

Blu-ray Review: Sleepy Thriller ‘The Company You Keep’ Boasts Starry Cast

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on August 22, 2013 - 4:27pm

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CHICAGO – Robert Redford has slowly become that grandfatherly figure who spends his time in the corner at family gatherings, lecturing nearby whippersnappers on the importance of challenging authority, while reminiscing about the war protests of generation’s past. He’s a well-meaning guy, but his crusty words of wisdom could use a shot of adrenaline.

Redford’s latest work is virtually unrecognizable from his 1980 directorial debut, “Ordinary People,” a phenomenally acted, delicately nuanced family drama that notoriously beat out “Raging Bull” for the Best Picture Oscar. There’s more tension in the scenes between troubled Timothy Hutton and his icily removed mother than there is in all 122 minutes of the sleepy-eyed thriller, “The Company You Keep,” a talky mystery fueled by the same finger-wagging preachiness that marred Redford’s 2007 effort, “Lions for Lambs.”



Blu-ray Rating: **2.5/5.0**

Yet since Redford is a living legend, not to mention the creator of America’s most influential film festival, he’s at the point in his career where he could work with pretty much anyone he wants. His ensembles are packed with about as many recognizable faces as the latest Woody Allen production, and though the actors are often well-cast, their celebrity status registers as a consistent distraction, a la “Lee Daniels’ The Butler.” A few of the actors, such as “Another Earth” star Brit Marling, seem to have dutifully signed on to Redford’s “Company” simply because they owe their careers to Sundance. According to the disc’s behind-the-scenes interviews, the script by Lem Dobbs (“Dark City”) was in the form of an 80-page skeleton that allowed each of the actors enough space to shine. This approach works well in some respects, but it also slows down the narrative to the point where its contrivances become naggingly apparent. Redford stars as a former member of the Weather Underground whose cover is blown by a spunky journalist played by increasingly tiresome smugness by Shia LaBeouf. Any Cusackian likability the actor may have displayed early in his career has dissolved into distracting tics and repellant caricature. His performance here is hardly different from his last few films, aside from his distracting tendency to adjust his glasses while saying, “Hmm,” just like a real journalist.



The Company You Keep was released on Blu-ray and DVD on August 13th, 2013.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

Standing out from the crowd are Susan Sarandon, looking startlingly haggard as a disgraced veteran of the Underground, and a very effective Stanley Tucci as LaBeouf's aggravated boss. Julie Christie's much-hyped appearance is less satisfactory than one would've hoped, while little Jackie Evancho (as Redford's daughter) is precocious to a fault. Discussion of the film's messages would be somewhat repetitive since they are spelled out with a magic marker in the script. Redford clearly has affection for those who protested Vietnam, yet the film ultimately argues that one must own up to their past missteps, no matter how much time has drifted by. It's a nice story told at a sluggish pace.

"The Company You Keep" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.40:1 aspect ratio), and includes three standard featurettes illuminated by LaBeouf's disarming eloquence. Casting a pall over the optimistic soundbites is the failure of Occupy Wall Street, a movement that clearly energized the cast and crew during production, giving them hope that current protests would revitalize interest in the Weather Underground. The film's intentions are pure, but it's doubtful to spark much of a revolution.

'The Company You Keep' is released by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment and stars Shia LaBeouf, Robert Redford, Julie Christie, Susan Sarandon, Nick Nolte, Stanley Tucci, Jackie Evancho, Terrence Howard, Brit Marling, Brendan Gleeson, Chris Cooper, Anna Kendrick, Richard Jenkins and Sam Elliott. It was written by Lem Dobbs and directed by Robert Redford. It was released on August 13th, 2013. It is rated R.



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