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Dear Zachary: A Letter to A Son About His Father: Review By B. Alan Orange

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"The best doc*mentary of the year. If it doesn't move you, you probably can't be moved at all."

- B. Alan Orange

If Dear Zachary were a fictional mockumentary, critics would be hailing it as the best film of the year. It's a story so intense, so heart squeezing, and so absolutely unbelievable, when that third brick hits, you'll find yourself wishing it was all make believe. But it's not. This is one of the most harrowing stories you will ever hear. It's sad, powerful, and will crush your chest with the weight of a ten-ton truck. Despite the fact that this criminal case has been circulating through Canada for a couple of years, MSNBC Films wants the already initiated (i.e. us critics) to keep mum on several of the plot spoilers revealed throughout the course of this doc*mentary. Which creates an odd quandary of sorts.

This is a real tale told from the perspective of a man very close to the proceedings. He is there as each horrible bit of news unfolds in front of him, and he brings us along for the ride. What he has produced is a very visceral experience that will sweep you in and captivate your soul. After the first ten minutes, you will be riveted to your seat, unable to move. Sometimes unable to breath. In that regard, you have to split open the experience and look at it in two very different lights. Producers are first asking us to view it as a narrative film. While the director, Kurt Kuenne, is hoping we will become emotionally involved with the real people that occupy the screen. Amazingly, it works at nailing both conceits. While Dear Zachary's poignant core elements would phase your blackened heart as told through pretty much any medium, the film is unique in that it is put together quite unlike any doc*mentary before it. And its structuring would still be award worthy despite the horrible tale unfolding before our eyes.

It's not a coincidence that Dear Zachary is being released on Halloween. As its descriptive account unravels, we are treated to one of the scariest tales told this year. It is much more effecting than the fake traps seen in Saw. And its heart is in the right place. Viewing the film for the first time, I came into it fresh. I was told nothing more than the subtitle: A letter to a son about his father. And within the first ten minutes, I had to wonder why I was watching something so intimate. Kuenne's original intent was to create a video biography of his departed friend for the young son that got left behind. It starts off as a personal journey through one man's life. Dr. Andrew Bagby was 28 when he died, and he didn't know that his girlfriend was pregnant. We see a compilation of clips that introduce us to Bagby. He was a friendly chap loved by all. And this seems like a project made strictly for a kid who'd never know his father otherwise. Its almost a little too private, and you feel like a peeping tom, peering over the fence of someone you haven't been formally introduced to yet.

The one absolutely perfect thing about Kuenne's film is his apt ability to edit the piece. For a few fleeting moments, you almost want to turn off the film because it truly does seem too personal. We didn't know this guy. So why are we being thrust into his life? Kuenne has cut the retrospective at a mad clip. It is captivating in a truly odd way, and its impossible to turn away from Andrew's shining personality. When Ken dove into that first box of old videotapes to construct this moving photo album, he never meant for it to go public. But as he was traveling the globe, meeting Andrew's friends and family for the first time, certain horrible things started to come to light. And Kuenne uses this starter project to live through those gut dropping moments that are revealed to him just as he reveals them to us. Its almost as if we are

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OVERALL **5.0** SUPERB

By B. Alan Orange
Oct 28th, 2008

Story	5.0 stars
Acting	5.0 stars
Directing	5.0 stars
Visuals	5.0 stars

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there, standing beside the guy as he hears each bit of shocking news himself.

Kuenne deftly weaves the anger and the outrage with humor and a living spirit. He doesn't so much hold our hand through the bad times as pull us all in for a group hug. As evident from the testimonials, Ken's dearly departed friend Andrew had a knack for making friends with just about anybody. Now, more than five years after his death, Kuenne is helping his lost buddy continue to make even more friends from beyond the grave. The documentary does a great job of presenting Bagby as a real angel of sorts. He was liked by all, and you truly get a sense of why he was so special. In keeping with that sense of strength and courage, Kuenne has decided to devote all of the proceeds from Dear Zachary to help overturn the Canadian law that caused the film's events to spiral so far out of control.

In keeping up with your interests, it is probably best that I say nothing else about the film. It is something that should be viewed fresh, and you should probably not take any preconceived notions into the theater with you. Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son About His Father gets a big Whoop-doo! And it's a definite must see.

(All of B. Alan Orange's reviews are based on the "Boo!" or "Whoop-doo!" evaluation system.)

Post Comment



kupo

I think alot of people are going to be reluctant to watch a film they know nothing about, its story is almost entirely shrouded in secrecy, but that's good. Nowadays films become easily spoiled by reviews, trailers and short clips.

good review, im glad you didn't spoil anything.

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