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"Classy" Freddie Blassie filing his teeth

[Lowbrow Literati](#)

Let the Kayfabe be Unbroken: My Breakfast with Blassie

[16 July 2009]

By [Monte Williams](#)

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I have never seen *My Dinner with Andre*, but lest you suspect that I am unfit to critique its parody, I should point out that I *did* see a fantastic spread of fake movie covers in a *Mad Magazine* spoof of an old Columbia House Video ad about 20 years ago, and one of the covers in question was *My Dinner With Andre the Giant*, and so now you know better than to question my credentials.

In a just world, *My Breakfast with Blassie* would be part of a DVD two-pack alongside *I'm from Hollywood*, the life-changingly surreal and bewildering documentary highlighting Andy Kaufman's deranged, inspired wrestling feud with heavyweight champion Jerry "The King" Lawler, who has since become a bloated, grotesque leech who rants incessantly about the breasts of World Wrestling Entertainment's female wrestlers. (Except that female wrestlers are now called "Divas", and Lawler calls breasts "puppies".)

I'm from Hollywood is far more accessible than the for-Kaufman-diehard-only *My Breakfast with Blassie*, which lacks not merely approachability for mainstream audiences, but indeed even simple context; little effort is made to explain why a frail-looking actor best known for playing an irritating but lovable example of the *Just A Stupid Accent* trope would make the inexplicable decision to challenge a championship wrestler to a match. Admittedly, even *I'm from Hollywood* has no answer to that question, but it's still the more engaging of the two movies by quite a wide margin.

For now, *My Breakfast with Blassie* is on its own, and it's just what its title implies: performance artist Andy Kaufman has breakfast in a diner with professional wrestling legend "Classy" Freddy Blassie. As their meandering, nearly hour-long discussion unfolds, the viewer experiences precisely the same emotional cycle one undergoes while watching a professional wrestling program: an initial guilty-pleasure breed of curiosity, followed by a self-conscious yearning to make it clear that you are somehow above the ridiculous performance you're witnessing. (Even if you're watching it alone.)

This movie provokes a guilty-pleasure curiosity, followed by a yearning to somehow feel above the ridiculous performance you're witnessing.



My Breakfast with Blassie

Director: [Linda Lautrec, Johnny Legend](#)
Cast: [Freddie Blassie, Andy Kaufman](#)
 (US DVD: 16 JUN 2009)



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Ultimately, you're left wondering whether the prolonged, off-putting joke has been conducted at your expense. You might even speculate about the extent to which the performers themselves are in on the joke.

Kaufman and Blassie discuss germaphobia and obsessive-compulsive tendencies, plus herpes, saying grace before a meal, tactless autograph-seekers and, inevitably (if also much less frequently than you might expect), professional wrestling. One cannot help but wonder who the intended audience for such a nonsensical movie might have been, even as one concedes that *My Breakfast with Blassie*, while largely stupid, is also kind of entertaining, if perhaps only by accident.

Twenty minutes into the meal, wrestling comes up for pretty much the first time, as Kaufman expresses dismay that Jerry Lawler was able to beat him up at all, let alone so badly that he's still wearing a neck brace months later; "But I've wrestled women that are *bigger* than him," he marvels. The advice and gentle criticism that Blassie offers his young protégé in response is so brilliant in its calm, dignified, straight-faced earnestness that the legendary wrestler and manager somehow manages to steal the show from Kaufman.

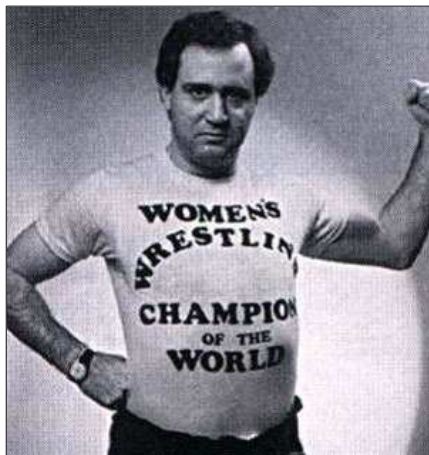
This is no small feat, but nor should it be a surprise; *My Breakfast with Blassie* is performance art, sure, but so is professional wrestling, and by the time *My Breakfast with Blassie* was shot in the early '80s, Blassie had been in the wrestling industry for several decades. (Behold life's cruel unpredictability: Kaufman was 34 and Blassie was 65 when *My Breakfast with Blassie* was released, and yet Kaufman was dead a year later and Blassie lived another 20 years.)

Oddly enough, despite my 20-plus years of wrestling fandom, I have seen only a few scattered matches that featured Blassie as a ringside manager, and I'd never seen him perform as a wrestler until I perused the *My Breakfast with Blassie* DVD extras (which also include nearly an hour of deleted scenes.) Naturally, I'm familiar with Blassie's tendency to dismiss wrestlers and fans alike as "pencil-neck geeks" (though I prefer Bobby Heenan's dismissive term for the common man: ham-n'-egger), but a mere catch-phrase gave me no sense of what to expect.

This is what to expect: Freddie Blassie looks and sounds like a less googley-eyed, less child-mollesty version of Ed Wilson, Rodney Dangerfield's creepy character in Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*. Coincidentally, in an early scene in *Natural Born Killers*, Dangerfield's character watches a wrestling match; it features Native American superstar Tatanka making his inevitable comeback against some anonymous jobber or another.

Dangerfield's Ed Wilson drunkenly admonishes the hapless, nameless white wrestler to "Get that fucking Indian!" While Blassie never says anything quite so inflammatory during his meal with Kaufman, he does refer to a pregnant Asian waitress as "Buddha". He then insists on repeatedly rubbing her belly, and finally predicts that she'll soon be on welfare.

When Kaufman tears into a female patron with his reliable "You should be in the kitchen where you belong!" shtick, Blassie gives an approving nod and chuckle. Still, who can say how much of Blassie's man's-man gruffness is an act? Can we not safely assume that any man who willingly appears in an experimental, self-indulgent movie with Andy Kaufman does not take himself seriously?



I could say that Kaufman and Blassie's deaths have lent an unexpected poignancy and relevance to *My Breakfast with Blassie*, but I would be lying. However, that both men are dead does seem to add a final, perverse punch line to what was already an unabashedly arbitrary movie, and I am sure Kaufman would approve. In the beginning voice-over narration, he dejectedly wonders why "Nobody seems to care." He adds, "I have wrestled and defeated over 400 women, and what do I get?"

You get cancer, Andy. And a

baffling, unique, subversive legacy.



Monte Williams has a Bachelors Degree in Communications. Would you like fries with that?

