

The Magdalene Sisters

The Magdalene Sisters offers a harrowing, but compelling story of 20th Century slavery: how “fallen” girls in Ireland were taken from their families (with those families’ consent) and consigned (until recently) to “Magdalene” asylums to pay for their “lasciviousness” under Catholic sisters imposing the equivalent of prison rules.

Director Peter Mullan (himself a noted actor) highlights the stories of three young women in the 1960's, Margaret (Anne-Marie Duff), Bernadette (Nora-Jane Noone), and Rose (Dorothy Duffy), victims of, respectively, a nasty rape, a healthy libido, and a youthful affair. The three Irish actresses, very different types, come up with three exemplary performances: Margaret, the principled, thoughtful one, Bernadette, the tough cookie who wants revenge, and Rose, the sweet, naive lass. You root for these girls as you do for any of those falsely accused in any prison flick. The significant difference is that it represents a real institution that functioned up until 1996!

The naturalness of the girls’ performances contrasts with the depiction of the warden-like nuns, lacking subtlety and range. Most egregious is the Mother Superior, Sister Bridget, played by Geraldine McEwan with pinched viciousness--think of a smaller, constipated Nurse Ratched on way too much coffee under a starched habit and you will have some sense of her consistently vile nature. Her distemper should appeal only to those movie goers who went through a particularly nasty Catholic school upbringing and seek some sweet revenge...
(Rated “R” for raw, abusive behavior towards young women)

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