

Robert De Niro Triumphs Again in ‘Being Flynn’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 9, 2012 - 6:09pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The intensity that Robert De Niro puts into his movie characters had slackened a bit, as he bent his reputation on more commercial roles. But Director Paul Weitz has revived the old legend with a meaty, purposeful character, and De Niro delivers it with his old fire. ‘Being Flynn’ is not a comeback, but a gratefully received reboot.

This exceptional character study has De Niro playing a homeless man, accepting the fate with as much rancor and cardboard philosophy as he can muster. What is so impressive about the role is that it’s wrapped in a logical, sensitive story about the relationship between a father and son, at a point where all the signs and past encounters should add up to no relationship at all. This is the jumping off place for De Niro’s characterization, and it never devolves into sentiment or easy solutions. Paul Weitz has adapted Nick Flynn’s memoir into a larger story about not being able to choose your relatives, and what to do or not to do about it.

Nick Flynn (Paul Dano) has had a difficult childhood. His earnest but flighty mother Jody (Julianne Moore) has not left him much of anything, and his father Jonathan (Robert De Niro) was nowhere to be found, except in a series of strange letters over the years. Nick is an erstwhile writer like his father, but is underemployed and in need of new housing. He settles for a roommate situation in an old abandoned strip club, and takes a job at a homeless shelter that his friend-turned-lover Denise (Olivia Thirlby) has recommended.



Out of the blue, he encounters his father for the first time in years. It seems the old man has been kicked out of his apartment, and re-connects with Nick to basically to again ignore him, and berate him anew. Jonathan then loses his last job and ends up homeless on the street. When the father checks into the same homeless shelter where the son works, each man will confront demons that will teach them some life lessons.

Robert De Niro flexes his consider acting talent in the film, and the character of Jonathan Flynn can proudly stand up to Travis Bickle, Vito Corleone, Jake La Motta and Rupert Pupkin. It is a complete and visceral performance, unromantic and in the moment. De Niro did his homework on street life, because it's the survival instinct that best defines the performance, and in tandem with his bearing and image choices, it is a portrait of homelessness the slowly strips his dignity. This is not a show-off or Oscar baiting role, but a performance veteran uplifting his character and his craft.

Paul Weitz's script adaptation is similarly unflinching, with no indication of an annoying joyful eccentric in Jonathan nor some street-smarter-than-thou fop. The production design builds a realistic grit in both the homeless life and the shelter's attempt to provide for such a community. There are enough diseases and grime on display that the film almost can be smelled. It makes the relationship story stronger, because despite what Jonathan is going through, his inflexibility still makes him a heel.

The supporting cast stands right up to De Niro and complements the narrative. Paul Dano as Nick Flynn subscribes his low-key style into a contrast for Jonathan's passive aggressive stance. There is one angry explosion, which is a bit over-dramatic, but the father and son do have years of pent up frustration. Olivia Thirlby is becoming everyone's favorite girlfriend, and tempers her usual vivaciousness to give Denise a fragility that is appropriate for the character. And the great Julianne Moore stamps her presence on the smaller role as Nick's mother so effectively, that it can't be imagined anyone else would do.



Catch the Legend: Robert De Niro (Jonathan Flynn) and Julianne Moore (Jody) in "Being Flynn"

Photo credit: David Lee for Focus Features

The film is literary as well, since Nick and Jonathan are both writers. Some nice dialogue involving the often schizophrenic life of the author is expressed, which is bit more philosophical and lighthearted than the homeless theme. Director Paul Weitz told HollywoodChicago.com [in an interview](#) [15] that Nick Flynn wrote the original memoir as a comedy, and the screenplay is peppered with ironic laugh lines like "you can't kill anyone with writing, nobody is that good a writer." The "writer" is an occupation that invades our lives every day, it's fun to get a little perspective regarding it.

But the highlight in the performance of Robert De Niro. It remains hopeful that in his "last chapter" the cinema community will toss him some more luscious roles to close out one of the great careers in the history of the medium.

"Being Flynn" continues its limited release in Chicago on March 9th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Robert De Niro, Paul Dano, Julianne Moore, Olivia Thirlby, Lily Taylor and Eddie Rouse. Adapted screenplay and directed by Paul Weitz. Rated "R"



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