



## TUESDAY 09 AUG

RESTAURANTS EVENTS NEWS FEATURES OPINION INFO CLASSIFIED

Home · Articles · DVDs · Documentary · [The Death of Andy Kaufman](#)

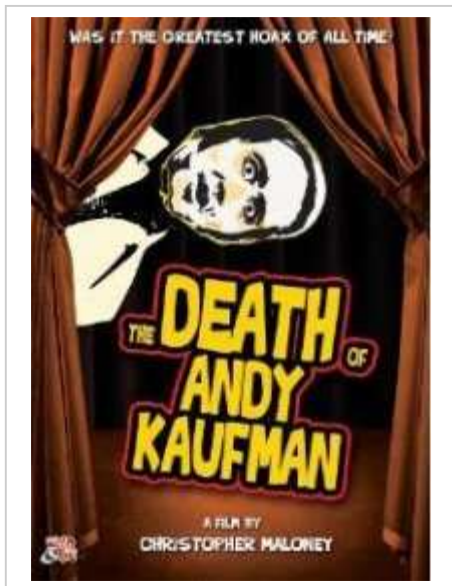
### Documentary

## The Death of Andy Kaufman

In search of ... the man on the moon.

**Rod Lott**  
July 27th, 2011

Even as big a fan of Andy Kaufman as I am, one can't help but be disappointed by "The Death of Andy Kaufman."



In his effort to prove or disprove the rumor that the outré comedian faked his own death in 1984, director Christopher Maloney's aim is true, but hampered by budgetary restraints.

A great deal of Kaufman's act hinged on pulling the wool over his audience's eyes, so it's no unreasonable for people to assume — as many did, and continue to do (ergo, this documentary) — that reports of his death by kidney failure were just another one of the comic genius' hoaxes. Maloney wants to believe that is the case, and lays out a point-by-point theory that includes Kaufman having found a look-alike nearing the end of his life and switching identities with that person at the hospital.

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9

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If you're an easy believer in conspiracy theories, you might buy that one, too. Much emphasis is placed on Andy having talked about wanting to fake his death as near proof of having done so. Yet Andy's own brother tells Maloney straight out that as much as he'd like that to be true and was present where Andy died, "Nothing's impossible ... (but) he's gone."

Best about this do-it-yourself doc is the glimpse you get of some of Andy's legendary routines, like the group lip-synch to "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." Worst about this do-it-yourself doc is how narrow that glimpse may be, because Maloney simply cannot afford to license clips from his star-making appearances on "Saturday Night Live," his work as Latka on the long-running "Taxi," or the infamous disruptions on ABC's sketch series "Friday." Seeing Kaufman do the "Mighty Mouse" theme on "SNL" is hilarious; because Maloney can't use it, he has to describe it, which is like leaving a portrait half-painted.

Those are the limitations, which also include iMovie-esque titles and an all-too-languid narration by the filmmaker. While Kaufman's demise remains a blow, a manic energy would be the best way to tell Kaufman's story in his spirit. —*Rod Lott*



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