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FILM CAPSULE: Nebraska (Alexander Payne, 2013): USA

Description

By Larry Gleeson.

Viewed during the AFI Filmfest 2013.

Nebraska, written by Bob Nelson, is the latest film from two-time Oscar winning screenwriter and acclaimed director, Alexander Payne *(The Descendants, Sideways, About Schmidt, Election, Citizen Ruth*). *Nebraska,* takes us on a 750-mile black and white journey from Billings, Montana to Lincoln, Nebraska. Along the way, an emotional healing occurs amid some exceptional dialogue and strong character development.

The character arc of the protagonist, Woody Grant, an elderly man with a touch of dementia, played by veteran journeyman and Hollywood legend, Actor Bruce Dern, an elderly man with a touch of dementia, is fully realized, in my opinion, as we see his willingness to fight for what is his and his ultimate acceptance of his lot in life. And, much like his 2004 *Sideways,* Payne utilizes the road trip structure to bond the two main characters and he also revisits the cantankerousness of character eccentricities as in his 2002 film *About Schmidt.*

Nevertheless, itâ??s the performance of Dern as Woody Grant that makes the film what it is. Throughout his career, Dern has played a plethora of despicable characters and lays a claim to being the only actor to kill Hollywood legend, John Wayne on screen in *The Cowboys,* (1972). Before the screening at the Graumannâ??s Chinese TCL Theater Mr. Dern was given a Hollywood tribute. Quentin Tarantino gave an introduction to the â??acting national treasure.â?•

The film opens with Woody walking on the shoulder of a well-traveled highway. He tromps up towards the camera and before long the police arrive and escort Woody home to his antagonistic wife Kate, played by June Squibb. Sheâ??s at wits end with Woodyâ??s antics and his adamant, persistent posture in going to Lincoln to get his million dollar prize money which turns out to be nothing more than a Publisherâ??s Clearinghouse type of sweepstakes notification enticing the recipient to order magazine subscriptions. Kate unable to deal with her husband calls upon her sons, David, a local electronics salesman played very convincingly by Will Forte, and Ross, a back-up local newscaster,

played by Bob Odenkirk. As siblings often do, the two disagree on their fatherâ??s situation with David, recently put off by his girlfriend who decided to move out leaving David by his lonesome, seizing the moment to spend time with his dad by driving him to Lincoln so Woody can collect his million dollars but also so he can get to know his dad again.

Along the way the two make a stop after an accident in the town where Woody grew up complete with the relatives and locals who stayed and who believe Woody has become a millionaire. Mr. Payne born in Omaha, Nebraska paints quite a caricature of the local populace. The small town is believable enough. Yet, the characters that inhabit the town might be a stretch. For example, Woodyâ??s two nephews draw a strong resemblance to Disneyâ??s Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. Adding into the mix is Kate Grantâ??s full on personality, an overly harsh, yet comedic, belittling better-than-thou Catholic, in a most memorable graveyard scene. On the other hand, Stacy Keach who plays Woodyâ??s former business partner, Ed Pegram delivers with the utmost believability the dark side of a partnership/friendship when he believes Woodyâ??s come into some easy money.

Overall, Alexander Payne delivers a film in black and white that not only entertains but also delivers a visual portrait of a small Midwestern town in an economic downturn, bypassed by mainstream America while showcasing the sense of loneliness and the eccentricities it has caused.

Category

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