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FILM REVIEW: Jackie (Larrain, 2016): USA

Description

Reviewed by Larry Gleeson. Viewed during the 2016 American Film Instituteâ??s (AFI) FILMFEST 2016 presented by Audi.

screen-shot-2016-11-18-at-12-23-06-pm*Jackie* is Chilean Director Pablo Larrainâ??s love letter about First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy in the days following the assassination of her husband, John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK). Drawing extensively from a series of private letters between the First Lady, played by Oscar Award-winning actress, Natalie Portman and her Catholic priest, played by John Hurt, Larrain attempts to address what it was like for Jackie as she tries to cope with an overwhelming grief, tend to the psychological needs of her children and to create a legacy for her husbandâ??s short-lived administration.

Portman skillfully channels the spirit of Jackie Kennedy. Larrain chose to recreate archival film clips with Portman. Having seen the original clips of the First Lady showcasing her masterful interior decorating of the White House, I believed Larrain had inserted the originals into the film. Only when the camera pushed in to a medium full frame was I able to discern the subject. It was Natalie Portman!

Several other scenes provided an astonishingly likeness as well. Most notably are the veiled widow walking in the funeral procession and the interview that would result in a Life magazine feature. Veteran stage and and film actor Billy Crudup, portrays the journalist (a dramatization of the four-hour interview Jackie had with journalist Theodore H. White on November 29th, 1963 that evoked the Camelot myth). Noah Oppenheim wrote the script. Greta Gerwig, currently one of Hollywoodâ??s most sought after actresses, warmly portrays Nancy Tuckerman, the Kennedyâ??s Social Secretary. Peter Sarsgaard embodies Bobby Kennedy, the late Presidentâ??s brother, protector and consoler of the First Lady. Last, but certainly not least, is Danish actor Caspar Phillipson as a spot-on JFK lookalike.

Most people know the story of the Kennedy assassination and some are familiar with the Kennedy Administration and the Camelot myth. What most people are not aware of is what a thirty-four year-old Jackie Kennedy experienced in the moments and days after the fateful day in Dallas and her need to secure her husbandâ??s historical legacy. After watching *Jackie*, and seeing Mrs. Kennedy retrieve the portion of the Presidentâ??s brain matter from the trunk of the convertible and place it back inside the gaping hole on the left side of his skull, I realized magnitude and scope of her love.

I believe this is what Larrain had in mind as he created *Jackie.* Intensely private, the world knew very little of Jackie Kennedyâ??s private life despite her immense popularity as a public figure. Photographed as much as almost any woman in the 20th century, Jackie emanated style and sophistication and evoked desire becoming known simply by her first name.

Larrain poses questions of how she must have felt in those days following the assassination. She became a queen without a crown. Her throne and her husband had been taken from her. Showing undaunted courage and concern for her husbandâ??s legacy, she fought despite the challenges and obstacles placed in her way. Admittedly, most will probably never know exactly what was going through her mind and what feelings she was experiencing in their entirety during these days. Nevertheless, Larrain weaves together an extraordinary narrative that attempts to piece together a brief moment in time that became the genesis of Camelot and the Kennedy Administration. Highly recommended.

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