

For Your Consideration: A disappointing effort

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30 November 2006

For Your Consideration, directed by Christopher Guest, written by Guest and Eugene Levy

Anyone who goes to Christopher Guest's *For Your Consideration* hoping to see a scathing satire of the Hollywood industry, particularly of the silliness that surrounds the Academy Awards, is bound to be disappointed. What he or she will see instead is a relatively feeble, occasionally amusing, attempt at poking fun at the could-have-been-but-never-were actors who live with the eternal illusion that one day they will "make it."

And what could be a greater validation of their worth, which will assure their "making it" and having unimagined success, than being nominated for an Academy Award? Well, getting the statue itself.

Marilyn Hack (Catherine O'Hara), who once gained fame for playing a blind prostitute in a long forgotten cheapie, now plays Esther, the dying mother in another cheapie independent, *Home for Purim*, a Jewish melodrama set in the Deep, Deep South of the 1940's. Her husband in the film-within-the-film is played with melodramatic panache by middle-aged Victor Allan Miller (Harry Shearer), who, in a pathetic twist typical of Hollywood, is best known to the world as "Irv the Foot-Long Wiener" in television commercials. Their terribly-misunderstood and prodigal daughter is played by Callie Webb (Parker Posey), a stand-up comedian and, wouldn't you know it, a lesbian. Finally, befuddled Brian Chubb (Christopher Moynihan) plays the son, a sailor.

One day, during the filming, Marilyn hears that there's a rumor on the Internet that her performance could win her an Academy Award nomination. Soon after, both Callie and Victor hear that they, too, may be up for nominations. Suddenly, the public relations machine is set in motion. The set and the town are

quickly abuzz. Egos inflate. Misunderstandings occur. Petty jealousies break out. The media, more brainless and parasitic than usual, preys upon everyone.

The suits come down and, savoring the possibility that the publicity may help rake in millions, "suggest" that the "Jewishness" of the movie be "toned down." At first, the screenwriters balk, but they are screenwriters after all. They eventually give in—no surprise here—and the film's title is changed, along with its content. It is now called . . . but why spoil one of the few fun surprises the film has in store for us?

Director-producer Christopher Guest and his company of regulars have given us some quite amusing satires in the past, buoyed by sharp observation and a lack of meanness that somehow always felt right. *Spinal Tap*, *Best in Show*, *Waiting for Guffman* and *A Mighty Wind* come to mind. Not only were these films amusing; they were entertaining and, to a large extent, quite imaginative. They felt bouncy and fresh.

Not so *For Your Consideration*, in which every line is consciously a cliché, supposedly satirical of movie conventions. Instead, the film feels largely leaden and flat. And from the beginning it exudes an air of implausibility and unreality, no matter how hard everyone involved with the project tries. Is it perhaps because Guest and his company have gotten too used to one another and new blood is needed? Or perhaps they grew timid faced with the prospect of satirizing their own industry?

For example, *For Your Consideration* itself is supposedly an independent film, and so is the film-within-the-film, but Guest's work is being released by Warners Independent. And *Home for Purim* is obviously being shot in the back lot of a very big studio—in the fictional Sunfish Classic Studios, but which is clearly Warners—with very large sound stages,

a very large staff, and a very large cast. These are hardly the credentials for an independent.

All the film's targets—producers who don't know a thing about producing, publicists who haven't a clue about either their clients or their clients' projects, film directors who treat the script as toilet paper, screenwriters who get no respect, petty, narcissistic actors who would do anything for fame, suits with the sensitivity of a doornail—all seem rather old hat, listless, stale. Is it possible that in 2006 any of these characters, for example, has not heard of the Internet or doesn't know how to operate a cell phone? As Eric Morris, the famous acting coach said, "Comedy is funny reality, but it's based on reality. If it's not based on reality, it ain't funny."

For Your Consideration may provoke a laugh here, an occasional guffaw there, and a few smiles in between, but it seems these reactions are bound to come mostly from industry insiders, because, as they like to say, "we've been there." Some of the gags are so "inside" that nobody except people in the industry will understand them. Thus, to general audiences, the film may seem longer than its eighty-six minutes running time.

In getting away from his usual mockumentary style and opting for the straight, fictional narrative, Guest and his crew of talented comedians have lost much of the zaniness and frenetic zeal that made their past efforts delightful satires on certain aspects of our society.

Among the actors, Catherine O'Hara provides both humor and pathos as the probable Oscar nominee who, in her delusions of a nomination, undergoes plastic surgery and unnecessarily—and somewhat cruelly—becomes the film's object of ridicule.



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