

Film Close-Up: Morgan Freeman

by Joey_Berlin

In the sweet new slice-of-life drama "Feast of Love," Morgan Freeman returns to a type of role that is now familiar. He plays a sage observer of human nature and a commentator on our foibles and follies in all things romantic. Of course, Freeman often portrays characters with a near-mystic omniscience. With his innately calming manner and authoritative delivery, he has played both the president and God.

MORGAN FREEMAN - In the slice-of-life drama 'Feast of Love,' Morgan Freeman plays a sage observer of human nature. Freeman, now 70, has plenty of new projects on deck, including next summer's 'Batman' sequel. CNS Photo courtesy of Peter Sorel. In director Robert Benton's "Feast of Love," Freeman's role is decidedly more mundane. The Tennessee-born actor plays a Portland, Ore., college professor mourning his son, who died from a heroin overdose. He witnesses various couples uniting or uncoupling, and offers comfort to Greg Kinnear, a local coffee shop owner who is dealing with marital strife. In 2005, Freeman won an Academy Award for "Million Dollar Baby," his fourth nomination.

Freeman, now 70, has plenty of new projects on deck including next summer's "Batman" sequel, "The Dark Knight," and "Gone Baby Gone," a crime thriller that is also Ben Affleck's directing debut.

Q: You play a wise yet fairly ordinary guy in "Feast of Love." Is this character close to how you really are?

A: Yeah, but he has a little more gravitas than I have in my life, you know. I'm an actor. I'm a carny. I'm a performer. I'm not that guy. But it's great to have the chance to appear that way so that when you walk into a room, people tend to think you are! The waters seem to part, you know? There's nothing wrong with that - until I expect it. Then I think it goes completely haywire.

Q: Your character also narrates the movie. Is it just standard operating procedure now for every filmmaker to want to give you a voice over?

A: You know, I'm beginning to think that is becoming true. I get so many requests to do narrations, and also voice overs for documentaries. The S.O.P., the come-on for it is, "Only you can do it!" And of course if you believe that then you'll be buying bridges and all kinds of other stuff.

Q: But you have played God before, and your voice does sound like you have a lot of wisdom.

A: Heh, I have no such thing, actually. No. You have to keep uppermost in your mind that it is written down somewhere, and all I am doing is reading it back. None of it is spontaneous. Not a comma comes out of me. It's all scripted. That I can pretend well enough for you to believe it is either my curse or my blessing. But it's hard to walk through life with people saying, "Uh oh, here comes God!" See, you're confusing the actor with the part again. That was a syndrome we used to call the Othello syndrome, where you walk off the stage with the character still in place. Not me. I never do that. Never have, and still don't.

Q: So you do not have divine wisdom. But even just being a movie star carries a lot of weight. In everyday life, do people defer to you?

A: Well that is another one of the problems that movie stars have. OK, I will cop to being fairly well-read, meaning that I can generally hold a decent conversation on a wide variety of subjects. That doesn't make me wise, it only makes me well-read, as an actor should be, having read most of the classics as a necessity. But it has nothing to do with anything else. I mean, when I open my mouth, I'm no more to be listened to than you! Heh, wrong analogy.

Q: "Feast of Love" is not just another bland Hollywood story about life and love. What did you think when you first read the script?

A: Well, I think it's a very eclectic approach to love, as we think of it. What we are generally talking about is love and many of its manifestations: sexual, interpersonal, group - not in the sense of "grope," but "group interaction." I was very intrigued by it. It covered a lot of ground, you know? It's very inclusive, shall we say,

and you just feel like, yeah, I want to be involved in this. I feel good about taking part in this music, you know?

Q: What keeps you excited about making movies?

A: Money.

Q: Really?

A: Well, you know, you do so much of this for free when you're trying to make a career, that when you start getting paid, when they start calling you a professional, then that's what you are. So if someone says, "Well I have this wonderful script. This script was made for you." What do you say? You say, "How much does it pay?" I mean, how else do I make the choice?

Q: But there is nothing wrong with that, right?

A: I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it. But, you know, that really isn't all there is to it. You also are looking for that little gem, that pearl, that one that's nestled in amongst all the others that may not pay well, but the dividends are countable.

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