

Film Review: Unfunny 'Burke and Hare' Wastes Top-Notch Cast

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on September 9, 2011 - 7:34am

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CHICAGO – There are few sights more depressing than a game cast all dressed up with nowhere to go and no good jokes to share. "Burke and Hare" is the sort of comedy Mel Brooks was making in the '90s. All the ingredients are on hand for a promising comedy, and yet something's missing—namely, laughter. The timing is off, the punch-lines are obvious and the actors are bored beyond belief.



Rating: **2.0/5.0**

What makes "Burke and Hare" doubly unfortunate is the fact that it was directed by John Landis, the same man responsible for a true American classic ("Animal House") and one of the all-time great escapist entertainments ("The Blues Brothers"). This picture marks his first feature directorial effort since 1998's soulless "Blues Brothers 2000" and the largely unseen "Susan's Plan." It's interesting to note that Landis has shot his recent work (including the upcoming farce "The Rivals") in Britain, which may provide an indication that the aging director has gone overseas to revive his creative juices a la Woody Allen.



[Read Matt Fagerholm's full review of "Burke and Hare" in our reviews section.](#) [12]

Unfortunately, "Hare" is as stale as a dried crumpet. It tells the fact-based tale of two murderers in late 1820's-era Scotland who kill unsuspecting victims and sell their corpses to doctors for medical demonstrations. This material was tackled in Vernon's Sewell's 1972 horror flick of the same name, but Landis is clearly aiming for a seamless mixture of morbid humor, gruesome bloodletting and genuinely affecting characterizations. Landis pulled this tonal amalgam off famously in 1981's "An American Werewolf in London," but "Hare" proves that his skill has not improved with age. Any attempt made to humanize these reprehensible characters is utterly laughable, while the gory stabs at satire are generally laughless. Multiple scenes in which William Burke (Simon Pegg) and William Hare (Andy Serkis) haplessly off their innocent prey aren't scary or funny. They just amount to mean-spirited slapstick that leaves a particularly rancid taste in the mouths of viewers. Serkis smiles his marvelously ghoulish grin while Pegg frets and moans with his signature neuroses, but no matter how hard the actors try to be lovable, the leaden material undermines them every step of the way. Imagine a slapstick comedy about Leopold and Loeb directed by Carl Reiner, and you'll have a fair approximation of how wince-inducing this mess truly is.

'Burke and Hare' stars Simon Pegg, Andy Serkis, Isla Fisher, Tom Wilkinson, Tim Curry and Bill Bailey. It was written by Piers Ashworth and Nick Moorcroft and directed by John Landis. It opened Sept. 9 in New York. It is not rated.



[Continue reading for Matt Fagerholm's full "Burke and Hare" review.](#) [12]



Simon Pegg and Andy Serkis star in John Landis's Burke and Hare.

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