

Rooney Mara, Jude Law Star in Steven Soderbergh's Thrilling, Stellar 'Side Effects'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 7, 2013 - 1:25pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Steven Soderbergh has given interviews in which he claims that his latest film, the fantastic “Side Effects,” will be his last. As much as I have my doubts that this is true, it makes more sense after viewing the thriller starring Rooney Mara, Jude Law, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Channing Tatum. It plays like a proof of the auteur theory; like a “Greatest Hits” of Soderbergh's career.

With elements that remind one of “Contagion,” “Sex, Lies, & Videotape,” “The Girlfriend Experience,” “The Underneath,” and much more, it is a testament to the man's incredible ability that he can blend all of these different styles and creative visions into one highly-entertaining piece of work. “Side Effects” not only draws on Soderbergh's career but has conscious echoes of Roman Polanski, Brian De Palma, and Alfred Hitchcock as well. I hope it's not one of the modern era's best director's final film but it would be fitting if it was.



Side Effects

Photo credit: Open Road Films

Emily Taylor (the great Rooney Mara of “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo”) is going through a rough period. Her husband Martin (Channing Tatum, making his third Soderbergh appearance in just over a year after “Haywire” and “Magic Mike”) is about to be released from prison after doing a few years for insider trading. Emily has stayed loyal to Martin as her world collapsed and her spouse's release seems to trigger an emotional upheaval. She breaks into tears randomly. She disappears into the “poisonous fog” of depression and even attempts suicide by driving her car into a brick wall in a parking garage.

After the accident, Dr. Jonathan Banks (Jude Law) comes to visit Emily and sees a woman in trouble. She refuses to be admitted to the hospital for observation but agrees to see Dr. Banks regularly. The doctor cannot quite crack Emily, even after going to visit her old psychologist, Dr. Sebert (Catherine Zeta-Jones) and learning more about his fascinating patient's back story. Dr. Sebert suggests a new drug, Ablixxa, one that is being heavily advertised as the cure for what ails ya. Emily begins taking the drug but, of course, it has some side effects.



Side Effects

Photo credit: Open Road Films

Don't get ahead of this movie. While this brief, first-act synopsis may make "Side Effects" sound like a modern treatise against the over-drugging of our society and what could result (a "Contagion" for the Prozac scene), it really only hints at where "Side Effects" goes from there. Don't worry. It is not a message movie, although I do think that Soderbergh and regular writer Scott Z. Burns ("Contagion," "The Informant!") have very purposefully crafted a thriller with elements that indict our mental health industry and the way it too quickly reaches for the prescription pad, that might make "Side Effects" sound a little dry. It is most certainly not. It is Soderbergh's most traditional thriller, borderline noir, in years. I can't tell you how without spoiling some of the film's many twists but "Side Effects" is probably not the movie you think it is in the first act.

That first act has echoes of Polanski's wonderful, urban paranoia films like "Repulsion" as Soderbergh (under the pseudonym of Peter Andrews) shoots the "wounded bird" of Mara often from below or above, heightening the claustrophobia of a city in which millions can feel alone despite being in such close proximity. Then the film twists and Soderbergh/Andrews & Burns bring a different, pulpier style that's more reminiscent of De Palma when he so blatantly mimicked Hitchcock. Technically, it's a marvelous piece of work as Soderbergh proves defter with his camera with every film. The Thomas Newman score adds a trippy feeling to the movie that I found a bit overplayed at times but almost plays like a character in the final acts. When the piano keys start to play, something bad is going to happen.



Side Effects

Photo credit: Open Road Films

Soderbergh draws fantastic performances from his entire cast but the film belongs to Mara and Law. The former has proven herself one of the best of her generation in works like "Dragon Tattoo" and "Ain't Them Bodies Saints" and this is just another complex turn from this future award-winner but Law is the real surprise. He is better here than he has been in years, possibly ever as a leading man. He turns Dr. Banks into a captivating character filled with gray areas and questions about his own past. He is charming but also devious (and neither of those adjectives in the obvious ways that lesser actors would have chosen).

I have long been an admirer of technical craft. Some of my favorite modern directors are the ones who most masterfully pay attention to every little detail (David Fincher, Michael Mann, Joel & Ethan Coen, and more). When one watches "Side Effects" (or nearly any Soderbergh film for that matter), there is a sense that not a shot is wasted, not a line of dialogue not fully considered, and not a technical element ignored. It is the work of a master craftsman. And as much as it comments on what he's done so far, I have every hope that it is merely the end of an act and not the end of the play.

"Side Effects" stars Rooney Mara, Jude Law, Channing Tatum, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Ann Dowd. It was written by Scott Z. Burns and directed by Steven Soderbergh. It will be released on February 8, 2013 and is rated R.



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