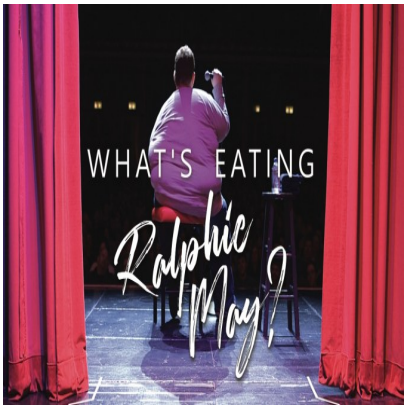
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FILM REVIEW: Whatâ??s Eating Ralphie May?

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Cat Rhinehartâ??s documentary, *Whatâ??s Eating Ralphie May?, m*ade its world premiere at the 50th Anniversary of the Nashville Film Festival. â??I thought Nashvilleâ??s 50th was the perfect time and place to premiere. Ralphie loved Nashville â?? and he talks about it in the film. I could tell the audience felt that affinity â?? so I couldnâ??t imagine a better fit. Ralphie would have been proud,â?• said Rhinehart.

Ralphie May was an American stand-up comedian known for his extensive touring and television comedy specials. Ralphie appeared to be living the American Dream with a beautiful wife, Lahna Turner, and two perfect children. May suffered from obesity. He loved making people laugh. And, people loved Ralphie in return.

Rhinehart began documenting May as he set out to lose weight. He asked his lovely wife, Lahna, to help him. Turner could see a bright future with a successful documentary and possibly a book deal for Ralphie. After losing 300 pounds from a starting point of 800 pounds, Ralphie plateaued. Unable to get through, he turned to pain medicine to alleviate his suffering. He decided not to have weight loss surgery.

After Ralphie landed a year-long contract to perform in Las Vegas, tensions became unbearable. Lahna decided to focus on herself. One night after a show Ralphie came back to his room and fell smashing his skull on a table on the way down. Shocked and bewildered, Turner and Rhinehart dedicated the footage they had and decided to honor Ralphie with *Whatâ??s Eating Ralphie May?*



Utilizing traditional documentary filmmaking techniques, including archival footage, direct interviews and still photographs, Rhinehart traces Ralphieâ??s early life including his difficult childhood in Arkansas, his fascination with comedian Sam Kinison, his runner-up finish debacle in Jay Mohrâ??s Last Comic Standing in 2003 and documents his marital strife.

Following Ralphieâ??s untimely death, Rhinehart decided to interview Ralphie and Lahnaâ??s daughter for the film. When asked if she wanted to say anything about her dad, she replied, â??I love my dad and hope he feels better now that heâ??s out of that body.â?• Lahna continues to perform her stand-up comedy.

Whatâ??s Eating Ralphie May? is more than direct cinema. Itâ??s an important film documenting and illuminating issues about marital relationships and obesity, and how people deal with them. Ralphieâ??s New York Times obituary read that he died of hypertensive cardiovascular disease. No mention was made of Ralphie suffering from obesity, a complex disease involving an excessive amount of body fat. Ralphie confesssed to Lahna he didnâ??t want to be fat. Lahna wanted Ralphie to get healthy.

Unfortunately, the film never quite answers the question of what caused Ralphieâ??s addiction to food. Instead, it portrays Lahna as a victim (which she denies vociferously) unable to do for Ralphie what he couldnâ??t do for himself. Ralphie opted to continue working, doing what he loved most, making people laugh, despite â?? or maybe in spite of â?? his unhealthy obesity.

Highly recommended film.

Category

1. Nashville Film Festival

Date Created
October 7, 2019
Author

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