



Mike Vogel and Emmy Rossum in *Poseidon*

HERE SHE BLOWS

Poseidon

review by M. Faust

Think back to the original *The Poseidon Adventure*, from that halcyon year of 1972, and what images pop into your mind? Shelly Winters' death scene, probably. Or maybe one of hipster priest Gene Hackman's speeches exhorting his band of survivors not to just lay down and die because God isn't going to help them? Or New York cop Ernest Borgnine reassuring his wife Stella Stevens that no one on board is likely to recognize her from her former career as a hooker. Or Roddy McDowell mooning over Carol Lynley (it's called acting, folks).

If you saw it anytime after the 1980s, you may have been struck by the odd sight of Leslie Nielsen in one of the straight roles that he's spent the last three decades making fun of.

The point is, what you remember about the progenitor of the whole disaster movie genre was the people, not the special effects. Because that's the number one rule of disaster movies: You have to care about, or at least be interested in, the people that the disaster is happening to.

That's not the case with *Poseidon*, Wolfgang Petersen's \$160 million remake. Hitting the big screen less than six months after a Hallmark made-for-TV version, this aims to be a leaner version of the story; instead, it's merely meaner, an obstacle course stripped of human drama.

There's nothing left from the original screenplay other than the general outline: On New Year's Eve, a luxury liner is capsized by a giant "rogue wave." Despite the captain's insistence that all of the survivors wait for help in the main ballroom, a group sets out to save themselves by climbing to the bottom of the ship.

This is a smaller band than the 12 who followed Father Gene in 1972—I count eight, though it seems like fewer because for the most part they're an undifferentiated mass of bodies. During one scene

in which one survivor backtracked to rescue a pair of trapped stragglers, I was at a loss to remember who had been killed and who hadn't.

Given the cost, maybe we shouldn't be surprised that Petersen gives his actors short shrift. But the special effects aren't all that special; the oversized sets are only featured in a few scenes—after which most of the film takes place in smaller areas that any Hollywood set designer should have been able to toss together in a few days. What should have been the film's centerpieces, two scenes in which most of the passengers are killed, are curiously unmoving, as if they were left entirely to the second unit.

For the man who made the definitive film about seagoing claustrophobia, *Das Boot*, Petersen gets remarkably little out of the setting. A scene with our heroes trapped in an air-conditioning shaft is probably the most effective, even as you're aware of how mechanically prolonged it is. (For egregious fakery, though, it has nothing on the magic raft that appears in the final scene, as if flung at our heroes by Neptune himself.)

Given that *Poseidon* runs barely 90 minutes, less the end credits, it seems likely that a lot of the dramatic scenes were trimmed, either before or after shooting. It seems hard to believe that, for instance, Richard Dreyfuss would sign on for what in the finished film is such a nothing role. (Early on, I was pleased to note that his character's homosexuality was not an issue in his actions. By the time the film was over, I realized that indicating that he was gay was only a pointless way of trying to imply character by shorthand rather than taking the trouble to develop any.)

In the end, *Poseidon* is a disaster movie that Roger Corman might have made, fast and forgettable. Corman just would have spent a lot less money on it.

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