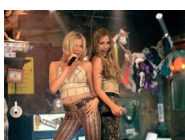


Everything Old Is...Old Again: "Coyote Ugly" and "The Replacements"

Written by Mike Schulz

Thursday, 17 August 2000 18:00

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COYOTE UGLY and THE REPLACEMENTS

Most genre flicks in the '80s were pretty crummy, but what absolutely terrifies me is that now, on the verge of a new millennium, we're actually being presented with homages to the crummy movies of that decade: *Coyote Ugly*, from uber-producer Jerry Bruckheimer, is a nod to the Jerry-produced smash *Flashdance*, and *The Replacements* is a paean to professional-doofus sports movies like *Major League* and *Necessary Roughness*, with Gene Hackman on hand to remind us of the coach he played in 1986's *Hoosiers*.

Both films would like you to think they're full of heart – their underlying subject matter is Follow Your Dream – but heart is exactly what they're lacking; they drip with cynicism, and contempt for the audience's intelligence. You can make it through the kitchiness and ersatz emotion of *Coyote Ugly* because the movie is so nakedly retrograde that it almost works, but I can't imagine who will be able to stand *The Replacements*, which doesn't contain one single recognizable human characteristic or emotion. Both works are soulless;

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The Replacements

is also completely brainless.

In *Coyote Ugly*, Piper Perabo stars as Violet, a wannabe songwriter from Jersey who moves to New York City to jump-start her career. But she finds that becoming an overnight sensation is harder than she expected (Violet isn't exactly Mensa material), so she accepts a bartending job at a local haunt named Coyote Ugly, where the house specials are beer, shots, and serving supermodels who shimmy on the bar. There's some plotline about how Violet needs to overcome stage fright and learn to assert herself, but the movie is just an excuse to watch some great-looking babes spin bottles and dance around while soaking wet, and as most men will tell you, that's excuse enough for a movie.

This complete lack of motivation is actually what's kinda charming about the film. Director David McNally knows that *Coyote Ugly* is trash, so he goes about making the best-looking piece of trash he can. He starts off well enough with the casting of Perabo. This actress (who also starred in *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle*) is a real find, even though after leading roles in two high-profile movies this summer, it's still unclear whether or not she can truly act. She has an amazing face – her features are huge and bright – that conveys joy and disappointment and lust and terror in incredibly broad strokes, yet it never appears that she's overacting; she seems naturally stylized, and ready for anything. (It's easy to imagine young girls watching her and saying, "That's who I wanna be when I grow up.") She brings a lot to the party, and the others in the cast are equally game, the best being Maria Bello as the tough-bitch-with-the-heart-of-gold owner of Coyote Ugly, and John Goodman, as real and lovable as ever, in the role of Violet's pop.

Still, you might leave the movie theatre feeling mildly depressed, because the energy on display in *Coyote Ugly* is used in the service of something completely worthless. There's not a moment in the film where you have any doubt what will happen next, and the filmmakers' attempts to make the Violet character poignant are rather embarrassing. Most embarrassing of all is the movie's soundtrack – and I can't help but pin the blame for it partly on Jerry Bruckheimer – which sounds exactly like a middle-aged producer's idea of "hip." When Violet stands on-stage – oops, I mean on-bar – singing along to "One Way or Another" and her "sexy" crooning actually stops a bar fight, I wanted to hide my face; if Jerry and company had truly realized how cornball and campy this scene was, they would have had Violet sing Irene Cara's "What a Feeling" anthem from *Flashdance*. Then the movie could have achieved true hilarity. As is, *Coyote Ugly* is just blah, reasonably well-performed but junky regardless.

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