

Channing Tatum Reveals the Male Stripper in 'Magic Mike'

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – It turns out that Channing Tatum did a bit of male stripping on the way up the show business ladder, which adds some spice and verisimilitude to “Magic Mike,” a backstage tale about the masculine side of theatrical disrobing, supported by Matthew McConaughey and Alex Pettyfer.

Boys just want to have fun in this male version of “Showgirls” – complete with the naive-kid-turned-exposed-performer and a clichéd subplot about his downfall. Channing Tatum is the centerpiece as the title character, and actually adds some depth into a solid story directed with a sharp edge by Steven Soderbergh. Throw in Matthew McConaughey in full “McCounaughey Mode,” and all will leave the theater exclaiming his catchphrase, “all right, all right!”

Tatum is Mike, a mysterious “entrepreneur” who meets a 19 year-old employment drifter named Adam (Alex Pettyfer) at a roofing job. He sees Adam later in the evening, and needs his help. Mike assigns Adam to start recruiting women to a male strip club, and once the duo finally gets to that club it is revealed that Mike is “Magic Mike,” one of the featured strippers in elaborately staged shows. Besides Mike, there are performers like “Big Dick” Ritchie (Joe Manganiello) and the host/owner at the club, Dallas (Matthew McConaughey).



Beef on the 4th of July: Matthew McConaughey (left, as Dallas) and Channing Tatum (Mike) in 'Magic Mike'

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Adam starts doing odd jobs around the club, until one of the strippers can't get to the stage. Like a flashy ingenue that steps in for the star on

opening night, Adam becomes "The Kid," and becomes one of the performing brotherhood. This also comes with the backstage drugs, alcohol and women, and The Kid does succumb to those problems, much to the chagrin of his sister Brooke (Cody Horn). In trying to keep The Kid on the straight and narrow, Magic Mike also develops feelings for Brooke, just as his stripping "career" looks like it's winding down.

The comparison to the movie "Showgirls" is crystalized by two components in the film. The male stripper shows are elaborately costumed and staged, like the fantasy presentations of the previous film. These shows are appropriately outrageous, and will surely become a bachelorette (and gay bachelor) party favor for years to come. And like "Showgirls," the wet-behind-the-ears innocence of The Kid becomes a plot point, as in everything that seems fun and perfect about the male stripper universe becomes perverted by outside temptations.

The direction by Steven Soderbergh does give the film some depth, as he does emphasize the inner journeys of these characters within the screenplay (by Reid Carolin). Given that Channing Tatum is somewhat telling is own story – and was instrumental in getting the film made – he really shines as Magic Mike, both as a performer on stage and in the creation of the character. His ambivalence about continuing the stripper life, even though he has other dreams, is realistically communicated.

The supporting cast executes as well, Alex Pettyfer offers a low-key spin on The Kid, starting as a bright-eyed newbie and ending up being destroyed by that callowness. Cody Horn as sister Brooke – and Mike's love interest – represents the real world with a willowy sexiness. Joe Manganiello ("True Blood") personifies "Big Dick" Ritchie with his over-sized presence. And finally the great Matthew McConaughey cements his movie persona as club owner Dallas, pouring on the all-right-all-right catchphrase, taking the character and his on-screen personality to the height of self parody.



Cody Horn (Brooke) and Channing Tatum in 'Magic Mike'
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

There is not much new on the surface of "Magic Mike." It is a backstage narrative in the tradition of "The Rose" or "A Star is Born," in which the eager-to-please performer becomes crushed by their own success and later excess. The difference in this film is that male stripping has a shorter shelf life, and holding onto it has implications, in which Tatum, screenwriter Carolin and Steven Soderbergh expose in a less-than-flattering light.

But there also is beefcake, a lot of large fun in the male attributes of the strip shows and full metal Matthew McConaughey. This is the celebration the founding fathers intended when declaring our independence, "all right, all right, all right!"

"Magic Mike" opens everywhere on June 29th. Featuring Channing Tatum, Matthew McConaughey, Alex Pettyfer, Cody Horn, Joe Manganiello, Adam Rodriguez and Olivia Munn. Screenplay by Reid Carolin. Directed by Steven Soderbergh. Rated "R"



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