

# 'Sisters' struggle through Catholic life

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The nuns are laundering money.

And laundering for money. In a film named for them, the Magdalene sisters launder clothes and cleanse souls in their asylums for wayward girls.

These nun-run laundries provide opportunities for penitence through harsh labor for girls deemed impure by the judgmental Irish Catholic society and often by their own parents or pastors.

Based on a true story, "The Magdalene Sisters" chronicles the tragic experiences and life stories of three of those girls — Margaret (Anne-Marie Duff), Bernadette (Nora-Jane Noone) and Rose (Dorothy Duffy).

The film opens with each girl's "crimes": One is raped by a cousin, another has a child out of wedlock and the third simply is too pretty.

"In a country of God, temptation must be kept away so that the true natures of men can be seen," Sister Bridget (Geraldine McEwan), the head of the laundry,

**MOVIE REVIEW**  
"THE MAGDALENE SISTERS"  
★★★

says to the doe-eyed brunette marked as a temptress.

Sister Bridget's opening lines lay the foundation of hypocrisy from which sadism grows almost unchecked — but director Peter Mullan saves the film from mawkishness by retaining elements of ambiguity.

The girls — who become almost sexless under the abuse of the sisters — don't band together and rise up in indignation.

Some of them are selfish, but Mullan allows them to explain their attitudes. Some of them are stupid, which the film unapologetically underscores.

Mullan uses a realistic, documentary-like style, focusing on sustained shots and character tracking, which puts the audience amidst the story instead of separating it from the screen with a deluge of visual and aural doodads.

The sweeping mood music of most films is muted here — Mullan lets the pain tear from the inmates' throats in raw, cacophonous shrieks rather than capturing the moment with piercing violins or crashing drums.

But the screams as well as the beatings last too long, as if Mullan made mistakes postproduction in the editing room.

Yet the intensified seat-squirring enhances the film's



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIRAMAX

Dorothy Duffy, Anne-Marie Duff and Nora-Jane Noone star as a trio of "sexual sinners" forced to launder clothes as a form of retribution under the hypocritical rule of a band of nuns, "The Magdalene Sisters."

realism. It hurts because it really happened.

Fortunately, some of the girls get out — but the world isn't rosy ever after.

The film finishes abruptly with character end notes that summarize the lives of the survivors —

melancholy stories that unsurprisingly follow a realistic depiction of asylum life.

"The Magdalene Sisters" is a film about the past that provokes emotion that could — and should — be channeled into activism. But the release of the film in 2003

comes a bit too late.

The last of the oppressive, shocking Magdalene asylums closed seven years ago in 1996.

All that's left is cynicism.

Contact the A&E Editor at [artsdesk@unc.edu](mailto:artsdesk@unc.edu).

**DIVERECOMMENDS**

**The Listening, Little Brother**  
One of the most refreshing releases in recent hip-hop. Inviting, energetic and genuine, these N.C. Central University alums bring hip-hop back to the B-boys and away from the hot boys. Ethereal head-nodders such as "Nighttime Manuevers" and the title track prove that the group's producer and DJ, 9th Wonder, truly might belong next to the Pyramids, the Hanging Gardens and DJ Premier.

**"Tmaro," Charles R. Saunders**  
This tale of an African warrior rivals the best of the sword-and-sorcery genre. Breakneck pacing brings a haunted, parallel Africa to life. The book is considered a benchmark for its positive portrayal of a black fantasy hero. Hard to find, easy to dig.

**Hail to the Thief, Radiohead**  
Despite naysayers, the Oxford quintet continues to push the listener's boundaries in its pursuit of art rock as future shock. It's not the band's best work, but songs such as "There There" and "Myxomatosis" add much missed fire to a recently icy catalogue. Coldplay defectors need to recognize.

**"Fresh"** The idea of a 12-year-old drug runner causing a cocaine war is caustic enough, but the unapologetic grit of this film makes it the finest of its genre. Sean Nelson is ever believable as he navigates a world too deadly for most adults, but a mere chess game for his precocious title character. You won't believe his coldness as he reprimands a desperate crack fiendess.

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