

Imagine What Could Have Been for 'Danny Collins'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 27, 2015 - 10:14am

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Danny Collins” is a shoulda-woulda-coulda film. It was inspired by the true story of a John Lennon letter acquired by a musician 40 years after he was suppose to to have received it, and then re-imagined as a cheap soap opera, punctuated by far superior John Lennon songs.

There is nothing wrong with changing the story. The musician who actually received the letter thought it was nice, but probably then thought, “I have to pay my mortgage this month.” In “Danny Collins,” the rocker is played with little believability by a too-tan Al Pacino, and he is a filthy rich rock star, “selling out” shows during a dinosaur road tour. Throw in the estranged son with a deathly disease – yeah, they went there – and the whole John Lennon vibe is lost on a sappy, silly story that should have been much more interesting, considering the elements it was given – including the use of a Lennon song soundtrack.

The film begins in 1971, when a young Danny Collins is doing his first major interview for a “Rolling Stone” type magazine. John Lennon apparently reads the article in this parallel universe, and writes a letter of encouragement for Danny. The rocker goes on to a big career, which gives him all the star trappings, but doesn’t read the letter under his manager Frank (Christopher Plummer) buys it from a collector forty years later. The words so move Danny Collins (Al Pacino), that he decides to re-engineer his life.



Hoo-Hah! Al Pacino as the Title Character in 'Danny Collins'

Photo credit: Bleecker Street Media

This includes going to New Jersey (naturally) and reuniting with his long lost son Tom (Bobby Cannavale) and Tom's wife Samantha (Jennifer Garner). Tom is a working class hero, and wants nothing to do with Danny, until he confesses he has a deadly disease. Luckily for the plucky rocker, he can fix that, while staying at a local hotel and wooing the comely hotel manager named Mary (Annette Bening). In this case, money can buy them love.

It's too bad that John Lennon is dead, and can do nothing about the use of his name and his songs, which oversees the atmosphere of this dreck. Most distressing is the use of his songs on the soundtrack as emotional markers (including "Instant Karma!," which proves the irony meter was off on this film). There are many independent directors out there, lamenting that they can't afford a Lennon song in their movie, and "Danny Collins" gets to waste several John solo songs. Worst. Use. Of. A. John. Lennon. Soundtrack. Ever.

Al Pacino is miscast as the title character, and most likely insisted on doing his own singing – including a wretched "comeback" tune – and sounds like Al Pacino doing karaoke. There is not one iota of believing Pacino is an ex-rocker, especially in his "hoo-hah" brand of character phase. And while casting Christopher Plummer as the manager was available to writer/director Dan Fogelman, it doesn't mean he has to cast him. Both he and Pacino gave ham-handed and inauthentic performances.

As if that wasn't enough, the superior acting skill of Annette Bening is shuffled to the background, and Jennifer gets the role of "The Wife." I'm assuming all favors were pulled in to get this cast, when they shouldn't had bothered them with the thin script. Poor Bobby Cannavale takes the brunt of the tepid story, trying to perform the son character like a human weather vane – as he blows emotionally in all directions. Plus he is saddled with the disease-of-the-week for Danny to miraculously infiltrate, with his large endowment of dollars.



Tom (Bobby Cannavale) and Samantha (Jennifer Garner) in 'Danny Collins'

Photo credit: Bleecker Street Media

The character of Danny isn't logical, and therefore isn't interesting, bottom line. He can "sell out" shows but there is nothing but old ladies over 60 (ha-ha), and there is not a hint of what really should be a Las Vegas cheese-level act. In reality, he would be on those Saturday night PBS specials used to raise pledge dollars ("collect all the Danny Collins DVDs!"), which would have been far more interesting. By making Danny such a winner, should we care that his son doesn't care? I didn't, even with some of my favorite John Lennon songs providing emotional pause.

What are those lyrics? "Instant Karma's gonna get you...gonna knock you right on the head...What in the world you thinking of?...What on earth you tryin' to do?" Advice the production company of "Danny Collins" should have heeded.

"Danny Collins" continues its limited release in Chicago on March 27th. Featuring Al Pacino, Christopher Plummer, Jennifer Garner, Annette Bening, Bobby Cannavale, Josh Peck and Nick Offerman. Screenplay written and directed by Dan Fogelman. Rated "R"



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