

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "MAN OF THE YEAR"

It's funny. It's smart. Cloaked in hip humor, "Man of the Year" is about questionable voting machines, monetary gain above all else, and a country so fed up with politics as usual that a comedian falls through the wisecracks, ultimately becoming the President Elect.

But "Man of the Year" has a tone problem. It's as if Jon Stewart, in the middle of a brilliant bit on "The Daily Show," were suddenly held at gunpoint. Suddenly "nothing's funny. At all.

Robin Williams stars in "Man of the Year". Photo Credit: Ava Gerlitz / Univ

Writer/director Barry Levinson has walked this way before. He is a master at absorbing the political zeitgeist of the time, and then reflecting it right back in our faces via the movie screen. More than mere entertainment, he often uses his films as mirrors that might serve to enlighten, teach and hopefully reform. Levinson's earlier works such as "And Justice for All," "Good Morning, Vietnam" and "Wag the Dog" come to mind. Politically brilliant and funny, he tickles our funny bone until he sucker punches us in the stomach.

With his rapid-fire delivery, Robin Williams is well cast as Tom Dobbs, the Jon Stewart-esque host of a liberal late night television show. When an audience member suggests that Dobbs should run for office himself, the idea snowballs. Not unlike the grassroots swell for Howard Dean, next thing he knows, he's taken to the campaign trail. As his two sidekick advisors, Christopher Walken and Lewis Black are a sheer delight, keeping us laughing until it hurts. Enter Laura Linney as the love interest/statistical and computer expert who works for a Diebold-like corporation called Delacroy. Not far behind are the bad guys, the corporate honchos of Delacroy, who push their new, state-of-the-art voting machine at all cost. When the voting machine looks to be less than accurate, this outrageous political comedy suddenly becomes a dangerous suspense thriller.

There's a fine art to holding bad guys at bay in comedy versus letting bad guys run amok in drama. "Home Alone" is a good example of bad guys breaking and entering, capable of doing harm to a child yet because the child keeps foiling them at every turn, the situation stays comic. But in "Man of the Year," by putting a main character in true life-threatening situations, the film sounds more than a few different tones and ultimately turns sour.

Aside from the outcome of a comedian who gets elected President of the United States (wait isn't that what we have now?), there are some other difficult leaps of plausibility, e.g., a brand new voting machine that is suddenly operational all over the country in a matter of seconds; that no one challenges the outcome of the vote; and that the Laura Linney character doesn't seek help from anyone other than the president-elect.

Go for the laugh-out-loud lines, the marvelous Christopher Walken who can't stop turning in one great

performance after another, Lewis Black unleashed, the pace, the fun, and Robin Williams converting a staid presidential political debate into a Jerry Springer free-for-all.

"Man of the Year" is far from perfectâ€”but unlike the real presidential tournaments, far more entertaining to watch.

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: B-minus

Production Credits: "Man of the Year" Directed by Barry Levinson Written by Barry Levinson Cast: Robin Williams, Christopher Walken, Laura Linney, Jeff Goldblum, Lewis Black Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 115 minutes Grade: B-minus

The Screen Savor: â€œElectoral Collageâ€™ by Kimberly_Gadette