Film Review: Matthew McConaughey Delivers in Searing ‘Killer Joe’

Submitted by BrianTT [1] on August 2, 2012 - 10:05am

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CHICAGO – William Friedkin’s film of Tracy Letts’ “Killer Joe” takes no prisoners. One of the central characters is introduced from the waist down and to say that the film climaxes in violent, sexual oddity would be like saying “The Avengers” features a few superheroes. However, it would be a mistake to allow the controversy or the shock value to become the story of this excellent noir comedy that takes black humor to a new level of darkness. With what is arguably Matthew McConaughey’s best performance to date, “Killer Joe” is easily one of the most memorable films of the year. You won’t soon forget it. Even if you want to.

McConaughey plays the title character, a corrupt cop who happens to be a brutal hitman on the side. Joe gets a call from Chris Smith (Emile Hirsch), a total moron of a redneck who wants his mom killed for the life insurance money that he owes a local crime lord. One of several problems with Chris’s idiotic plan is that the cash which will go to his sister Dottie (Juno Temple), and so he must let this unique young girl in on his plan. Naturally, he also needs his dad’s (Thomas Haden Church) help and dad’s greedy gal pal (Gina Gershon) needs to get her cut. When they learn that Joe won’t work on future earnings, an unusual deal is struck. It turns out that Joe will work on retainer if that retainer happens to be a wide-eyed Southern waif named Dottie.

Read Brian Tallerico’s full review of “Killer Joe” in our reviews section. **[14]**

Before you can spot the noir inspirations (“Double Indemnity,” “The Killer Inside Me,” many more), things have gone very very bad for Chris and his clan (how the plan unravels is a true work of noir genius on Letts’ part, including a “duh” twist that I didn’t even see coming). Chris ends up not having the money to pay Joe and so it looks like the ruthless madman with the smooth demeanor may decide to just keep his retainer for good. Chris isn’t OK with that. From here, “Killer Joe” spirals into a bloody and greasy ballet of bad decisions.

Just as he did with the underrated “Bug,” the legendary Friedkin proves to be an excellent fit for Tracy Letts’ searing gift with dialogue, character, and claustrophobia. The five central characters in “Killer Joe” are roles that actors dream of playing, filled with a bizarre combination of broad satire and dark social commentary along with down-and-dirty, gritty southern living. Church brilliantly sketches the kind of man who would wear a trucker hat to a meeting with a lawyer and Gershon gets her juiciest role in years. Temple and Hirsch fare a little less successfully by comparison. Temple finds some nice beats in Dottie but she sometimes feels like more of a plot device than a person and Hirsch is the film’s weakness on an acting level, never quite finding the right motivations as Chris.

Continue reading for Brian Tallerico’s full “Killer Joe” review. **[14]**

“Killer Joe” stars Matthew McConaughey, Emile Hirsch, Juno Temple, Thomas Haden Church, and Gina Gershon. It was written by Tracy Letts and directed by William Friedkin. It opens in Chicago on August 3, 2012. It is rated NC-17.



Killer Joe
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