Film Close-Up: George Clooney

by Joey_Berlin

George Clooney plays Michael Clayton in the new thriller of the same name. A high-powered Manhattan lawyer wallowing in self-loathing, debt and divorce, he is also a "fixer." That means he cleans up the mess when wealthy clients get in trouble. But during a big lawsuit against a chemical company in "Michael Clayton," one of Clooney's fellow lawyers flips out and starts sabotaging his own case.

GEORGE CLOONEY - George Clooney is a troubleshooting attorney who refers to himself as 'the janitor' in the drama 'Michael Clayton.' CNS Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures. The directing debut of veteran screenwriter Tony Gilroy, "Michael Clayton" co-stars Tilda Swinton as a corporate lawyer and it builds tension slowly, twisting and turning its way to a shattering climax. The movie marks the 15th time Clooney has served as executive producer. But the 46-year-old superstar - People magazine's reigning Sexiest Man Alive (his second time taking the title) - wears even more hats on his next movie. "Leatherheads" will be a romantic comedy set in the world of 1920s football, and besides wearing a football helmet, Clooney also wears the hats of producer, director and co-writer of the film, which is due out next April.

Meanwhile, Clooney remains a prominent voice for several social and political issues, including environmentalism and the humanitarian crisis in Darfur.

A: What was it about the story of corporate corruption in "Michael Clayton" that resonated with you, and made you want to do the film?

Q: We've done them for years, these kinds of films, and the reason we do them is because we do suspect corporate America, and with good reason. Between R.J. Reynolds and a certain couple of other places, they've done some pretty shady things and it requires a whistle-blower along the way. And we do suspect problems at times in law firms, too. All of those things are very real. So I think that's why it resonated with me.

Q: So it was the script itself that made you want to get the movie made?

A: The truth of the matter is, it's really hard to find a good script in Hollywood. You'd think that would be easy but it isn't. This is a great script. And you read the script and you go, "This movie has got to get made," because of what it talks about, of course, but also it's got great characters, it's a well-crafted script and it should be made into a movie. And they're not easy to get made, in this day and age.

Q: What particular scene that you played touched you the most?

A: The love scene with Tilda! It was so, so good! The rehearsals, though - she'd knock on my door, "George, let's rehearse the love scene again." You know, listen, first of all I love watching really good actors at their best. I love watching Tilda in a bathroom stall sort of falling apart - which I saw yesterday, actually, for a whole other reason. No, there's something really beautiful about watching characters who are seemingly in control, really not be in control, and learning a lot about them. Those are the scenes that touch me.

Q: Did you draw on your passion for human rights and the value of human life as you played this role?

A: Well listen, I grew up in a family where my mother was a mayor and my father ran for Congress, and I've always been involved politically and socially in issues. Those always weigh on another part of my life, but it didn't really inform much of what I was doing on this movie.

Q: It is well known you took a bit of a pay cut to take this role. Did that entitle you to tweak your character at all?

A: No, I didn't tweak anything. Tony wrote a great part. I guess in the last eight films I've done, I've been paid for two. You know, you do the big movies, the rest of them you do for as little as possible because you want to get those movies made. It's not like you're going to get rich off of "The Good German" or "Good Night, and Good Luck" or "Syriana." But you do them because you want to get the movies made. It's OK. I do all right. I'm doing fine. But no, it doesn't allow me any leeway with Tony, trust me. He may be a first-time director but he's an adult and there was no me manipulating him, I promise you that. I tried!

Q: Do you and your friend Brad Pitt have a healthy competition going? Do the two of you ever acknowledge it?

A: You know, I don't like him. I'll tell you right off the bat. He's very short, I don't know if you've ever seen him in person. He's very tiny, a tiny little fella. No, never any competition with my friends, ever. It's a weird thing, but you try not to compete in art because it always seems sort of strange. I couldn't do the things he does, ever. I feel some competition with Matt Damon though, because I'd like to kick his butt!

Q: What is your favorite Brad Pitt movie?

A: "Johnny Suede!" No, let me think. In fairness, I'll tell you what, he's a really brave actor, which is an interesting thing. People don't often say that enough about him. What he did in "Snatch" was just phenomenal. I'm working with him right now on a Coen brothers movie ("Burn After Reading") and he's doing stuff in it that kills me, because he's going to steal the movie and I'm going to murder him for it.

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