

FILM REVIEWS

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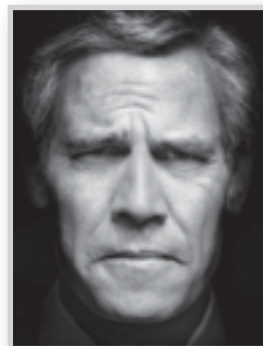
Short Take: A surprisingly subtle film from Oliver Stone with killer performances.

REEL TAKE: Oliver Stone's *W.* is a truly remarkable film in many ways. It's remarkable for its subject, remarkable for its performances and, most of all, remarkable for the restraint shown by director Stone.

What could easily have been a hatchet job (those expecting one will be disappointed) in the most heavy-handed manner possible (the majority of Oliver Stone's movies make their points with sledgehammers) emerges as a relatively

balanced portrait of a flawed individual. Flawed but by no means tragic.

In between a series of flashbacks and fantasy sequences, we follow George W. Bush from his days at Yale, through a failed series of jobs, to a failed bid for Congress. These are all provided by his



Josh Brolin as President Bush in Oliver Stone's "W."

father who doesn't hide his disdain over Junior's failures. When he finally defies him and runs for Governor of Texas, we know what happens. And we know what happens after that.

What keeps *W.* so engrossing and so entertaining despite its length are the performances by an ideal cast. James Cromwell and Ellen Burstyn make a fine George Sr. and Barbara Bush with Elizabeth Banks a solid Laura Bush. The film's juiciest moments however belong to Richard Dreyfus as Dick Cheney (an Oscar worthy performance) and Toby Jones as Karl Rove. Also Oscar worthy is Josh Brolin as W himself. His central performance drives the film along and gives you a definite picture of a sincere but limited man who is used by others.

W. is doing respectable business but who knows how long it will be around after Election Day. No matter what your feelings about President Bush are, you owe it to yourself to see this provocative, performance driven film from one of America's most outspoken high-profile directors. It explains a lot without excusing a thing.

Rated PG-13 for language, sexual references, alcohol abuse, and war imagery.

Review by Chip Kaufmann

Chip Kaufmann's Pick:
"Winter Kills"

DVD Picks of the Month

Michelle Keenan's Pick:
"The Candidate" (1972)

Winter Kills

Although the election will be over by the time most of you read this, politics will still be on everyone's mind so why not be entertained by one of the most interesting political conspiracy movies ever made.

Back in 1977 a young "maverick" director named William Richert secured funding and began shooting a version of Richard Condon's *Winter Kills* with a dream cast of Hollywood veterans. Condon wrote *The Manchurian Candidate* and if you're familiar with that film then you know what to expect here but even more so.

A young Jeff Bridges is joined by the likes of John Huston, Anthony Perkins, Dorothy Malone, and Elizabeth Taylor and that's just for starters. Some of the roles are little more than glorified cameos, but each performer brings something of to the table for all of us to share.

Although it uses the JFK assassination as a reference point, the film is not so much about the about the Kennedy family (here called the Kegans) as it is about all the conspiracy theories that fol-



lowed in its wake. In that sense it is the "mother of all conspiracy movies," even more so than Oliver Stone's *JFK*.

In watching the film again recently I was struck by how much it resembles a Coen Brothers movie. While not up to their technical level, the absurdist humor underlying the proceedings could be considered vintage Coen (they must have known this film).

Recently released on DVD in a beautiful print, *Winter Kills* is one of those movies that makes you think while displaying a twisted sense of humor. If that's your kind of film then become the part of the audience that this film was denied when it came out in 1979.

The Candidate (1972)

When Chip and I decided to pick political flicks for this month's DVD picks, there was good lot to choose from, *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*, *The Last Hurrah*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Primary Colors* and so on and so forth. Eventually I decided on *The Candidate*.

The reason is twofold. When you watch it now, you realize this film paved the way for the future of independent film, particularly in its dialogue and camera work. The second is that even though it was made in 1972, it stills holds up today.



Robert Redford and director Michael Ritchie had previously teamed up for *Downhill Racer* in 1967. When they re-teamed to produce *The Candidate*, they used Ritchie's directing talent and Redford's recent mega-stardom to make quite a statement.

Political handlers and strategists, in particular Peter Boyle as the liberal idealist and campaign strategist Lucas, hand pick Bill McKay (Redford), a good looking, legal aid worker and son of a former California governor to run for the U.S. Senate and infuse the Democratic Party with new energy.

Starting off strong and independent, McKay falls prey to the political machine and the usual temptations along the way. When he realizes no longer recognizes what he stands for any more and it's not working, he takes back his campaign in his own way and in doing so wins the people. The vulnerable and honest last line of the movie strikes a shocking chord in the heart of the American voter.

The dialogue, camera work and performances by Redford, Boyle, and Don Porter are outstanding. Whether you've voted many times or just recently for the very first time, *The Candidate* is worth a look.

Imagine a School... Summerhill

FILM BY DIRECTOR WILLIAM TYLER SMITH WILL HAVE ITS DEBUT SCREENING AT THIS YEAR'S ASHEVILLE FILM FESTIVAL.

The feature documentary, produced by 418 films ltd. and represented by Reflection Media, Inc., was filmed in England over a period of seven years:

"In 1997, Tony Blair's New Labor government took steps to live up to its promise to improve standards in education. Ironically, this would threaten the existence of an unusual little school in Suffolk called Summerhill..."

So begins this extraordinary documentary about an exemplary school in England, in which the students, the staff and a few formidable barristers take on OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) and Tony Blair's Labor Government to fight for its existence and the lifeblood of alternative education throughout the world.

Imagine a School... Summerhill follows four students from the ages of eleven to sixteen as they grow up and make important decisions about life and their education at the same time that they become involved in the legal and political fight to save their school.

The film follows the same children who sneak out of their dorms at night and dance to The Spice Girls at the end of term party as they go on to help run the democratic processes of their school, give a press conference at the Houses of Parliament and, finally and triumphantly, turn the high court into an unprecedented and historical Summerhill general meeting to decide whether or not to accept the terms of the British government.



IF YOU GO: *Imagine a School... Summerhill*, Friday, November 7, 3 p.m. at 35 below, Asheville Community Theatre. 35 E. Walnut Street (828) 254-1320.

Asheville Film Festival, November 6-9. For screening schedules, events, ticket information and more, go to www.ashevillefilmfest.com.