



Uncut Gems (Safdie, 2019):USA

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

I had the good fortune of being at the 46th Telluride Film Festival and working in the Werner Herzog Theatre with a reserved seat. I didn't know what to expect on Saturday afternoon, the 31st of August, 2019. But before I knew it!

Bam! Hard-hitting, independent filmmakers, Safdie Brothers (*Good Time*), Josh and Benny, screened a frenetic film, [*Uncut Gems*](#), starring, in an Oscar-caliber performance, funny-man Adam Sandler. The film is executively produced by legendary filmmaker, Martin Scorsese, and was one of my favorite films at this year's film festival.

In *Uncut Gems*, Sandler plays a hustling, manic, charismatic Jewish jeweler, Howard Ratner, in New York City's Diamond District. National Basketball Association's future Hall of Famer Kevin Garnett of the famed Boston Celtics, lends a supporting role with a remarkably cool performance as Ratner gets himself roiled into an ever-deepening crisis.

Think of *Mean Streets* in the Big Apple's hustle and bustle of insatiable appetites and self-destructive behavior. Cinematographer Darius Khondji captures memorable visuals of the New York City skyline. The film's narrative, however, belongs to Sandler via the Safdie Brothers. I found myself rooting for Ratner and then shook my head as the film's tragic hero/anti-hero continued to hustle against all odds.

The musical score by Daniel Lopatin rocks. That's all I can say. It rocks! Benny Safdie and co-writer Ronald Bronstein edit the film so that it mimics the roller-coaster-ride narrative. The younger viewers were gaga during the film while the older generation seemed to be going bananas with the frenetic pacing. Nevertheless, the Safdie Brothers are perfecting their art. The production values are strong and the mise-en-scene provides an abundance of detail to the film's character and to the film's narrative.

In the Q & A following the film, Benny and Josh Safdie discussed their love of the fast-paced, New York City Diamond District vendors and confessed their infatuation with the Saul Bellow and Phillip Roth tragic-comic novels of the Jewish-American experience. And, interestingly, in the same vein as Joel and Ethan Cohen, the Safdies do all facets of filmmaking in collaboration. Admittedly, the Safdies knew from the start they had a winner with Sandler.

Sandler, known mainly for his comedic roles, also participated in the Q & A revealing he pushed both brothers hard on his character, Howard Ratner. The result is a highly sophisticated performance that will stand as one of, if not the very best, of Adam Sandler's career. Hats off to casting team of Francine Maisler and Jennifer Venditti. Also, Mr. Sandler's agent's persistence in getting his client and the Safdie's to meet, was noted and gratefully acknowledged by Sandler himself.

With a run time of two hours and fifteen minutes the film moves at an extraordinary pace. And when it ended, it left me wanting more. More Safdie Brothers and more Howard Ratner. The film is scheduled to be released by A24 into theatres on Christmas Day, December 25th. My recommendation is after you finish shopping, catch the matinee or after dinner see the evening show. Either way you won't be disappointed. Very warmly recommended.

Category

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