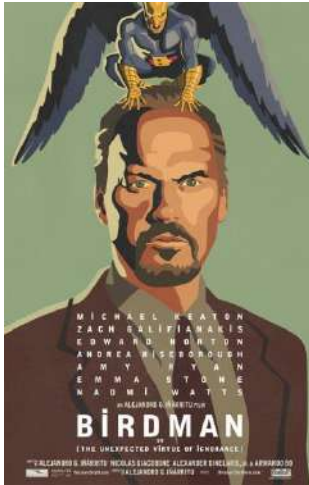


Mark Whelan's Movie Picks

Birdman: Or (The Unexpected Virtue Of Ignorance) (2014) Director: Alejandro González Iñárritu. 119m Rated: R



The inimitable Michael Keaton dons a cape and mask once more in ***Birdman***: a high-level homage to the art of cinema, stage, and the bohemian regimes of New York City, which took home the Best Picture Oscar of 2014.

Distressed from a professional and creative hiatus, former big-screen super-hero icon (Keaton) is adamant at concluding his muddled career on a high note. Worse for the wear and branded a 'has-been' for decades, Keaton painstakingly adapts, directs and stars in a stage production based on the writings of Raymond Carver in efforts to obtain some reverence and critical success.

Keaton's uncommon crusade scrambles seamlessly--cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki propositions the illusion of a single shot throughout the film's entire duration--from one character to another as he tussles with his troubled daughter's (Emma Stone) drug addiction, knotty cast members (a scene-stealing Edward Norton) professional criticism and his own self-worth.

Director and screenwriter Iñárritu in alliance with co-writers Nicolás Giacobone, Alexander Dinelaris, and Armando Bo, have managed to marvelously utilize Carver's work as a foundation for this perceptive, comical and occasionally heartening character study that cunningly dodges clichés--and resists wallowing in pretense--with Keaton never better at its core.



Birdman can be evaluated on a variety of levels. It is an assessment to the validity and fragility of art, a wonderful showcase for its exceptionally gifted cast, and a beautiful testimony to one of screens most talented yet often overlooked actors.

--Mark Whelan, August 7, 2015