



Film Review: Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (McDonagh, 2017): USA

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

[Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri](#), Martin McDonagh's tragic, dark comedy about a rural Missouri woman, Mildred Hayes, who becomes frustrated with the local authorities' ability to solve the murder of her daughter, continues its impressive run this award season garnering three Actor Awards at the SAG-AFTRA Screen Actors Guild Awards – Best Actress (Frances McDormand), Best Supporting Actor (Sam Rockwell) and Best Ensemble Cast. These accolades come on top of four Golden Globe Awards for Best Screenplay (McDonagh), Best Dramatic Film, Best Actress (McDormand) and Best Supporting Actor (Rockwell). And, it doesn't stop there. *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, received seven Oscar nominations – Best Picture, Best Actress (McDormand), Best Supporting Actor (Rockwell and Woody Harrelson), Best Original Musical Score (Carter Burwell), Best Original Screenplay (McDonagh) and Best Film Editing (Jon Gregory). The Oscars, presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, is scheduled for March 4, 2018.



Writer/Director Martin McDonagh

Playwright/Director McDonagh penned and directed the film starring veteran actress Frances McDormand (*Fargo*, *Almost Famous*, *Moonrise Kingdom*) as Mildred Hayes. McDormand turns in a spectacular performance as does Sam Rockwell as a small-town, racist, law enforcement officer who still lives with his mother. They both have plenty of support with moving diatribes from Woody Harrelson as Chief of Police, William Willoughby, Peter Dinklage as the local pool hall hustler, Caleb Landry Jones as billboard advertiser Red Welby, and Lucas Hedges as Mildred's son. In addition, Abbie Cornish and Zeljko Ivanek turn in a few memorable moments as Anne Willoughby and the Police Desk Sergeant. Hats off to Sarah Finn for her casting. But it's McDonagh's dialogue that allows the characters to deliver deep emotional pitches. And, in my opinion, therein lies the magic of the film.

The film opens with Mildred, a woman in her 50's driving down a country road to a non-diegetic operatic score from Carter Burwell signalling *Three Billboards* is not an ordinary, run-of-the-mill rural yarn. Far from it. Tragedy and a sense of forlorn are in the air as Mildred seems to notice for the first time three well worn billboards faded and tattered with the words "EBBING BILLBOARD ADVERTISING." She slows to a stop reverses direction and the camera shows the three billboards in unison as they stretch across the horizon and into the distance as if tombstones.

From here the film follows Mildred as she places three large advertisements that catch the attention of the local media and the entire community – "RAPED WHILE DYING," "AND STILL NO ARRESTS?" and "HOW COME, CHIEF WILLOUGHBY?" With the community on edge, tensions rise as Rockwell's character, Officer Dixon, takes matters into his own hands first to defend his Chief and later to bring justice to Mildred and her family. Rockwell's physicalities are spot-on and his performance makes a powerful case for an Oscar. Meanwhile, Mildred is facing the fallout from the community and McDormand delivers a powerful, emotionally-moving performance embodying the anger, fear and frustration of a rural Missouri woman who is seeking answers – who is demanding answers. Along the way, various situations and scene work allow the cast considerable room to stretch and flex their acting chops. This is only one tidbit of the tasty treats inside *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*.

Surprisingly, the film comes in at an hour and fifty-five minutes. The run time is deceptive as the dialogue is sharp, albeit somewhat repetitive, and it allows the characters to deliver subtle nuances in their respective deliveries. An often overlooked component in film is the mise-en-scene, its variations of imagery and what it translates with its cinematic language. *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, pokes and prods the viewer while McDonagh's writing and the cast performances continuously reel in the audience. In the end, the film does seem to ask more questions than it really answers. And that's not such a bad thing in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*. Highly recommended.



Category

1. Feature Film

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