Verdone Returns to the Big Screen with Optimism

Monica Straniero (February 19, 2020)

The film, written with Giovanni Veronesi and presented by Filmauro, comes out February 26. Reminiscent of the Commedia all'Italiana tradition, however with fluctuating results that are never up to the standards of the Verdone we have come to know and love.

As the images of Carlo Verdone's new film "You Only Live Once" appear on the screen, you can't help but think of the great Italian cinematic tradition of bittersweet comedies that range from "Amici Miei," to Pietro Germi, passing through Pietrangeli and reaching its highest point with Dino Risi's "Sorpasso," an insurmountable masterpiece.

Here, writer and director Verdone tries to give this tradition a modern spin relying on the incredible talent of his real-life friends Max Tortora, Anna Foglietta and Rocco Papaleo, with whom he even shares a residence in the beautiful Roman neighborhood of Monteverde Vecchio.

The chemistry between the four is undeniable, they look and work well together, as if they were at the theatre. But that’s it. The movie’s plot is weak and very predictable, the jokes soon get heavy and boring and even the erotic and sensual intervention of Mariana Falace who plays Verdone’s peculiar and somewhat slutty daughter feels out of place. In order to keep watching this film we need more than to see the lady’s perfect lower back being paraded all over the place under the guise of criticizing it.

Verdone and his impeccable surgeons are serious and esteemed professionals, who can even count the Pope amongst their clients. But they’re as capable in their jobs as they are inept, clumsy, and even unlucky in their personal lives. Beyond medicine, they share a passion for jokes that they have been carrying out for years and of which they are themselves the targets. The anesthesiologist Amedeo Lasalandra (Rocco Papaleo) is the preferred victim. The other three manage to ruin everything for him, from a romantic evening up to a job interview.

These are cruel, useless jokes. Though needed in order to break the tension in the operating room where the team continuously opens up and stiches back bodies, they still feel pathetic and immature. Can these 50-something-year-olds really find no other way to amuse themselves? Even Amedeo realizes this and lases out, sending his friends to hell. Verdone himself realizes it and abruptly shifts the screenplay as one of the character's situation changes. From this point forward, the jokes end and friendship becomes once more that refuge, that support that we all look for in a friend. Up until the predictable final twist, which we naturally won’t reveal.

It isn’t much for the fans of Verdone, who have come to expect more refined, less gimicky comedy, jokes filled with malincholy, irony and painful truths which you have to laugh off in order not to cry, well-constructed characters, provocative and at times serious reflections.

Finally, I can’t go without mentioning a pretty aggressive product placement, worthy of a James Bond film. If the purpose was to make us go to Puglia, where most of the action takes place, then at least this goal was met. Not only does Puglia never betray you, it also never plays tricks.

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