

Jamie Foxx Rides in Quentin Tarantino's Incredibly Fun 'Django Unchained'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 21, 2012 - 4:12pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Quentin Tarantino's "Django Unchained" has some undeniable pleasures, the kind that erupt from the screenwriting abilities of one of the best movie scribes alive. Tarantino's way with words and plotting are as honed as ever and he directs his super-talented cast to enjoyable performances all around. His reboot of the "Django" character is smart, funny, action-packed, and remarkably stylized. It's also a tad too long, containing a few scenes that should have been left on the cutting room floor, which could have resulted in a more streamlined masterpiece instead of merely a heck of a lot of fun.

A chain gang of slaves crosses a wintry plain. Among them is a man named Django (Jamie Foxx), who is bought in the opening scene by Dr. King Schultz (Christoph Waltz), a bounty hunter masquerading as a dentist. He feels guilty about buying a slave, a practice in which he doesn't believe, but he needs Django's help finding three men who Schultz has been assigned to bring to justice. After that assignment ends successfully, Schultz agrees to help Django reunite with his true love, Broomhilda (Kerry Washington), who has been purchased by the notorious Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio). Samuel L. Jackson, Walton Goggins, and Don Johnson co-star in small but crucial roles.



Django Unchained

Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

In many ways, "Django Unchained" is Tarantino's most straightforward script. It doesn't have the chronological jumps that have in many ways defined his style and its plot is relatively simple – two men devise a plan to save a slave in the name of love. On this simple structure,

Tarantino works wonders with theme and dialogue. Candie is a fan of mandingo fighting, pitting his biggest slaves up against each other in fights that often result in death. This manipulative scumbag so well-played against type by DiCaprio is getting entertainment out of slaves in turmoil. Which is arguably what Tarantino is doing as a filmmaker as well.

It's just one example of how "Django Unchained" is one of those films that works on multiple levels, either as pure escapist entertainment or as something deeper. Much has been made of Tarantino's copious use of the n-word but don't think that "Django" isn't a complex examination of race and identity. It features some daring tonal shifts that make the brutality of the action feel more honest than a lot of Tarantino's movies. In the final, incredible scenes at Candie Land, easily the peak of the film and some of the best scenes of the year, everyone on-screen is hiding something from Django pretending to be a mandingo expert to Broomhilda pretending she doesn't know him to Samuel L. Jackson's memorable turn as a loyal butler with plenty to hide. No one is really who they purport to be and Tarantino has a blast here in something that plays not unlike an extended version of the best scene in the bar in "Inglourious Basterds."



Django Unchained

Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

Getting there is a little more troublesome. The middle act of "Django" sags a bit, especially in scenes that either go on too long or never should have been included in the first place (such as a boneheaded bit with a cameo by Jonah Hill that only serves to remind one of the Mike Myers scene in "Basterds," another misjudgment from an otherwise smart filmmaker). There were rumors that Tarantino rushed "Django" to get it done in time to get it in theaters by the end of 2012. I wish he had taken a bit more time with it, finetuning a few of the beats and pacing issues that hold it back from its potential. And the film kind of peters out in its final scenes post-Candie Land in a disappointing way. It doesn't have the punch at the end that it needed to be truly great, partially because of another misguided casting decision by QT to put himself in a silly role.

As for performance, everyone here is stellar, particularly Waltz, who shares nearly every scene with the very-good Foxx and delivers to nearly the degree he did in his Oscar-winning turn in "Basterds." Dr. King Schultz is a charismatic manipulator, a person who has a gift with words but starts to feel the weight of his conscience as the film goes on. It's a great character and Waltz knocks it out of the park. As for supporting roles, DiCaprio is the likely Oscar nominee but Jackson is just as good, taking a complex role and making it work. Even small parts like those taken by the always-great Walton Goggins (who apparently took the part after Kurt Russell backed out) are well-cast.

"Django Unchained" is fun, smart, and filled with memorable scenes and lines. A few pacing issues keep it from perfection but one wonders if we aren't holding Tarantino to a higher standard than we should. If this was a debut effort, we'd be screaming its praises from the rooftops. Judged against undeniable masterpieces like "Pulp Fiction" or "Inglourious Basterds," it comes up a bit short comparatively. But, then again, so do most movies.

"Django Unchained" stars Jamie Foxx, Christoph Waltz, Leonardo DiCaprio, Kerry Washington, Samuel L. Jackson, Dennis Christopher, and Walton Goggins. It was written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. It will be released on December 25, 2012.



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