‘T2 Trainspotting’ is a Nostalgic Trip That Stays on the Rails

Submitted by JonHC [1] on April 6, 2017 - 2:38am

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Sequels are the bane of film’s existence. They tend to end with unresolved plotlines in an attempt to promote the need for another film. Disappointing film franchises have been built this way, but Danny Boyle is the last person I would have expected this from. “T2 Trainspotting” is the sequel to “Trainspotting” that we never wanted but are surprisingly happy to have.

“Trainspotting” didn’t end the conventional way by resolving every conflict, but instead ended with the limitless potential of a new beginning. Danny Boyle has never been a slave to conventions so this comes as no surprise, but the way he ended the first film left it completely open-ended and up to the imagination of the viewer. There is a purity to that approach that forces the audience to take everything they have experienced and learned during the film and use it to create their own ending. True filmmaking should always transform the audience into active participants, and “Trainspotting” accomplishes that in spades. I’m not just referring to the traumatizing scenes with the baby on the ceiling or dead in the crib, which haunted me the first time I saw the film as a child. [In retrospect, I probably shouldn’t have been allowed to see this film as young as I saw it]



The old crew is back together in ‘T2 Trainspotting’
Photo credit: Sony Pictures

Boyle has always held the longstanding idea that he would never create a sequel to any of his films, and we happily thanked him for that. When told correctly, there is never the need to tell a compelling story with sequels. At least, that’s the view I had going into “T2.” The film takes place 20 years after the events of the first film with the majority of the original cast reprising their roles. The story follows Renton’s (Ewan McGregor) journey as he returns home to reconcile with his past and plan for a future he never knew he would have. Returning screenplay writer John Hodge returns to tell continue the story by putting the old crew into similar situations and escapades that made the first film so exciting. Although the sequel it takes some of the power away from the open ending in “Trainspotting,” “T2” gives us something equally satiating by providing a sense of closure we didn’t realize we needed.

Danny Boyle uses Hodge’s screenplay and makes sure to match the unstoppable energy of the first film. The pacing adapts to the scene, sometimes offering the nonstop rush you get from cocaine while other times creating a more mellow, but twice as potent high that you would get from heroine. Then, of course, there are the shaky, slightly out of focus scenes meant to emulate the intoxication of the characters. True to form, Boyle uses a robust and undiluted visual style that both embodies the different forms of drugs taken in the film, as well as creating a nostalgic element carried on from the first film. “T2” is often visually dizzying and disorienting, but altogether a magnificent inebriation of the senses similar to the same high that created our addiction to the first film.



Simon (Jonny Lee Miller) and Renton (Ewan McGregor) bonding over bad habits in ‘T2 Trainspotting’
Photo credit: Sony Pictures

Visuals aside, this film wouldn’t be anywhere as engaging or even (slightly) relatable if it wasn’t for the dynamic of the characters. The comradery, and even rivalry, of the original four friends, is what gave the first film it’s unflappable charm, and it is continued and strengthened in “T2.” Robert Carlyle and Jonny Lee Miller return with the same deplorable charisma that made us fall in love with them. The real surprise comes in the performances and character development of Ewan McGregor and Ewen Bremner, who return to this now-franchise with twice the drive and excitement that they had the first time around. Watching them interact on screen is the most enjoyable experience in the film, and seeing how much each character (and actor) has changed in the last 20 years, even if we ultimately realize how much they have actually remained the same.

There is an undeniable draw and power in nostalgia, but it can easily become a corrupting force when done for the wrong reasons, such as financially motivated ones. Making a sequel for the sake of making one will always be a fruitless effort because the motivations are transparent. It is obvious that “T2 Trainspotting” was made as a labor of love by someone who felt like they had something more to offer the cinematic world they had created. Even though it treads on a familiar trail, “T2” is a sequel we could have easily lived without, but luckily don’t have to.

“T2 Trainspotting” opened everywhere on March 31st. Featuring Ewan McGregor, Robert Carlyle, Jonny Lee Miller, Ewen Bremner, Shirley Henderson, Anjela Nedyalkova and Kelly Macdonald. Screenplay by John Hodges. Directed by Danny Boyle. Rated “R”

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