

Ken Loach Misfires with Generic 'The Angels' Share'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 26, 2013 - 2:19pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “*Once you’re involved in the shit, you can’t get out.*” Ken Loach, filmmaker of the working class and longtime supporter of people who are just trying to better their lives knows this kind of statement isn’t true. We can all climb out of the shit. And his latest, “The Angels’ Share,” is yet another tale of a young man who has made some mistakes in his life beginning that climb to adulthood and responsibility. While it has some likable characters, particularly its charismatic lead, it’s impossible to shake the feeling that we’ve seen this movie before. To be blunt, I never had a reason to care, which is not something that can be said about most of Loach’s films. This one is just bland.

Loach’s film opens with a montage of Glasgow residents getting their sentences of community service. Clearly, these aren’t really “bad guys” since they’re not doing custodial time and so we’ll have no problem falling in love with them, right? The protagonist leader of this ragtag group of lovable misfits is Robbie (newcomer Paul Brannigan), a young man with a dark past. He’s one of those still-adolescents who gets into fights far too often, including a brutal incident in which he beat a man who he thought move too quickly when he parked next to him. Robbie also has serious problems with a young man whose father fought with Robbie’s and the family of the young woman, Leonie, with whom he now has a child. Life is working against Robbie.



The Angels' Share

Photo credit: Sundance Selects

Unexpectedly, Robbie finds a bit of family and a skill set in his new group of community service petty criminals. At first, they’re just painting old houses, but then they become involved with, of all things, the high-priced world of whiskey. Their manager takes them to a distillery for a tour

and it is discovered that Robbie has a skill for the drink, picking out the flavors that others just taste in a blend. Robbie and his mates learn about whiskey to the degree that they also realize that there's some money in the game. When a rare cask that is going to fetch hundreds of thousands of pounds is found, they form a bizarre plan to steal some of it and “The Angels’ Share” becomes something of a caper film.

I say “something of” because “The Angels’ Share” is tonally imbalanced. Are we supposed to root for Robbie, who really needs to be going straight, to pull off this heist? The drama of the first act is completely discarded just as it's getting interesting, leading to a film that feels haphazard in its construction. And what of the incredibly long scenes about whiskey tasting and the history of the drink? They truly test the patience of the viewer. Loach seems honestly fascinated with this world of refined booze but he has a tough time translating that interest into drama.

It doesn't help that “The Angels’ Share” is also a wacky comedy. Is Robbie's story of attempted redemption and the promise he makes his new son really fertile ground for humor? Fart jokes, dirty laundry jokes, nothing under a kilt — the general oddity of the people in Robbie's new life makes for a film with a weird and generally inept sense of humor. I was actually engaged with and interested in the drama of Robbie's life, largely through the charismatic performance by Brannigan, before it turned into this weird hybrid of caper movie, physical comedy, and whiskey lesson. Loach has made a number of working class dramas in his career. I wish this had been another one.

“The Angels’ Share” stars Paul Brannigan, Gary Maitland, Jasmin Riggins, John Henshaw, and Stephen Fry. It was written by Paul Laverty and directed by Ken Loach. It opens in Chicago today, April 26, 2013.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [13]

Content Director

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