

Movie Review: Poseidon

Written by {ga=mitch}

Monday, May 22 2006 7:00 PM -

In addition to his weekly Sopranos recaps, and The Crystal Ball, Mitch also reviews movies for the site. And he writes a damn good review. This week, Mitch reviews "Poseidon", which was just released at the theaters, and is the story of a luxury cruise ship being capsized by a huge wave and the struggle for survival that ensues. Click on Mitch's name for his full archive of columns and movie reviews, as there are some gems in there you may have missed.



Wolfgang Petersen has a proven talent for directing action/adventure movies. Starting with the brilliant German language submarine picture "Das Boot", he has always at least been entertaining with such films as "In the Line of Fire", "Air Force One", "A Perfect Storm", "Outbreak", and the fun but pedestrian "Troy". I mention all these other films to establish his pedigree, as I can't think of another director that could have pulled off the job that he has done with "Poseidon". The film has no plot to speak of, no real character development, and limited opportunity for chemistry between the characters. However, it is still a "grip the edge of your seats" thriller with fantastic special effects that will keep you glued to the screen for almost every one of its 98 minutes of sparse run time.

We all know the story from both the trailers and the 1972 original version of "The Poseidon Adventure". Big wave capsizes boat...lots of people die...some try to save themselves by getting to the bottom of the upside down ship. End of plot line. Luckily, unlike such drawn out films like "Titanic" or Peter Jackson's "King Kong", we don't spend much time before the actions starts. In less than fifteen minutes, we have made a cursory round of all the people we'll be following over

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the next ninety minutes, learning just enough about them to keep them distinguishable from one another.

Petersen and the screen writers do make a wise decision here. This is not a remake of "The Poseidon Adventure" in any regard other than the fact that a ship named Poseidon gets capsized. There is no defrocked priest (Gene Hackman in the original), no hard bitten cop (Ernest Borgnine) and his former prostitute wife (Stella Stevens), and best of all...none of the characters that were played by Shelley Winters, Red Buttons, or that obnoxious "know-it-all" kid. The people are different, and the problems they encounter are different as well. Water and fire are of course still involved, but you could watch the original movie right before going to see this one, and you would not know what to expect.

In this case, we have Josh Lucas and Kurt Russell in the primary leadership roles. Lucas plays Dylan, an enigmatic gambler who first has the idea of abandoning the main ballroom after the catastrophe. Russell portrays Robert Ramsey, a former fire captain, New York City mayor, and all around hero. He chooses to go with Dylan primarily to find his daughter, Emmy Rossum, who is elsewhere on the ship with her new fiancé (the engagement being initially unbeknownst by Russell). They are joined by various others; a single mother and her young son (who at least isn't a brat), a gay architect (Richard Dreyfuss), a woman stowing away to meet her brother in New York, and a couple of others who serve the thankless roles of body count for a movie such as this.

Dylan, as a former submariner, and Russell, as a former fireman, use their macho skills to lead their group through the labyrinth of corridors and staircases filled with debris and dead bodies in an effort to climb faster than the ship sinks. Petersen is able to recapture the claustrophobic tension he had in "Das Boot", as our heroes often seem to be in a ventilation shaft, elevator shaft, or a crowded, narrow hallway. And while the events may be somewhat predictable in regards to what they encounter, the apprehension you feel for the characters is always high. This is particularly true in the scenes in which they are swimming underwater from one

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place to another...despite all of them seemingly having David Blaine level skills regarding holding their breath.

Credit must be given for three of the actors in particular. Russell, Lucas, and Dreyfuss do a masterful job in creating well defined characters given the limited material they had to work with. There is no clash of egos between Dylan and Ramsey vying for the position of Alpha Dog, and the film is better for it. This is a perfect type of role for the fifty-five year old Russell; a confident, relaxed man of distinction who is comfortable leading, but does not demand center stage when others know more. Lucas's Dylan is a bit harder to read, being the prototypical loner who steps up to sacrifice for others. A bit of a clichéd character, Lucas steps beyond the role's trappings to create a unique individual. Dreyfuss also avoids stereotypes in his role as an architect whose understanding of structures helps them navigate the treacherous terrain. The fact that he is gay is almost a throw-away fact...but that's not a bad thing as I don't think his character would have handled anything differently if he were straight.

The women don't fare quite as well, unfortunately. Emmy Rossum only seems to exist to worry about her father and her fiancé; Jacinda Barrett's is there only to worry about her son (and provide a romantic interest for Lucas), and Mia Maestro is there as the designated panicky woman. I'm beginning to think that this may be a habit in Petersen's movies, as the closest thing he's ever had to a strong female character was Rene Russo in both "In the Line of Fire" and "Outbreak". Other than those two peripheral characters, most of the time women in his films are on the sidelines or in the background. There is no reason that Petersen couldn't have added a strong female character in this film, except for the fact that he (and the scriptwriters) didn't want to.

Another missed opportunity was in failing to recapture some of the surreal images seen in the first film from everything being upside down. In "The Poseidon Adventure", there were numerous images of the group walking through larger rooms where it was obvious that they were walking on the ceiling, adding to the

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bewildering atmosphere. Other than early on with the young boy stuck on a piano that is now on the “ceiling”, you don’t get those same images, and visually there doesn’t seem to be much difference from escaping from any other sinking ship.

All things considered, however, this is a movie that won’t disappoint you. Good acting, excellent special effects and fantastic action sequences that are never “Mission: Impossible” level absurd all add up to the type of movies we like to see during the summer season.

My Rating: *Bill Nelsen (2 ½ footballs).*