



FILM REVIEW: The Current War Director's Cut

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Starring Benedict Cumberbatch as Thomas Edison and Michael Shannon as George Westinghouse, *The Current War* is the story of the rivalry between the greatest inventors of the industrial age over whose electrical system would power the country's economic engine in the coming century. Directed by Alfonso Gomez-Rejon (*Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*) and written by playwright Michael Mitnick (*Sex Lives of our Parents*), *The Current War* also stars Katherine Waterston as Margurite Westinghouse, Nicholas Hoult as Nikola Tesla, Tom Holland as Samuel Insull (Edison's personal secretary), Matthew Macfadyen as J.P. Morgan and Tuppence Middleton as Mary Edison. The acting is as good as any I've seen this year. An easy comparison is an upcoming film (December 20th, 2019 release date), *The Aeronauts*, with Oscar-winner, Eddie Redmayne, and Felicity Jones as the leads, in a fun, entertaining historical drama about hot-air ballooning in the 1880s. Moreover, after seeing *The Current War*, I'm looking forward to the in-production biographical work, *Tesla*, starring Ethan Hawke.



Benedict Cumberbatch as Thomas Edison in *The Current War*. (Photo Credit: Dean Rogers)

But, first, let's return to the electrical *Current War*. Backed by J.P. Morgan, Thomas Edison dazzles the world by lighting Manhattan with his patented bulb. Westinghouse and Tesla light the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, sparking the infamous war of currents. Westinghouse and Tesla bet everything on what Edison called "risky and dangerous" alternating current. Edison plotted to poison the public's mind by associating Westinghouse with a new form of humane capital punishment "death by electrocution" powered by Westinghouse Electric. More on that, later. Astonishingly, Benedict Cumberbatch channels Edison with such grace and ease, I found my self suspending disbelief. Cumberbatch's performance reminded me of his captivating impersonation of Sherlock Holmes in the TV Series, *Sherlock* (2010, 15 episodes).



Tom Holland, left, as Edison's personal secretary, Samuel Insull, and Benedict Cumberbatch as



Michael Shannon as George Westinghouse in *The Current War*. (Photo Credit: Dean Rogers)

While Edison loses out to Westinghouse in the end, Edison simply moves on to his next project — motion pictures! Meanwhile, Michael Shannon's formidable impersonation of George Westinghouse is nothing short of spectacular. Shannon returns to form that garnered an Oscar nomination (*Nocturnal Animals*) as Westinghouse, who despite his intimidating presence simply wanted to create something that would benefit the public saying, "If someday they say of me that in my work I have contributed something to the welfare and happiness of my fellow man, I shall be satisfied." With his back against the wall, Westinghouse is forced to reveal Edison's attempt to discredit the Westinghouse and the superiority of alternating current as opposed to Edison's direct current.



Katherine Waterston as Marguerite Westinghouse, left, with Michael Shannon as George Westinghouse.

While the two don't appear on screen together very often (I believe it's twice), the connection between Edison and Westinghouse is undeniable. Each backing his own current of electricity. To me,

this is the artistic essence of the film. Gomez-Rejon melds the human and electrical stories into one in a seamless fashion. It is remarkable. *The Current War* is highly entertaining, informative, and polished with a compelling narrative. The costuming and makeup speak for themselves â?? delectable. The ensemble cast is exquisite. The production design is excellent. The lighting and sound add a powerful context and a balanced emotional heft. And, the mise-en-scene is captivating. Very, very warmly recommended!

*Featured photo: Nicholas Hoult as Nikola Tesla in *The Current War*. (Photo Credit: Dean Rogers)

Category

1. Feature Film

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