

Film Review : J. Edgar

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Dir. Clint Eastwood

Screenplay Dustin Lance Black

Music Clint Eastwood

Cert. 15

Biographical/Drama/Historical

Two reasons at least why you should see this studied gem: firstly the outstanding performances from both DiCaprio in the eponymous role and that of Armie Hammer as Clyde Tolson, Hoover's unconsummated but ever faithful assistant G-Man love interest. Secondly, just to admire and immerse oneself in Clint Eastwood's consummate directorial craftsmanship.

Add to this, screenplay writer, Dustin Lance Black's sympathetic generosity that eschews both gaudy voyeurism and over-sentimentality. The ensemble, that also includes a bravura performance by Naomi Watts as Hoover's ever-faithful secretarial confidant, Helen Gandy, bring to a complex, sometimes repugnant man of patriotic zeal bordering on criminal fanaticism, a subtle and nuanced portrait.

The narrative device, whereby characters and events are shaped through flash-back and re-construction as Hoover dictates his memoirs, is further embellished with insight into his intense devotion towards his formidable mother, Anna Marie Hoover, played with dignified resilience by Judi Dench.

Whilst some may have reservations with the narrative being claustrophobic and lacking in dynamic, this is rather missing the point. The film aims to be truthful to the dramatic events and the mindset of both the man and the times.

A contemporary scourge of all things 'Pinko-Leftie', Eugene McCarthy, of Witch-Hunt infamy gets short-shrift from J. Edgar:- "He's not a patriot, he's an opportunist." Nevertheless, between them they destroyed thousands of reputations and careers.

Hoover's seething disgust with, and fear of, the perceived Bolshevik threat to all things American. lends moral justification for his practice of file-indexing and illegal 'wire-tapping' that lead to the accumulation of his legendary 'Confidential Files' on prominent politicians and public figures. His championing of a scientific, forensic approach to evidence-based detection during the Lindbergh baby kidnapping case is revealing. Though there is now, literally, not a shred of evidence to prove the files' existence. Their posthumous destruction being a promise kept by loyal Miss Gandy.

And not least, Hoover's parting Machiavellian raised-fingers to tricky-Dicky Nixon's grubby machinations to get his hands on them. J. Edgar's Nemesis also confronts him, as a frail and aged Clyde berates him for the falsehoods and lies in the autobiographical manuscript we have seen dictated and illustrated through narrative flashbacks. We pity his pathetic self-denial but are angered by his deception. He had a skeleton or two in his own cupboard as well as a place for hanging dresses. A film of great achievement complimented by a J.S. Bach influenced music score from Eastwood.

Photo : Warner Brothers