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Los Angeles Times

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▶ ✕ Capsule movie reviews: '2:22'

Also reviewed: '8: The Mormon Proposition,' 'The Lottery,' 'Raavan' and 'Stonewall Uprising.'

June 18, 2010

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Bad things happen to bad people in "2:22," a so-so heist thriller that rarely fulfills its genre-elevating ambitions. With a starrer cast and a more adept script, this noir-ish exercise might have beaten its derivative vibe and hasty contrivances. But as is, director Phillip Guzman, who co-penned with star Mick Rossi, doesn't engage the viewer much beyond the movie's visual sheen and its undelivered promise of villainous tension.

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An inordinate amount of the first act is spent getting to know four unpleasant career criminals (played by Rossi, Robert Miano, Aaron Gallagher and Jorge A. Jiminez) about to collaborate on a New Year's Eve robbery of a boutique hotel. However, despite its effort to align us with this violent, charm-free quartet, these introductions turn us off instead; let's just say there's not a Sonny Wortzik (Al Pacino's charismatic bank robber in "Dog Day Afternoon") in sight.

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The theft itself, which begins at the titular 2:22, though not always convincingly constructed, offers a few decent obstacles as the crooks empty the hotel's safe deposit boxes. But when one of their victims (Peter Dobson) turns out to be a vengeful drug dealer, things turn predictably ugly.

Gabriel Byrne enlivens as a veteran cop, as does Val Kilmer, also briefly on hand, as an eccentric jewelry fence.

Gary Goldstein

"2:22." MPAA rating: R for violence, language and some sexual content/nudity. Running time: 1 hour, 44 minutes. At Laemmle's Sunset 5, West Hollywood.

An outstanding and urgent example of the investigative documentary, Reed Cowan's "8: The Mormon Proposition" is all the scarier for its straightforward presentation of how the Mormon Church succeeded in getting California's Proposition 8 on the ballot in 2008 and then getting it passed. As an exposé, there could hardly be a stronger case for ensuring and strengthening the separation of church and state — or a

stronger message to gay people as to the magnitude of the challenge to win equal rights.

A gay Mormon whose father supported Prop. 8, Cowan explains that Mormon beliefs hold that its church leaders are divinely inspired through prophets and apostles who literally speak with Jesus Christ in the Mormon Temple. Mormons are taught never to question their faith and that to defy its leaders' commands is to risk going to hell.

Cowan documents how the Mormon Church derailed Hawaii's attempt to legalize same-sex marriage in the 1990s through a discreet coalition with other like-minded denominations, mainly Roman Catholics, and organized a costly media blitz that proved a valuable training ground for its battle for the passage of Prop. 8, the costliest ballot measure in California history. Growing more confident, leaders and their flocks became increasingly public in their anti-gay campaign. The words of the church's leaders and its activists could scarcely be more homophobic. To them homosexuality is a sin in God's eyes, and is not an innate orientation but rather a mental disorder.

The filmmaker gathered many voices on both sides of the debate but a woman demonstrating in front of the Mormon Temple in West Los Angeles makes a clear-cut case: "We're not trying to become members of the Mormon Church, we just want them to stay out of City Hall."

Kevin Thomas

"8: The Mormon Proposition." MPAA rating: R for some language/sexual references. Running time: 1 hour, 28 minutes. At the Sunset 5, West Hollywood.

On the face of it, the Harlem Success Academy, an upper Manhattan public charter school that's providing a dramatically superior education for a lucky number of the area's lower-income children, would seem an unlikely target for controversy. But, as Madeleine Sackler's absorbing, often tender documentary "The Lottery" shows, when it comes to the world of charter education, no seemingly good deed may go unpunished — or at least undercut.

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Set two months before the Success Academy's annual lottery wherein a small percentage of some 5,000 mainly African American and Latino hopefuls will be randomly chosen to attend the college-focused school's fall session, the film takes an effective, two-pronged approach to tell its enlightening tale. First, it follows four charismatic youngsters from Harlem and the Bronx — and their devoted, forward-thinking parents — as they wait to compete for an academy spot. At the same time, it stirringly captures the anti-charter school sentiment facing Success Academy founder Eva Moskowitz, courtesy of the United Federation of Teachers (she calls the union's tactics "thuggish") as well as from territorial local parents Moskowitz must debate at a heated community hearing.

Interviews with such observers as Newark Mayor Cory Booker, former New York City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and educator-social activist Geoffrey Canada add further dimension to the proceedings.

Gary Goldstein

"The Lottery." MPAA rating: Unrated. Running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes. At Laemmle's Music Hall, Beverly Hills.

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