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New documentary asks: Is Andy Kaufman really dead?

October 10, 2011 John Soltes [2 Comments \(http://www.hollywoodsoapbox.com/?p=4574#comments\)](http://www.hollywoodsoapbox.com/?p=4574#comments)



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Cover art courtesy of MVD

The premise behind the recently released documentary, *The Death of Andy Kaufman*, is contagiously interesting. The untimely loss of the often misunderstood comedian has always been surrounded by a shroud of mystery. How could a person so young die of lung cancer? Did he lose his hair from treatment, or did he shave it off to fool the world? Did Kaufman joke with family and friends about faking his own death? Could he be living in a community in the Southwest with other free spirits?

The film, directed by Christopher Maloney, unfortunately doesn't add much to the public record. There's no substantial evidence that the comedian has been playing a practical joke on the world for some 25 years. There is simply no definitive proof that the comedian didn't die in the 1980s. Earth-shattering cinema this is not. In all likelihood, Kaufman died at a very young age from a form of cancer that takes many a life around the world. May he rest in peace.

Still, Maloney is able to resurrect enough interest in the subject matter that Kaufman's story continues to compel. By investigating the comedian's death, we come to know the man behind the jokes. And the man, rather than his death, is worthy of inspection.

Kaufman, who was a common presence on *Saturday Night Live* and *Taxi*, was the definition of unorthodox. At his legendary Carnegie Hall gig, he invited the entire audience to enjoy some milk and cookies with him after the show. At the height of his popularity, Kaufman ditched the brick walls and solitary microphones of the stand-up circuit and decided to become a professional wrestler. His main opponents: Any woman who dared to leave the kitchen and confront a man on an equal playing field.

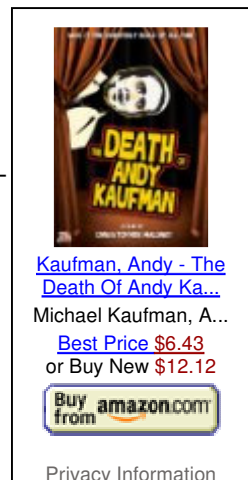
Maloney has access to some choice footage of Kaufman. There are not too many "official" comedy routines, but enough amateur video is featured that the comedian comes into full light.

To be honest, if the documentary focused on Kaufman's life and work, rather than the mystery surrounding his death, it would probably be a much more effective cinematic experience. When the director and his shaky cam leave the spotlight and head onto the road to find evidence about the possible practical joke, the film and Kaufman's brilliance feel hijacked. After a while it becomes immaterial whether the comedian is still alive. Why can't we just enjoy his influential and long-lasting comedy routines?

The film was obviously made on a tight budget, and although I'm inspired to commend the effort, much of the camerawork and sound production is shoddy. There's one sequence that almost feels like a teenager messing around with his dad's video recorder.

The Death of Andy Kaufman is a memorable film for no other reason than it offers modern-day audiences another insider's look at a comedic legend. Except for re-runs and Jim Carrey's effective performance as Kaufman in *Man on the Moon*, the misunderstood performer doesn't make too many appearances in pop culture nowadays. This documentary at least opens a door for new fans to enjoy an American original.

Note: Andy Kaufman, if you are still alive ... I apologize for thinking you're dead. Perhaps you can leave a message in the comment field below?



By John Soltes / Publisher / John@HollywoodSoapbox.com

<mailto:John@HollywoodSoapbox.com>

- *The Death of Andy Kaufman*
- [2011 \(http://www.hollywoodsoapbox.com/?p=754\)](http://www.hollywoodsoapbox.com/?p=754)
- *Written and directed by Christopher Maloney*
- *Running time: 120 minutes*
- *Not Rated*
- *Rating:* ★★☆☆☆

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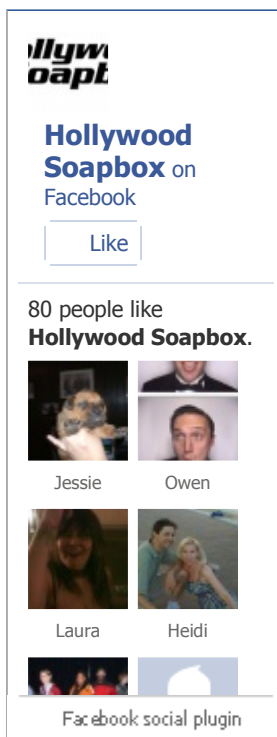
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