



CHESTER FILM SOCIETY PRESENTS:

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

2006 USA 98 MINUTES

DIRECTED BY CHRISTOPHER GUEST

STARRING CATHERINE O'HARA, FRED WILLARD

There's something cosily familiar about the films of Christopher Guest. The same faces — Fred Willard, Parker Posey, Eugene Levy, Jennifer Coolidge, Catherine O'Hara and others — crop up again and again. The mockumentary formula is tried, tested and perhaps even a little tired by now. The satire tends to be more gently affectionate than mocking. Which is why *For Your Consideration*, the latest picture from Guest and his team, is something of a departure.

The cast remains the same but the mock-doc formula has been binned in favour of a more conventional observational comedy style. But the real surprise is how much darker the approach to the material is this time. It's funny of course, but there's an undercurrent of something that feels an awful lot like despair and disgust. And given that the target this time is the movie industry, it suggests that Guest and his co-writer Levy have a rather ambivalent relationship with the world in which they work.

As the title suggests, the theme of the film is the awards season: the hysteria and hype it generates and the humiliation and self-abasement that an actor will put himself through to secure a nomination.

The film is book-ended by two agonisingly perceptive scenes. Right at the beginning we're introduced to Marilyn Hack (a tremendous performance from Catherine O'Hara), an actress in the autumn of her career. As she flutters around her unremarkable suburban living room readying herself for the day, a DVD of Bette Davis's Oscar-winning turn in *Jezebel* plays in the background. Marilyn mouths the words and apes the gestures of the speech like a teenage wannabe rock star miming air guitar in his bedroom. The poignancy of the scene doesn't really hit home until a variation on the same theme plays out again at the close of the film — it's

one of the most achingly desolate endings I've seen in a comedy.

Marilyn is playing the dying matriarch of a Jewish family in an absurdly dreadful-looking period melodrama. Titled *Home for Purim*, the movie also stars Victor Allan Miller (Harry Shearer), once a serious actor now best known for his work as a giant hot dog in a series of television commercials. Playing Marilyn's estranged daughter is Callie Webb (Parker Posey), an alternative comedienne trying to move on from her disastrous one-woman show *No Penis Intended*.

When an internet rumour hints that there might be Oscar nominations in the offing for the three actors, the publicity machine, piloted by the film's gibberish-spouting unit publicist, goes into overdrive.

Guest and Levy don't shy away from clichés. The studio executive (Ricky Gervais) has a shark's smile and a compulsion to meddle with the script. The screenwriters meanwhile are impotent and outraged. The actors are paranoid, self-obsessed and voraciously needy, although none of them can match Marilyn — her plea for affirmation reaches a new level of shrill desperation once there's a sniff of a recognition. It's a brutally raw performance that is more painful than funny much of the time.

In the most bittersweet of ironies, O'Hara was tipped by some as a potential Oscar nominee for her performance in the film. You suspect that she handled the whole demeaning circus with rather more dignity than her character does.

The Times

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PLEASE LEAVE ANY COMMENTS ABOUT THIS FILM ON THE REVERSE OF THIS FORM. MANY THANKS.

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TERRIBLE FANTASTIC