

Film Close-Up: Vince Vaughn

by Joey_Berlin

The lanky actor Vince Vaughn has a talent for making shifty-eyed, fast-talking scoundrels seem loveable. He is now starring as the title character in "Fred Claus," a merry Christmas comedy that is perfectly safe for families, unlike his \$200 million comedy hit from 2005, "Wedding Crashers."

VINCE VAUGHN - Vince Vaughn stars as Santa's bitter older brother in the comedy 'Fred Claus.' CNS Photo courtesy of Jaap Buitendijk. As played by Vaughn, Fred is Santa's big brother, but he is the polar opposite of his famous North Pole sibling. Instead of giving, Fred takes things for living, as a repo man. To repay a debt to his little brother, Fred agrees to work with the elves in Santa's toy shop, where he does not comfortably fit in.

"Fred Claus" has an all-star cast, and Vaughn shares the screen with several Oscar winners and nominees, including Paul Giamatti as the big, bearded guy in the red suit, along with Kevin Spacey, Rachel Weisz, Miranda Richardson and Kathy Bates.

For the Minnesota-born Vaughn, 37, "Fred Claus" was also a chance to reunite with his "Wedding Crashers" director, David Dobkin. Vaughn is also currently featured in the awards-season contender "Into the Wild," and he has several films in the works for 2008, including another holiday comedy, "Four Christmases."

Q: Is there a certain challenge going from R-rated comedies to "Fred Claus," which is rated only PG?

A: I think it's a testament to David Dobkin, in that I loved those claymation holiday films growing up and this kind of feels like a live-action one of those. It has such great heart to it. I think it works on a smart level. The movie never has to be risqué or gratuitous in order to accomplish that. So the adults really are following it on one level, and the kids are really connecting on another level.

Q: You have been on such a roll lately, but certainly you have seen other top comedians go through a backlash period. How do you deal with that possibility and keep doing good work?

A: I never even think of that. I think there's room for everybody, and those guys have done great stuff. I just don't approach it that way. I never have. I just am fortunate that I try to find stories that I think are going to be fun to go work on, and boy, it's easy when you've got David directing a movie. And look at the actors I have the fortune of working with. Everyone's been nominated or won, but me. I sort of get a complex on the set after a while.

Q: In the film, Kevin Spacey's character finally gets his secret gift wish. What gift do you wish for, that you never got as a kid?

A: I guess understanding. Thanks for asking. Sometimes under the shell of this turtle is kind of a soft interior. No, I don't know. As a kid, Christmas is fun because you want toys. Then when you get socks or shirts you kind of don't want those. As you get older that is all you get. It's nice to have kids around because you kind of get to enjoy Christmas. I have a nephew and some nieces, and having them opening presents and being excited in that way is fun.

Q: In the scene where you eat the flan, did Paul Giamatti give you any tips on how to eat it?

A: No, I just ate it. I actually ate a lot more than what made it into the movie. I ate a lot of it.

Q: How many takes did you do?

A: That was a one-er! I'm happy to do it. I don't know if you have seen me before, I would have been happy

to do two or three though. Unlike Paul, there is no fat suit on. What you see is what you get. I am authentic. Normally I'm 170 pounds soaking wet. Not on this movie, I had to get into character.

Q: How many times did you have to fall down that chimney?

A: Here is the good news. Sometimes I would come down the chimney, and that was fine because I would just kind of come down the chimney. When you see people falling and doing weird stuff, that is a stunt guy named Joe Bucaro, out of Chicago. It's not fashionable to say that. A lot of actors like to be like, "Yeah, I do my stunts." I don't do any of my stuff. I like to have a stunt guy do my stuff. So, Joe will go and fall on his head and then we'll do some kind of high-five thing or something, and then I will lie there and get up. I have sort of a sense memory moment from when I fell, when I was much younger.

Q: Do you remember the time in your childhood when your faith in Santa Claus was first shaken?

A: I remember the day I had neighbors that let me know - I was 6 years old - that there was no Santa Claus. They go, "You know there's not a Santa Claus, right?" And of course, covering in front of them, I was like, "Well, yeah. Of course there's not a Santa Claus, guys." Then I went to my sisters and they said, "OK, now you know the painful truth. There is not a Santa Claus." I was the youngest. They said, "Don't tell Mom and Dad because then we may not get gifts anymore. You've got to keep pretending that you think there is Santa Claus, or you are not going to get any gifts."

Q: So you kept pretending?

A: I was like 16 going, "Dad, when is Santa coming down?" My dad was like, "Look, it's getting weird. You are getting older, you know there's not a Santa. We're going to keep giving gifts, but there is no Santa. You know that, right?"

I said, "You're going to keep giving gifts?"

"Yeah, there is no Santa."

"I get that. I totally get that."

"That was my experience with it."

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