

Film Review: ‘The Sapphires’ Don’t Fit Inside its 1960s Setting

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 30, 2013 - 12:53am

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CHICAGO – “The Sapphires” is inspired by a true story, about an Australian girl group who entertains the troops in 1968 Viet Nam. There is little feeling regarding the era the film is portraying, and it’s essentially used as a vehicle for period pop songs that have been heard before.



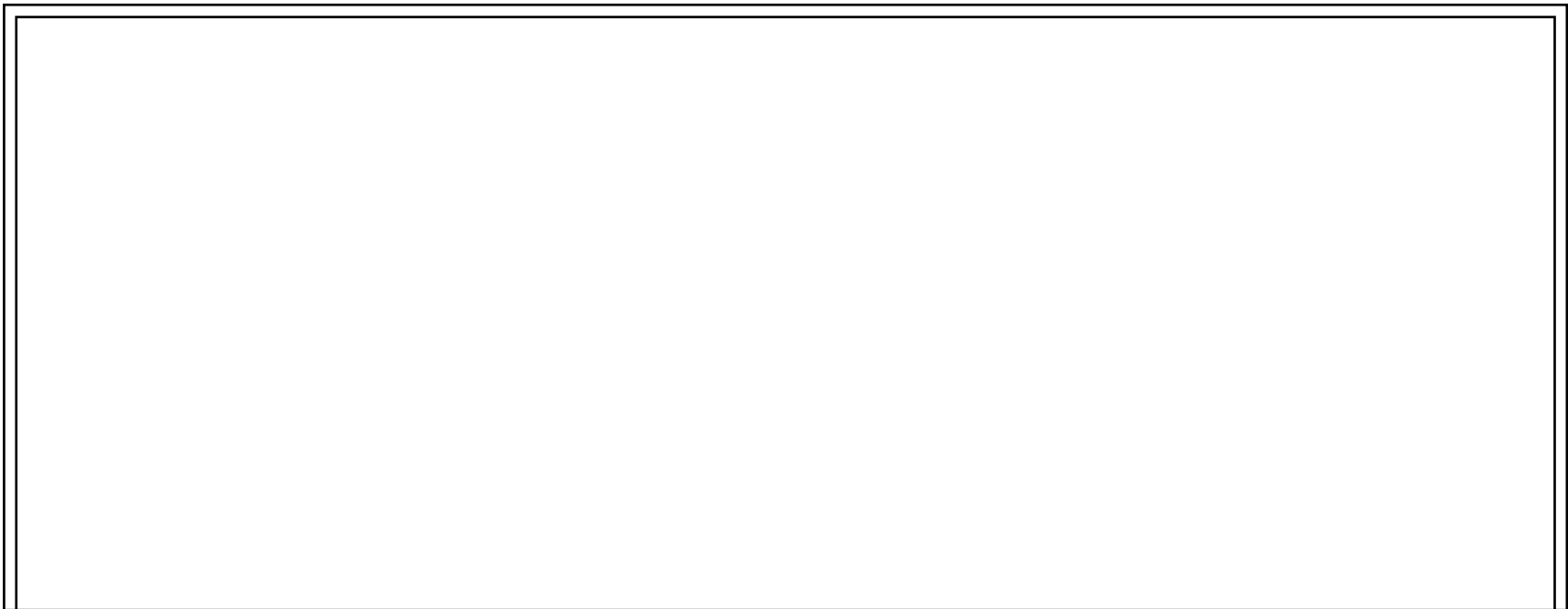
The attempt to create some heat in the film is sincere, including the addition of comic actor Chris O’Dowd (the cop in “Bridesmaids), but the presentation is hampered by the obvious lack of experience in the actresses portraying the girl group and the budgetary limitations of recreating the 1960s, including Viet Nam. There is no big moment in the film that seems honest, it’s just a backstage story of group-comes-together, group-goes-through-trials and group-wows-the-naysayers. There is a barely explored subplot involving racism issues in 1960s Australian, and calculated romance, but none of those themes are enough to propel the film, and the overall result is more flat line than a back beat.

The films begins in late 1950s Australian, in a rural area of the continent. Four little girls are entertaining the locals, when government vehicles intervene. This is the time of the “stolen generation,” when light-skinned Aborigines (native Australians) were taken from their darker skinned families to be assimilated into the imported white culture there. One of the girl singers is taken, and that becomes significant ten years later.

After that decade goes by, three of the “darker” Aborigine girls have grown up in that rural town, Gail (Deborah Mailman), Cynthia (Miranda Tapsell) and headstrong Julie (Jessica Mauboy). Gail and Cynthia head to town to participate in a talent show, joined by a defiant Julie against her family’s wishes. The three are discovered there by Dave (Chris O’Dowd), an Irish musician, who offers to manage them, as long as they switch the primary music in their act from country to soul. The gang also recruits stolen cousin Kay (Shari Sebbens) to complete the quartet, now dubbed “The Sapphires.” Dave gets the group a gig entertaining the troops in Viet Nam, as sort of an Australian version of The Supremes.

“The Sapphires” continues its limited release in Chicago on March 29th. See local listings for show times and theaters. Featuring Jessica Mauboy, Chris O’Dowd, Deborah Mailman, Shari Sebbens and Miranda Tapsell. Written by Keith Thompson and Tony Briggs. Directed by Wayne Blair. Rated “PG-13”

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Gail (Deborah Mailman), Julie (Jessica Mauboy), Cynthia (Miranda Tapsell) and Kay (Shari Sebbens) are 'The Sapphires'
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

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