I love what Mitch's movie reviews add to this website, and dude has been living at the theaters the last couple months for us. In his latest, he reviews Miami Vice, redone with Colin Farrell and Jamie Foxx playing Crockett and Tubbs. Read inside for Mitch's usual spoiler-free solid review of this film.

Michael Mann burst upon the scene in 1984 as the creative genius behind a groundbreaking new television show that was first pitched as “MTV Cops”. The show, of course, was “Miami Vice”, and it was one of the biggest successes of the decade, ushering in a new brand of one hour dramas where style was just as important as substance, adding modern music clips and Versace designs to the previous drab world of police detectives.

Mann went on to direct a sting of highly stylized, critically acclaimed movies. “Manhunter”, “The Last of the Mohicans”, “Heat”, “The Insider”, “Ali”, and “Collateral” have all been very good to excellent films, securing Mann’s place at the upper echelon of Hollywood’s “hip director” list. And now he risks a great deal of that banked credibility in going back and updating his breakthrough television series for the big screen; a big budget movie with A-List stars Colin Farrel and Oscar Winner Jamie Foxx taking on the roles so closely associated with Don Johnson and Phillip Michael Thomas as Sonny Crockett and Ricardo Tubbs.

And for the most part, Mann pulls it off. This is not the sun splashed, pastel colored Miami of the 80s, but a darker, neon backlit South Florida that is much more foreboding and dangerous for the undercover cops and federal agents. These are not jive-talking street

crooks and coked out pushers they are dealing with, but ruthless businessmen who easily have more manpower, firepower, and money than law enforcement can muster along with better technology and intel. The film wastes little time on exposition, as it almost immediately dives into the story of a multi-agency sting operation going bad. A joint operation of the DEA, ATF, and FBI has failed spectacularly, and a shadowy FBI supervisor (Ciaran Hinds, as good as always) has no choice but to turn to the two Miami vice detectives unknown to the other agencies to try to expose the leak and bring the operations of the cartel to light.

Crockett and Tubbs are given identities and back stories as drug runners, and are set up with enough toys to qualify them as NBA stars in regards to their vehicles and abodes. A higher level snitch sets them up to meet the Main Man, and they're flying off to Haiti for what ends up being a Mexican Standoff that would make Quentin Tarantino proud when the goons surrounding the drug lord somehow miss the fact that Crockett has smuggled a live grenade past them and is willing to blow them all up. Having established themselves as crazy bad-asses that know their business, they realize they are not dealing with the Big Guy himself, but his security chief and also his main money launderer, Isabella, played by Chinese beauty Li Gong.

With their cover identity established, they try to integrate themselves deeper within the organization. Crockett decides to work the angle of seducing Isabella in order to push her to give him more access to Montoya, the leader…but in true Don Johnson style makes the mistake of falling for her. Of course this puts everyone in danger as no one knows from where the inevitable double cross will originate.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to get much more into detail regarding the plot, as there really isn't much more to it, and to reveal more would be giving away vital information. This is the biggest weakness of this film, a plot that is not really any better than what you'd see on an average TV cops-n-robbers series on any given night. Given Mann's pedigree, I expected much better than this, given his work as a writer for every other movie he has directed save "Collateral". Perhaps his plate was too full this time with assuming the triad duties of producer-director-writer and the added pressure of re-creating his own icon. In any case, the end result is a film where the style is so much more than the substance. The predictable plot devices, unsurprising "twists", and stilted dialogs and character development would kill most any other movie. But the "style" part of it is so good, and the acting so crisp that it can more than recover for the script writing inadequacies.

The comparisons to the original series cast are inevitable, so let's get to it. With only one exception, the cast of the movie is far superior. Gone (thankfully) are the motor-mouthed good ol' southern boy Crockett and the corny phony Jamaican accented street hustler Tubbs, and they are not missed. Farrell is icy cold, laconic and intense as Sonny; no alligator on a boat, no sockless shoes, no $1000 Armani jacket over a $3 Hanes T-shirt. His motives and background stay as a complete mystery other than a brief discussion of growing up in Atlanta (although his lack of a Southern accent is noticeable). Tubbs is the more grounded one in the film, not the comedic one. He is also lacking a background or deep insight into his character, other than knowing that he has a caring relationship with his girlfriend Trudy, a member of the team. His dedication and integrity are beyond reproach, and he serves as the moral anchor to reign in the free wheeling Crockett. There is not a huge amount of chemistry between the two in regards to a buddy-buddy friendship, but the respect and dedication takes its place in spades.

The other four detectives are light years better than their television counterparts. Zito (Justin Theroux) and Switek (Dominick Lombardozzi) are not the bumbling comic boobs of the TV show, but supremely competent officers in their own right Trudy (Naomie Harris) and Gina (Elizabeth Rodriguez) are not stuck wearing ridiculous undercover outfits as trashy hookers just to serve as eye candy, standing equal to the men with no difficulty at all. In one scene, Gina gets most of her lines as a chilling marksman in a set piece that would have never went to a woman during the 80s.

The only "miss" is the casting of Barry Shabaka Henley as Lt. Castillo. Henley is not to blame, as he does a competent job, but the quiet strength and power of Edward James Olmos is sorely missed. Indeed, Mann did offer the part to Olmos, and to the detriment of the film, he declined, as he would have added so much to it. Additionally, the supporting players, with the exception of the radiant Li Gong, are two dimensional at best. There is very little gray area in regards to the bad guys. They are all very, very bad, and serve as nothing more than targets to be gleefully dispatched by the good guys.

Despite my complaints about script and character development, the one part that does work regarding story and characters is the depiction of the stress, adrenaline rush, and emotional cost of being deep under cover. It takes a very special type of person to immerse themselves into a life of crime in order to stop it…and those "types" that have the psychological wherewithal do it well are probably men or women that are seriously flawed in other ways.

Mann did a good job in the television series depicting other undercover officers who “went off the reservation” and became too conflicted with the duality of their lives to function properly. You can see this conflict in all six actors portraying the detectives, but Farrell stands out as the most torn, while Foxx conveys the rock foundation moral strength that a stable family life gives.

In all, this is not as good as any of the Michael Mann films I listed in the second paragraph, but given the quality of those others, that doesn’t mean this is a bad film at all. If you have a big screen, high-quality TV, DVD player, and sound system, it will make a great rental. If not, I recommend seeing it at the theater, as it is a good popcorn flick and a visual joy you won’t regret seeing.

My Rating: Bill Nelsen (2 ½ footballs)