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## Oscar-worthy J. Lo steals the show in heist film ‘Hustlers’

“Hustlers” is a heist movie — fast-paced, beautifully photographed and performed by women at the top of their game.

Based on the true story of strippers at the Scores gentlemen’s club in Manhattan who drugged high-rolling patrons then pilfered their credit cards and charged them to the limit, “Hustlers” has the shape and feel of a Scorsese film — a stripper “Goodfellas.”

In fact, Scorsese was the first director offered the script by the producers, even before Lorene Scafaria, who wrote the screenplay and advocated for the project since Jessica Pressler’s 2015 New York Magazine feature about the racket.

Jennifer Lopez plays Ramona, the head stripper in charge, a mother hen who shows the main character

venues: Scores.

Backstage she finds a stripper “family” of supportive women, including characters played by rapper and former stripper Cardi B; earworm virtuoso, body-positive activist and flautist Lizzo; and Keke Palmer, best known for her role as a middle-school spelling bee contestant.

The women’s dressing room chatter telegraphs the deadening effect that sex-as-performance has on sex-as-pleasure. And the movie shows the many hands that skim the dancers’ earnings during the course of a night.

There is an art to stripping, as we learned from “Gypsy” nearly 60 years ago. Great dancers must be aerialists and athletes with Cirque du Soliel moves. This art is exquisitely demonstrated in an ethereal scene, in which Lopez teaches Wu a medley



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The guys who remain are cruel, cheap, oddballs or all of the above.

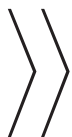
buys and the intoxicating appeal of belonging to a community — even if that community is a criminal enterprise.

In a cinematic gender reversal, the men in this movie are background players and underdeveloped characters placed in subsupporting roles — ex-husbands, policemen, complicit victims.

With its objectification of women’s bodies (of all shapes and colors) and transactional sex, “Hustlers” can’t be called a feminist movie. But it is all about girl power.

And it’s all about Jennifer Lopez.

Constance Wu may be the leading actor, but Jennifer Lopez is the star of “Hustlers.” Somewhere in an attic there is a Dorian Gray-style portrait of Lopez that has aged to look like you or me,



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and ingénue, Destiny (Constance Wu), the ropes.

The story is told from Destiny’s point of view. She’s been dancing at small clubs to support herself and her grandmother. Now she has ascended to the Carnegie Hall of stripper

of pole-dance positions to master for a compelling show.

Big spenders. Happy dancers. The sky is the limit until the market crash of 2008.

When Wall Street dries up, so does club patronage.

To survive, the ladies need another hustle.

What distinguishes “Hustlers” from other recent heist movies featuring women is that it’s not about the heist. It’s about the love of the game, the exhilarating independence that money

while the real Lopez is even more stunning and athletic than she was as a “Fly Girl” dancer on the ‘90s comedy series, “In Living Color.”

In an Oscar-worthy performance, “Hustlers” is the jewel in Jennifer Lopez’s crown.