Review: Face to Face

by Marcella Purnama | Monday, 12 September 2011 | | (0) Comment

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WITH twenty international film awards at hand, David Williamson is one of Australia’s most prominent play- and screenwriters. In collaboration with film director Michael Rymer, a thought-provoking, transformative Australian film has been created.

Released this week, Face to Face explores a different approach to justice, focusing on the wellbeing of the offender and the community instead of throwing the responsibility to the court. Adapted from David Williamson’s 2000 play of the same name, the movie is based on actual case notes.

Ten people sit down on wooden chairs in what looks like a community town hall, facing each other nervously. The only calm, decent-looking, suit-and-tie-clad man sits silently in the middle. We soon learn his name is Jack Manning (Matthew Newton), and they are there because a young, hot-tempered bloke, Wayne (Luke Ford), has just smashed in the back of his boss, Greg Baldoni (Vince Colosimo), sports car. When Wayne indulged in this act of revenge after being fired from his job with Greg’s construction company, he was presented with two choices: face his charges in court and potentially end up in prison, or face his boss in a community conference and maintain a slight hope of keeping himself outside the bars. He chose the latter.

Ten minutes into the movie and I’m betting half the audience thinks they know how the film will progress. But what looks like an insignificant, on-to-the-next-case type crime turns out to be something more complicated. As the movie unveils the characters’ motivations one by one, the audience are proved wrong.

Wayne’s workmate Hakim (Robert Rabiah), an Australian of Arab descent, soon splashes bitterness against Greg’s mind-your-own-business attitude towards his workers, paying them less than he should. Therese (Ra Chapman), a quiet Asian accountant, raises her rage as well, complaining about the dirty-work she has to do for the sake of her boss’ profit. Another workmate, Mr. Nice Guy Richard (Chris Connely), is then blamed for enabling racism towards Hakim by doing nothing to stop taunts of "Al Qaeda eats here". While Greg’s personal assistant Julie (Laura Gordon) proves to be much more than a pretty face, his steely wife Claire (Sigrid Thornton), berates her husband in every way possible.
While the film raises a range of social issues – from bullying and intimidation to gender politics and racism – it is also spiced with humour, spurring eruptions of laughter across the theater. Surprises and plot twists keep the audience entertained and curious to know what will next be presented on the screen.

Despite Face to Face’s continuous flashbacks, all the action unfolds in a single room, which gives you the feeling you’re watching Buried (albeit with ten people) all over again. Dialog makes up the movie’s soul, causing some to tactfully describe it as “lengthy”. If you have just finished your mid-term exams and want to kick back with a flick, you may well want to find your way to Horrible Bosses instead.

It is a very Aussie movie, with strong dialects and Australian slang, complete with very culturally-dependent jokes – some of which I got, some of which I didn’t.

My expectations weren’t completely fulfilled when it came to the cinematography – the scenes are very obviously shot on a hand-held camera, with clear changing of the lens’ focus and blurriness to indicate who is talking.

Yet being a low-budget movie, filmed in only 12 days and without rehearsals, makes it deserving of a good hand of applause. Face to Face proves a good story can often beat a big-budget one, and will be a likely addition to the list of Australia’s most original and impressive movies.

A very rich movie, Face to Face crams in a myriad of heavy social themes, but complimenting this is a good-humoured, highly entertaining nature. Yet it is an Australian movie, written by Australian playwright, directed by Australian director, acted out by an Australian cast, and embodying everything Australian.

It’s a story which would satisfy every aspect of an Australian film-goers palate. But for others, I’m not quite sure.

**Face to Face is showing at Cinema Nova and Cameo Cinemas until September 21.**

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