Movie Review: 'Ocean's Thirteen'

by David_Elliott

Lots of people bought into the smug fun of "Ocean's Eleven," the Rat Pack caper film. Sinatra and his pals had a good time doing it, Las Vegas (1960) glowed, and there was a functional plot.

'OCEAN'S THIRTEEN' - Ellen Barkin, Al Pacino and Noureen DeWulf star in the crime drama 'Ocean's Thirteen.' CNS Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures. Who would have imagined that their Vegas would seem a lost Eden of male togetherness, compared to the creepily indulgent retreads Steven Soderbergh has been churning out? His third, "Ocean's Thirteen," has a plot like confetti vacuumed off a casino floor, and the nostalgia seems buried under massive piles of neon tubing.

Who's more preeningly cute - Danny (George Clooney), Linus (Matt Damon) or Rusty (Brad Pitt)? They guess one anothers' thoughts, finish one anothers' lines and hang tight in a very loose way, a go-guy trio of neo-Sinatras surrounded by devoted stooges (Don Cheadle, Casey Affleck, Bernie Mac, Carl Reiner, etc.).

This crew makes Sinatra's mob seem like the knightly circle of King Arthur, but they do feel loyalty. After their Old Vegas buddy Reuben (Elliott Gould) is insulted into a stroke by Trump-like hotel mogul Willie Bank (Al Pacino), they scheme to wreck the opening of Bank's new casino, a double-phallic tower for high-rollers.

Their scheme involves big computers and stacked dice, a giant tunnel digger and a phony FBI sting with Bob Einstein doing paralyzed acting. It's all very jaunty, flip, driven, as if sheer hustle could invoke the snappy ghost of Sammy Davis Jr.

Along with a taste for facile glitz, Soderbergh has nerve. He includes a toss-off line about past disaster film producer Irwin Allen, then resorts to sub-Allen climaxes: a sloppy heist, fireworks, Bank humiliated. As humor we get a joke Chinaman (yep, the term fits), Cheadle doing a jived Evel Knievel, Ellen Barkin in a pitiful reduction of the steamy sex roles that made her a star.

Plot pieces barely fit, almost nothing is clearly explained, the gizmos and twists are stupid, the wit witless. This movie smokes a fat cigar of assumption, smug that most viewers will need to feel like insiders. Trying to dig the giggle of the gig, they may even swallow stuff like Damon wearing a fake nose worthy of a high school Fagin.

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) There is pointless insulting of poor Mexican strikers and even Emiliano Zapata, but also fond plugs for Oprah Winfrey. Gould does Friars Club Jewish inflections. David Paymer gets scared by bedbugs. Pacino, acting as if acting might make a difference, also looks like he guzzles tanning cream.

Do you sense the jackpot? Films this cynical and this heavily sold often find a way. No need to count the coming pile. The movie is pile enough.

A Warner Bros. release. Director: Steven Soderbergh. Cast: Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Matt Damon, Elliott Gould, Ellen Barkin, Don Cheadle. Running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes. Rated PG-13. 0 stars.

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