



Courtesy Photo
Andrew Strong (left) plays Deco and Robert Arkins plays Jimmy in The Commitments.

'Commitments' delivers soulful fun

FILM: *The Commitments* is currently showing at Cinema World. Rated R.
* don't bother, ** wait to rent, *** worth the time, **** a must see

Early on in *The Commitments*, one of the young, working class Dubliners asks if perhaps the group is being presumptuous by playing soul music. After all, they aren't black. But the leader, Jimmy Rabbitte insists they are the blacks of Ireland.

They're young, blue collar and scorned by the community. Perhaps Jimmy echoes the sentiments of the film's director, Alan Parker.

In *The Commitments*, Parker does something he doesn't usually do. He takes a potentially dreary story and turns it into a soulful, funny and spirited romp.

What's most likable about the film is the raw talent and excitement that the almost entirely inexperienced cast brings to their roles. As when Jimmy puts an ad in the local paper to recruit band members, Parker also put an ad

in a Dublin newspaper — to get musicians and actors to audition for the film.

The cast is young, ambitious, talented and funny. The mistake that is made is in concentrating too much on relationships that remain undefined.

There are some interesting characters. Joey "The Lips" Fagan, the only adult member of the band, claims to have played trumpet with some of the legends of blues and soul. Jimmy's father worships Elvis and provides some great moments. The King's picture on the family's wall is smaller than the Pope's, but hangs above the pontiff.

Despite several original characters, it's a mistake to try and do a complete study of each one. As is often the case with a Parker film, he tries to condense a world of information in efficient little scenes.

Ignoring that flaw, there is quite a bit of screen time devoted to what is really worth watching: talented musicians working through the not-so-wonderful years by playing raucous, angry and danceable music.

Parker keeps things moving and the lead singer, the amazing 17-year-old Andrew Strong, has immense stage presence and is a worthy voice to sing these great songs.

There's great energy and sounds throughout the film, but it might have been even better if it were simply played as a concert movie, devoting all the time to music instead of the characters, which in this film come off as underdeveloped and disappointingly thin. Still, there's so much love for soul in *The Commitments* that it inevitably wears off on the audience.

By Lucas J. Gutman
Emerald Contributor

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