

The Screen Savor: 'Stonework'

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "World Trade Center"

When watching a movie about men buried for twelve hours actually feels like twelve hours â€” you know you're in trouble.

Nicholas Cage stars in "World Trade Center" "World Trade Center" is based on the true life events of Port Authority Sergeant John McLoughlin, a 21-year veteran, and Will Jimeno, a 9-month rookie. On September 11, McLoughlin takes a group of Port Authority policemen down to the World Trade Center to help. As the men walk through the main concourse, both buildings collapse, ultimately trapping the group twenty feet below the field of rubble. The scope of the story branches out to include McLoughlin's and Jimeno's wives, Donna and Allison. Per Oliver Stone: "Two men in that hole â€” bonded together through the fire of their experience."

If they're truly bonding, can't they utter anything more substantial than repeated warnings not to fall asleep? That, along with quoting a line from the unremarkable G.I. Jane, "pain is your friend"? Though the real Jimeno probably cited G.I. Jane, there's the concept of staying true to the events â€” and then there's the concept of dramatizing those events. New screenwriter Andrea Berloff simply does not know how to write depth into her characters. Instead of honoring these men and their families, with such shallow writing, she actually does them a disservice.

Director Oliver Stone stumbles as well, setting a deliberate pace that seems encased in the very concrete slabs he films over and over again. People are dying, yet the police are ambling. I thought First Responders were known for extreme efficiency, unflappable yet speedy, virtual Road Runners with badges. If Stone had his actors slog any slower, he'd have to shoot it all in slo-mo.

At one point, Nicolas Cage's McLoughlin confesses that he doesn't smile and doesn't talk much. Is this supposed to excuse the actor from emotionally showing up on the job? Do we know anything about McLoughlin the man? How he feels about his 21 years on the force, his wife having an unplanned 4th baby, his missing his son's birthday? He states his guilt about leading his men into a deathtrap. Honestly â€¦ guilt over the buildings' collapse? A Brooklyn native, might he also feel responsible for the Dodgers' 1958 move to L.A.?

Michael Peña radiates a sweetness and an enduring optimism in his portrayal of Jimeno. But, again, this is two-dimensional caricature in a 3-D film. How does his grieving family co-exist, his side being Columbian, his wife's being Italian? We see shots of Jimeno's mother's grieving face, but nothing else. Of the four main characters, Maggie Gyllenhaal as pregnant wife Allison is given the widest spectrum. We see her relationship with her parents, her frustration taken out on a traffic light, her inability to handle her daughter's questions. And for brief, brilliant glimpses of Michael Shannon's Pentacostal ex-Marine on the edge and Frank Whaley's alcoholic paramedic who had "a few bad years," this film promised so much more than it gave.

But even with the mounting detritus, every now and then we get a glimpse of Stone the auteur. We see it in Allison running to the street to get away from her blaring television, only to be surrounded by the echoing choruses of televisions booming from every house on the block. We see it with images of ghostly trees waving at an empty Staten Island Ferry the day after; the monstrous shadow of the first plane before it hits; the shock on the policemen's faces as their bus passes a dead man on the street. Oliver Stone is alive and well, but perhaps he, too, was stifled. Not by rubble, but rather, by too much good intention to honor the victims of 911. He should take another look at his own "Born on the Fourth of July" â€¦ he told the truth in that movie as well, but with a visceral life force that this film sadly lacks.

Gotta run, um, sorry, amble. But a final question: Each time the men cautioned against falling asleep were they saying that to each other, or to us?

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: C-plus

PRODUCTION CREDITS: "World Trade Center" Directed by Oliver Stone Written by Andrea Berloff
Based on the true stories of John & Donna McLoughlin and William & Allison Jimeno Cast: Nicholas Cage,
Michael Pena, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Maria Bello, Donna Murphy, Stephen Dorff, Hay Hernandez, Michael
Shannon, Frank Whaley Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 125 minutes

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