



DO THE HUSTLE

American Hustle is a shiny collection of caper and romance twinkling with shining performances

AMERICAN HUSTLE: Directed by David O. Russell. Screenplay by Russell and Eric Singer. Cinematography, Linus Sandgren. Editing, Alan Baumgarten, Jay Cassidy, Crispin Struthers. Music, Danny Elfman. Starring Amy Adams, Christian Bale, Jennifer Lawrence, Bradley Cooper, Jeremy Renner, Louis C.K. Columbia Pictures, 2013. R. 138 minutes. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

David O. Russell's new film, *American Hustle*, is a shaggy, shambolic love story masquerading as a period crime drama. Loosely based on the ABSCAM operation of the late 1970s, the movie follows the exploits of a pair of

charming con artists, Irving Rosenfeld (Christian Bale) and Sydney Prosser (Amy Adams), who end up getting popped by an ambitious FBI agent, Richie DiMaso (Bradley Cooper), and thereby enlisted in a sting that seeks to bring down, among others, Carmine Polito (Jeremy Renner), the mayor of Camden, N.J.

Russell, who hit big with 2012's *Silver Linings Playbook*, weaves into this story of greed, corruption and double-crossing an epic meditation on the devious ways of

the human heart and the lengths to which we go to get what we want — or what we think we want. Like Martin Scorsese's classic gangster drama *Goodfellas*, *American Hustle* in the end becomes less about the intricate workings of crime and more about the wages of desire.

Every character in this film is on the make, and it's a testament to Russell's artistry that we are allowed glimpses beyond the con everyone is running — through the fragile cracks in the various complex facades. *American Hustle* is at its best when things fall apart: Bale, overweight and suffering a bad ticker, hanging his head in abject defeat; Adams confessing to Cooper that she's been stringing him along; Jennifer Lawrence, as Rosenfeld's loose cannon of a wife, hiding in a corner to sob on the shoulder of a stranger. These are the moments that disclose the humanity hiding in the malaise of narcissism and self-deception.

Russell is a gutsy director who isn't afraid to reach for epic greatness, and in the hands of a less ballsy artist *American Hustle* might have come across as merely derivative and over-determined. At times it walks that line, especially in its reliance on a blueprint laid down by Scorsese and picked up by directors like Paul Thomas Anderson in *Boogie Nights*: the amniotic creation of the decadent decade of the '70s, especially in the choice of soundtrack; the slow-mo, iconic saunter of characters closing in on a heist; the ragtag storytelling, with voiced-over flashbacks and temporal jump-cuts.

But Russell, through the sheer exuberance of his vision, makes it all work, and he is helped along here by a uniformly stellar cast. Adams and Bale, as star-crossed grifters, give the performances of their careers so far. Cooper continues to leap outside every box Hollywood draws around him, and Renner gives a touching turn as a good politician trapped in a shitty situation. Lawrence, as usual, is magnificent. *American Hustle* might not be Russell's masterpiece, but it is one of the strongest movies of the year. ■

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THE GREAT BEAUTY (LA GRANDE BELLEZZA)
Golden Globe Nominee 2:35, 8:00
THE HUNT (R)
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THE ARMSTRONG LIE (R) 12:05
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