

T2 Trainspotting

For his sequel to the outlandish “Trainspotting” (1996), director Danny Boyle updates us, 20 years later, on the lives of his four Scottish louts in “T2 Trainspotting.” The first film was a wild ride through the Edinburgh underclass and drug scene whose reputation has grown over the years as a landmark shocker in British cinema for its tawdry subject matter and its disjointed, often frenzied, storytelling. It also transformed the careers of its four leads.

Besides Ewan McGregor as Mark Fenton, “Trainspotting” introduced Jonny Lee Miller (as Simon “Sick Boy” Williamson), Ewen Bremner (“Spud” Murphy) and Robert Carlyle (Francis “Franco” Begbie), as, respectively, a handsome street hustler, an unremitting junkie, and a living temper tantrum. All are longer in the tooth in “T2” but they retain their individual natures 20 years on.

Mark has returned home after 15 years living a semi-normal life in Amsterdam to deal with the death of his mum. Simon runs a shabby saloon and makes a living off sexual blackmail using a Bulgarian tart Veronika (Anjela Nedyalkova). Spud has lost a wife and family to his habit and contemplates suicide. Franco is doing a 25-year stretch in the slammer and has just been denied parole.

Though Spud, the mildest of the original crew, has no bone to pick with Mark, both Simon and Franco—once they learn that Markie’s back in town—want revenge after he ran out on them with £16,000 from a big drug sale. It doesn’t take long for the one-time mates to drift back into each other’s orbit. Mark re-bonds with Spud after saving his life and re-connects with Simon over their boyhood pasts, while furious Franco escapes from prison to get back at Mark.

What people remember from the original “Trainspotting” was its pell-mell pace, with the boys constantly running away from authorities or themselves, getting beaten up, or beating themselves up, often shot in jump cuts accompanied by pounding music. It also became notorious for a wretch-worth toilet scene that few can put out of their mind. Boyle’s anarchic style—which also contained moments of reflection and macho humor—became a model for subsequent tales of wayward British youth.

Boyle, who went on to make such diverse films as “Slumdog Millionaire,” “127 Hours,” and “Steve Jobs,” here revisits his rollicking early style, and there are no surprises when the four lads revert to their old ways, becoming, as one character says, “tourists in their own youth.” They have “grown” little in two decades.

There is some leavening of their coarseness in “T2 Trainspotting”: more family life is depicted, with even out-of-control Franco is given some domestic moments with his wife and son, and the Bulgarian is a true wild card, a street-wise young woman who assesses the four as the little boys they are. There are lovely set pieces, too, as when Simon and Mark exult over their longtime soccer passions, or when the two demurely suit up to apply for an EU business loan, a visit way out of their comfort range. What doesn’t change is their language: for those with sensitive ears, the dialogue is a constant stream of obscenities, a few of which cannot help but turn out funny. If you ever had a yen for any of these blokes in the original movie, or you want to get down with some Scottish sleaze, this is your picture.

(The film runs 118 mins. and earns a hard "R" rating with violence, some skin, and ripe language.)

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