

Earnest ‘Gimme Shelter’ Needs More Truth

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 24, 2014 - 7:53am

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The balancing act between reality and drama in based-on-truth narratives is as delicate as walking the high wire. Pour in too much drama, and a story can feel like a soap opera. “Gimme Shelter,” although earnestly and achingly performed, has that sudsy protocol.

The film is about a sanctuary, in this case the harboring of single mothers during their unexpected pregnancies. It focuses on one particular case, a teenager raised on the streets by a drug-addicted mother. When the teen finds herself with child, she runs away and eventually ends up in a shelter set up by a devout fellow traveler. The key in this scenario is the transition from street-tough to expectant mother, which the film handles awkwardly. The relationships portrayed are not warm at any level, and are delivered through overwrought acting rather than any solid connection. The subject matter needed to be closer to the truth, rather skimming the surface towards a happy ending.

Apple (Vanessa Hudgens) has led a difficult life on urban streets. Her mother (Rosario Dawson) is a substance abuser and barely survives with her daughter in a series of transient relationships and substandard living. When Apple finds herself pregnant, she runs away to her biological father (Brendan Fraser), who has become a high-level financial guru, with a lifestyle and family to match.



Apple (Vanessa Hudgens) Contemplates Her Fate in ‘Gimme Shelter’

Photo credit: Roadside Attractions

Apple’s father takes her in, but wants her to terminate the pregnancy. Unable to do so, Apple takes to the streets again and finds Kathy

DiFiore (Ann Dowd), who offers the down-and-out mother to be a space in her shelter for single mothers. Despite efforts from her mother to reclaim her, and her father to reconnect with her, Apple finds the place that she can finally call home.

The story is based on a real-life scenario – there is an Apple, with her abusive mother and Wall Street Father – and most gratefully there is a Kathy DiFiore, who has run this non-profit single mother sanctuary for 33 years. That is all terrific, but as filtered through the screenplay of writer/director Ron Krauss, there is no originality to the tale. The street scenes seemed copied from TV-level dramas, and the transition to redemption is too clean and uneventful.

Director Krauss has a great cast to work with, each looking to deliver their part of the story. It starts with Hudgens as Apple, who transforms her “High School Musical” cleanliness into a street punk with some effectiveness, but the screenplay's necessity to transform and rescue her eventually leads to the cleanliness again. There is no indication in her character that she can ever trust anyone again, it just happens.

The supporting cast is trying hard as well, but a deglamorized Dawson plays the mother with just one note, that of anger. All her scenes seemed destined for a clip on an awards show, but not in a good way. Fraser never seems comfortable with the father role, and his wife in the McMansion (Stephanie Szostak) has the thankless, push-the-pregnant-urchin-back-onto-the-street, stepmom role.



Reverend Frank (James Earl Jones) Counsels Apple in 'Gimme Shelter'

Photo credit: Roadside Attractions

The always steady Ann Dowd (“Compliance”) plays Kathy DiFiore, and there is sense of her usual steadfastness, but the character isn’t given much to do. Ditto for James Earl Jones as a helpful reverend. Both actors add presence to any scene, but presence for presence’s sake is the only way they’re being utilized in “Gimme Shelter.” If the emotions in the film were portrayed with a little more subtlety, and the conclusions weren’t quite so grand, the story of Apple may have risen above a Lifetime TV Movie level.

The message in the film will no doubt resonate with persons in a similar situation, seeking shelter, and movies as mass culture can get the word out to those in need. The work that Kathy DiFiore does is godly, and if the film version of her story reaches out and helps one individual, then it has done its job.

“Gimme Shelter” opens everywhere on January 24th. Featuring Vanessa Hudgens, James Earl Jones, Rosario Dawson, Brendan Fraser and Ann Dowd. Written and directed by Ron Krauss. Rated “PG-13.” For more information about the shelter work of Kathy DiFiore, click on [SeveralSources.net](#) [14]



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