

The Full Monty

The Full Monty, in Britspeak, may mean a hearty steak and eggs breakfast (like the kind Field Marshall Montgomery used to have?), but in the latest English movie of that name it means “going all the way” in a striptease. The strip enterprise is undertaken by some unlikely out-of-work blokes from Yorkshire, one of whom, Gaz (Robert Carlyle), gets the idea such a show would be a money-maker in his economically depressed but hormonally vigorous home town. How they get there is a very smart, yet never smarmy, pleasure.

Gaz is a good-hearted divorced dad who needs money badly to gain joint custody for his son, Nathan (William Snape). An ex-steel worker at the local plant, he has no more likelihood of landing a good paying job than his ex-plant buddies, chubby Dave (Mark Addy), suicidal Lomper (Steve Huison), long-in-the-tooth Horse (Paul Barber), and hunkish Guy (Hugo Speer)). But, after sneaking a peek at how the local ladies cheer (and pay for) some visiting Chippendale male strippers, he concocts a plan to mount his own strip group which will, unlike the Chippendales--perform “the Full Monty.”

The final piece to Gaz’s puzzle is recruiting the officious Gerald (Tom Wilkinson) who was once the a plant foreman and is a decent ballroom dancer. But Gerald feels the gig (plugged in town as “We Dare to Bare”) is beneath his dignity--until he realizes that pretending to be a breadwinner (he deceives his wife by going each day to an invented job) is not bringing home the bacon. After Gerald signs on, the group is in business, learning to lose layers for the big day.

The film is the latest in a growing sub-genre of British and Irish films: what do working stiffs and youngbloods do once the plant closes down? Such an end-of-the-tether cohort has appeared in some Mike Leigh’s films, in the Irish tales of Roddy Doyle (*The Snapper* and *The Van*), in the form of the wandering Scottish layabouts of *Trainspotting*, and, in a close parallel, among the ex-mining misfits of *Brassed Off*. As the colliery workers of the latter film have their brass band, the gents of *The Full Monty* have their stripper’s dream--maybe the latter should have been called “Taken Off...”

The movie’s momentum, choreographed by director Peter Cattaneo, comes from the tribulations of the group as they practice for the Final Flash. In time, their rehearsals take hold, as evidenced by a charming strut they do (to Donna Summer’s “Hot Stuff”) in the unemployment line. But stumbles occur. Dave, terrified of what his wife will think of his big booty in public, quits to take a security job. Three of the guys are jailed for public indecency. Gerald finally gets a real job offer and is torn... The finale comes, rightly, on the night of the show with the six grinding and peeling to “Flashdance.” To let you know if the film audience gets a full dose of the Full Monty--well, you’ll have to see the picture.

(September 1997)