

Movie Review: 'Crossing Over' goes right to the heart of immigration

by Lee Grant

"Crossing Over" crashes to the screen like "Crash," the 2006 Oscar winner that intertwined stories set in post-9/11 Los Angeles touching on themes of racism, suspicion and alienation.

RATINGS GUIDE:

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) With its rich, complex characters, "Crash" did a better job capturing the ethnicity and turbulent life of an unwieldy and dangerous city than the more simplistic "Crossing Over."

Nevertheless, "Crossing Over" does tap something unique — the heart and compassion of those who toil in the maelstrom of illegal and legal immigration.

Harrison Ford is inspired casting as an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer who, unlike the young and gung-ho charges he directs, considers what it means when a raid at a San Pedro sweatshop nets a single mom whose small son is left behind. This man cares.

It's Ford's best role in years (sorry, "Indiana Jones" fans), touching the weary, laconic side of an actor who's been trying too hard with dreck like "Hollywood Homicide" and "Firewall." His Max Brogan is lonely, living solo with an affectionate red cat, occasionally trekking to Tijuana to check on the well-being of the "unattended child" caught up in the sweep. And when Ford speaks Spanish, it's charming.

Credit for this goes to director Wayne Kramer (the cool "The Cooler"), a native South African who recently became a U.S. citizen, guiding Ford in a way that delivers dignity to the character and the actor.

There are other striking portrayals, including the talented Summer Bishil as a high-schooler from Bangladesh who presents an essay in front of a class encouraging Americans to peer deeper into the motives of 9/11 and show sympathy for the cause, though "I didn't support their actions."

Outstanding in last year's "Towelhead" as a half-Lebanese-American kid coming of age emotionally and sexually in racist Houston, Bishil, after just two films, has the craft and suppleness for an important career.

Then there's veteran Ray Liotta (so fine in 2002's "Narc") playing a sleazeball green card and "visa application adjudicator" who's not above taking sexual advantage of an aspiring Australian actress in exchange for his official signature ("you want to be like Naomi or Nicole?"). He's tasteless and ugly in a beautiful performance.

In a side plot, struggling British musician Jim Sturgess (singing Beatles tunes in "Across the Universe") takes a side job at a Jewish Day School (warbling in Hebrew a not bad "He-Nay Ma-Tov"), employment that will hopefully keep him here legally.

In the end, "Crossing Over" crosses over into an absorbing, multifaceted tale on the price paid for citizenship.

"Crossing Over." Rated: R. Running time: 1 hour, 53 minutes. 3 stars.

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