

It's been quite a while since my last home movie review! Feels good to be back!

I finally got around to seeing the 2018 remake of "Papillon" the other night. This epic tale of survival is directed by Michael Noer (This is his English-language debut). The film stars Charlie Hunnam, Rami Malek, Eve Hewson, Roland Moller, Louisa Pili, Christopher Fairbank, Michael Socha, Brian Vernel and Yorick van Wageningen.

Before anything else, I'm just going to say that I have not seen the original film with McQueen and Hoffman. It is on my list to watch however. I tried three times to see this movie back in August. It just wasn't meant to be as it only stayed in local theaters for about a week and the times never lined up with my schedule. After I finally accepted that I was going to miss this one, I promised that I would still review it in its entirety when it released on home media. Just about three months later and here we are. I was pumped to see this for three specific reasons. Charlie Hunnam, Rami Malek and the film's story. I love both of them as actors and seeing them together in this gritty setting really got me interested. Now that I've watched the film, was it worth the wait and anticipation?

Simply one word. YES. This film was truly something special. I was enthralled throughout its fairly lengthy run time of 2 hours and 14 minutes. The performances were excellent across the board. The locations and cinematography were stunning even amidst the brutality being depicted. The music was haunting and beautiful. So let's not waste another second. Here we go.

As I already mentioned, the performances are all wicked good. Hunnam brings an intimidating physicality to Henri "Papillon" Charriere and this is by far the most committed performance I've seen from him. He also adds a lot of humanity to the role, very often putting himself in harm's way to protect others. Malek is no slouch either. His portrayal of convicted forger "Louis Dega" was very much the opposite of Hunnam's. He was quiet, fragile and sympathetic. Watching these two very different people form an unlikely bond to reach a common goal was genuinely thrilling. Their friendship is ultimately the heart and soul of the film and they deliver on that promise.

Another standout for me was Hewson's love interest to "Papillon", "Nennete". While her screen time is limited, I did believe that she truly loved him and her devastation to him being wrongly convicted later on demonstrated that perfectly. The last standout performance for me was that of Wageningen's "Warden Barrot". He was ruthless in his treatment of the inmates but strangely sympathetic as well. Whenever he was on screen, I felt extremely uneasy. As far as performances go, those are who stood out to me the most.

Moving on. The fight choreography and cinematography. Both were very visceral and stunning in their own right. Nothing about the violence in this film feels glamorized. It's bloody, muddy and brutal at times. It felt as if I was actually watching a real prison fight, complete with makeshift shivs and bone crunching punches. Every stab and punch is felt in it's entirety, as it should be portrayed. It's aggressive, dirty and painful. As for the cinematography, it's just gorgeous. From the seedy Parisian streets to the stark yet beautiful Devil's Island, it was clear that Hagen Bogdanski knew exactly how he wanted to capture every shot and location. It was a nice contrast between beauty and brutality. Great work all around.

The MUSIC. This has to be one of the most powerful and haunting musical scores I've heard all year long. David Buckley(having previously composed "The Nice Guys" and "Jason Bourne") blended religious chanting and a operatic choir to amazing cinematic effect. The music became a character in the film and it ultimately was responsible for bringing me to tears by the film's cathartic finale. It was just FANTASTIC.

Now we've reached the part of the review where I go over my negatives with the film. For starters, this is over 2 hours long and it is a slow burn type movie. I say this because that won't appeal to everybody. It didn't bother me however cause I appreciated the film taking it's time to establish its characters. Another potential negative is that the violence may turn many people off. It's meant to be hard to watch and this remake ups the violence from the original considerably. If you don't like that, then this may not be for you. I would have also liked a little more resolution at the film's conclusion. Lastly, the film does slow down about halfway through but it's necessary for what the film is trying to convey. Those are really my only potential negatives though.

In conclusion, I am so happy that i got to see this, even if it took longer than expected. It was worth every minute and I hope more people give it a chance cause I don't think many saw this in theaters. I connected with the characters, felt every hardship they faced and was just as relieved when they finally made it to the finish line. In the end, this was a powerful showcase of the human spirit, even in the face of utter inhumanity. I won't be forgetting this anytime soon. I'm going to give "Papillon" 4.5/5 stars.