

Motherless Brooklyn (Norton, 2019):USA

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Viewed as part of the 46th Telluride Film Festival at the Palm Theatre. Motherless Brooklyn, a crime, drama film noir throwback by Edward Norton, tells the story of a gum shoe detective with Tourettes Syndrome, a disorder characterized by involuntary tics, investigating the death of his boss, mentor and adoptive father figure, Frank Minnis, played by Bruce Willis. Edward Norton wrote, directed, starred and produced the film.



Edward Norton in Warner Brothers Pictures MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN. (Photo courtesy of Warner Brothers Pictures)

A passion project twenty years in the making, Motherless Brooklyn, attempts to re-imagine the famed film noir era. While most noir films were black and white, Norton chose to showcase his work in color. And with a cast including Leslie Mann, Gugu Mbatha-Raw. Bobby Cannavale, Alec Baldwin and Willem

Dafoe, I can certainly understand and appreciate his decision with the filmâ??s colorful characters. Nortonâ??s performance as Lionel Essrog, the Touretted detective, reminded me of Nortonâ??s Oscar nominated performance as Roy/Aaron in the 1996 crime drama, Primal Fear. Itâ??s every bit as impressive though seemingly carries a lighter psychological heft.



Alec Baldwin, left, and Edward Norton in Warner Brothers Pictures MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN. (Ph of Warner Brothers Pictures)

In Motherless Brooklyn, Lionel finds his legs in the world of detective investigations after the death/murder of his boss/mentor and adoptive father figure, Frank Minna. Driven to find the truth, Lionel navigates various scenes and worlds of New York City in the 1950â??s with a rock-hard determination as the filmâ??s peripheral characters are uninterested in who killed Frank Minna. Rather, each character has his or her selfish interests to pursue. Lionel, on the other hand, is steadfast and goes to any lengths to pursue the truth going so far as to impersonate a prominent and well-known New York Times newspaper reporter.



Edward Norton in Warner Brothers Pictures MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN. (Photo courtesy of Warner Pictures)

Nortonâ??s character, Lionel, carries the film from start to finish. Utilizing a traditional, signature noir element, the narrative voice-over, Lionel fills the audience in on background elements as the film dives, reminiscent of Roman Polanskiâ??s Chinatown, into a world of gangland violence and shady real estate deals within a flourishing underground entertainment scene.



Gugu Mbatha-Raw, left, and Edward Norton in Warner Brothers Pictures MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN. (Photo courtesy of Warner Brothers Pictures)

Several other aspects of the film push the work into the apex of top films. The filmâ??s musical score by Daniel Pemberton takes a seat with the Miles Davis score in Elevator to the Gallows. Wynton Marsalis and Michael K. Williams deliver an astonishing, melodic trumpeting as Lionel and Gugu Mbatha-Rawâ??s character, Laura, a community, housing fairness activist, share a heartfelt, tender

moment. The costuming from Amy Roth, the cast of characters by Avy Kaufman and production design from Beth Mickle qualify the film as a solid period piece set in the 1950â??s New York City. And while the mise-en-scene appears simple, it works magically with the calm, cool, polished voice-over narrative of a retrospective Lionel. Interestingly, Norton collaborated heavily with two-time Oscar nominee, Cinematographer Dick Pope.



Edward Norton, right, and Willem Dafoe, center, in Warner Brothers Pictures MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN. (Photo courtesy of Warner Brothers Pictures)

Granted, with a A-list cast of Hollywood actors, Nortonâ??s directorial work would seem to be a walk in the park. Yet, Norton not only directed the film, he also played the lead role adapting the Jonathan Lethem prize-winning novel of the same name to the screen, and was a major producing partner.

With a run time of 144 minutes, Motherless Brooklyn, comes in on time. Some editing and production choices allowed an emotional peek into the â??broken brainâ?• of Lionel and his coming to terms with his Tourettes that some viewers might find unsettling. Undoubtedly, the film, a Warner Brothers Picture production, is a vehicle for Edward Norton to showcase his talents. Yet, it also sheds light on a ruthless period in the urban planning of New York City providing an illumination into todayâ??s socio-economic/political environment. Highly recommended.

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