

Surprisingly Weird, Wacky ‘Puerto Ricans in Paris’

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Occasionally, a film breaks through the miasma of images, and proclaims its uniqueness by just being weird. Case in point, the strange and wacky “Puerto Ricans in Paris,” which may have been created after two rich film producers made a one dollar bet (ala “Trading Places”) that they could come up with a movie simply based on the title.

With a plot that would be at home in a 1970s cop drama – New York City undercover cops of Puerto Rican heritage go to Paris to break up a counterfeit designer purse crime – the absurdity of the situation and the actors playing the cops are almost secondary to the off-the-grid humor that emerges both because of and despite the situation. The film also looks good, better than would be expected for such a story, and Paris gets its due as a destination. One of the best examples of the bizarre nature of the way this film was approached, is the casting of Edgar Garcia (whose only major credit was in HBO’s “How to Make it in America,” created by Ian Edelman, the director of this film). He portrays the more romantic of the two cops in Paris, despite his tattooed girth and bald head. Obviously, Edgar has something on Ian.

Luis (Luis Guzmán) and Eddie (Edgar Garcia) are undercover New York City cops, whose beat is busting counterfeit designer purse criminals. After a successful exposure of a one such crook, they are approached by a Paris designer named Collette (Alice Taglioni) to come to the City of Lights to retrieve a hot designer bag – stolen right before its anticipated release.



Luis (Luis Guzmán) and Eddie (Edgar Garcia) in ‘Puerto Ricans in Paris’

Photo credit: *Focus World*

Lured by a large reward, the two fish-out-of-water lawmen start living in luxury in Paris, while coming up with ever more outlandish ways to

check out Collette's staff for the possible thief. In the meantime, the same Collette has a crush on Eddie, which wouldn't sit right with his wife Gloria (Rosie Perez). There are many complications to consider before this case can be solved.

There is a lot of clunky stuff in this film, mostly having to do with the miscasting of Edgar Garcia as a sensitive romantic. But for the most part there is also an air of smart aleck-ness that winks at the camera. The fringe characters are very silly, including Miriam Shor ("The Good Wife") as a tough-but-horny police commander, Collette's flamboyant designer assistant and Rosario Dawson as Luis Guzmán's put-upon girlfriend. Much of the funnier dialogue felt improvised, because the situation of the story was witless.

The director of the film is Ian Edelman, who seems to be paying back both Guzmán and Garcia for their earlier work in his HBO series, as both are not right for the cops – Guzman is too zaftig, and Garcia doesn't have the timing or presence for a sweet comic role. But Guzmán, to his credit, was not afraid to take on the heavy lifting of creating comic situations, and had a few good parts simply by interacting with the French.

The French actors, by the way, were great. They acted in contrast to the Puerto Ricans, and I'm positive that director Edelman instructed them to pretend they were in a French movie. The woman who portrayed Collette, Alice Taglioni, never wavered from her Frenchy-ness, even showing up in the final act with a total and shocking makeover. Even as she was awkwardly seducing Eddie, she was believable, which is exactly what the role needed. The French villain in the story (Frédéric Anscembre) had a nice oiliness, even though his role was thankless.



Rosario Dawson is Vanessa in 'Puerto Ricans in Paris'

Photo credit: Focus World

And since I liked the film I will go easy on Edgar Garcia, who – while trying his damn-dest to fit into what he was doing – was just not right in the romantic part. He just wasn't sure of what the role required, and the script focused way too much on his being a good husband/father versus the unlikely crush a lovely French woman had on him. Even in an absurdist comedy, it simply wasn't coherent. Again in contrast, when the movie wavered away from this, besides the clunks, it had a better sense of its own humor.

Regardless, "Puerto Ricans in Paris" is worth seeing, and frankly I wouldn't mind travelogue adventures in which the weirdly cast cops go to other locales. "Puerto Ricans in Morocco?" "Puerto Ricans on the Ivory Coast?" "Puerto Ricans in Dubai?" They belong everywhere, and on any astral plane.

"Puerto Ricans in Paris" continues its limited release in Chicago on June 10th, and is available through digital download. See local listings for theaters and showtimes, plus see digital providers for availability. Featuring Luis Guzman, Edgar Garcia, Rosario Dawson, Rosie Perez, Miriam Shor and Alice Taglioni. Written by Ian Edelman and Neel Shah. Directed by Ian Edelman. Rated "R"



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