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«««« ***out of four stars***

The original Magic Mike (2012) was a bit of downer. Supposedly a semi-autobiographical telling of Channing Tatum's early days as a stripper (or Male Entertainer as the boys prefer), the film focused on a young man on cusp of growing up and reaching his potential. The moral to the story was that stripping is bad and leads to soulless one-nighters, drugs and excessive tanning.

While *Magic Mike* was a rare case when Hollywood actually objectified men instead of women, many who went the theaters to see some attractive hunks slink around in a G-string were disappointed. Why so serious?

Fortunately *Magic Mike XXL* gets it right this time and fans will be dancing in the aisles. Let's take what we learned in the first film and throw it out the window. This film is all celebration, all fun and doesn't worry about bogging itself down with a moral. It is entertainment- pure and unapologetic. This is the movie that the ladies were hoping for the first time around. And because the film is funny and engrossing, men (regardless of sexual preference) will be laughing right along with them. Maybe even screaming along with the ladies. I won't judge.

We find Mike a slave to the working week. He owns his own company making furniture and while it was his dream to create instead of bearing cheeks, the reality has worn on him. He meets up with the old crew minus Matthew McConaughey who was the best component of the first film. What will they do without Matt? Go on a road trip to the annual stripper convention of course. It is a warped Yellow Brick Road the boys travel with stops at house filled with wine-fueled cougars and a place where "Male Entertainment" is not only defined by lap dances but also by serenades to the special lady.

Mike meets a girl, of course, but that plotline is ancillary. The real reason to watch is the relationships and chemistry between the group of guys. These are men at the end of a career that make the best of what is left to them. The movie doesn't care what happens to them after the dollar bills quit raining all around. It is the moment that matters. Let's party.

New to the roster is Jada Pinkett Smith who tries to fill McConaughey's shoes as the MC of the festivities and does a decent job. The women characters are strong here and meet the men in the middle regarding seduction. There are some cameos that will surprise that I won't spoil. Tatum is one of the most likable "pretty boys" to come out of Hollywood in a long while. Joe Manganiello of *True Blood* fame has a much more beefed up role here and rises to the opportunity. This will be the film that leads to more substantial roles for the behemoth. Mark it down and remember I was the one that told you.

If you have any interest in *Magic Mike XXL* go with a group of friends, have a wine party, grab an Uber and make it out opening night. I saw it in a full auditorium filled with overzealous women clapping and hooting at the screen and it made for a great movie going experience. Top 10 all time because it felt like a "happening" and more than just seeing a movie. And I laughed. A lot.

Considering that this sequel gets the equation right this time it is easy to say that regarding box office, *Magic Mike XXL* is going to be huge!!! Sorry. I couldn't help myself.