

1970s Caper Film in Enjoyable ‘Finding Steve McQueen’

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The “caper” film, AKA the heist film, is one of the old reliable genres in the movies, and usually involves a gang of mismatched thieves. “Finding Steve McQueen” goes all the way back to the 1970s to spotlight a based-on-truth burglary that involves Tricky Dick himself, President Richard M. Nixon.

The gang is led by the underrated character actor William Fichtner (probably best known as the gun-waving astronaut in ‘Armageddon’), who depends on a dim-but-reliable car enthusiast played by Travis Fimmel, whose story is the focus of the film. The title is a reference to the Fimmel character’s love for the King of Cool, movie star Steve McQueen, and many of the film’s incidences either alludes to or directly comments upon McQueen’s films. Director Mark Steven Johnson (“Ghost Rider”) also does some fancy timeline jumping, as the film begins in 1980, but tells the story of the bank robbery and the main character’s love coupling in flashback. The story is interesting, the actors have fun and any memory of Steve McQueen is always welcome.

Harry Barber (Travis Fimmel) is a McQueen-obsessed fan from Youngstown, Ohio, who honors his hero by driving fast in cars. He’s kind of a drifter employment-wise, but finds his niche with his Uncle Enzo (William Fichtner), who is planning a bank robbery. Enzo figures a small town California branch contains illegal slush funds totaling 30 million bucks, hidden by President Richard M. Nixon.



King of Cool: Travis Fimmel in ‘Finding Steve McQueen’

Photo credit: Entertainment One

Uncle E gathers Ray (Rhys Coiro) and Pauly (Louis Lombardi) to flesh out the gang, and Harry recruits his Vietnam vet brother Tommy (Jake Weary). Because the alarm system is old school, it is Harry who figures out – almost Forrest Gump-like – the intricacies of the break in. They get away with it initially, but the FBI has interest, including Agent Lambert (Forest Whitaker) and Deep Throat himself, W. Mark Felt (John Finn).

The story is told by Harry in 1980 to his girlfriend Molly (Rachael Taylor), while he is on the run and living under another name ... it's actually a confession. What might seem boring is actually one of the more charming elements of the film, as Rachael Taylor has a real star appeal. The flashbacks include their initial courtship, and the natural goofiness of Travis Fimmel's Harry and Taylor's Molly makes this part of the story work as well. Fimmel was cast obviously because he looks like Steve McQueen, but his comic style was a bonus.

The robbery itself is nicely framed as a step-by-step process, and the gang has the usual “characteristics” that heist movies add ... those little flaws in each personality that might trip them up later. Fichtner as Enzo is the highlight, he hates Nixon so much he sees the robbery as vengeance. Ray (itchy trigger finger) and Pauly (always angry) round out the typical robbers, but even they are fun. And you want some commentary on the Vietnam War? Veteran Tommy is a victim of that sad farce.



Fimmel with Rachel Taylor and Forest Whitaker in ‘Finding Steve McQueen’

Photo credit: Entertainment One

The always interesting Forest Whitaker is also given some serious quirks. He is a French horn playing, going-through-marriage-issues FBI agent, and is perplexed by the interest in the robbery by the eventual Deep Throat. Shades of Watergate! Whitaker always seems to play his characters as if he's thinking of something else, and it really works in this film. If there is anything that breaks up this party, it's the lack of definitive ending. It's clever, but cuts off the story without the same satisfaction the rest of the story contained.

Ah, memories of the 1970s. The music! The clothes! The films! The lack of social media! And most importantly, the punishment of a corrupt Republican president. As the old saying goes, may history repeat itself.

“Finding Steve McQueen” opens in Chicago on March 15th, part of a nationwide release. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Travis Fimmel, William Fichtner, Rachael Taylor, Forest Whitaker, Lily Rabe and John Finn. Written by Ken Hixon and Keith Sharon. Directed by Mark Steven Johnson. Rated “R”



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]
Editor and Film Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [16]

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