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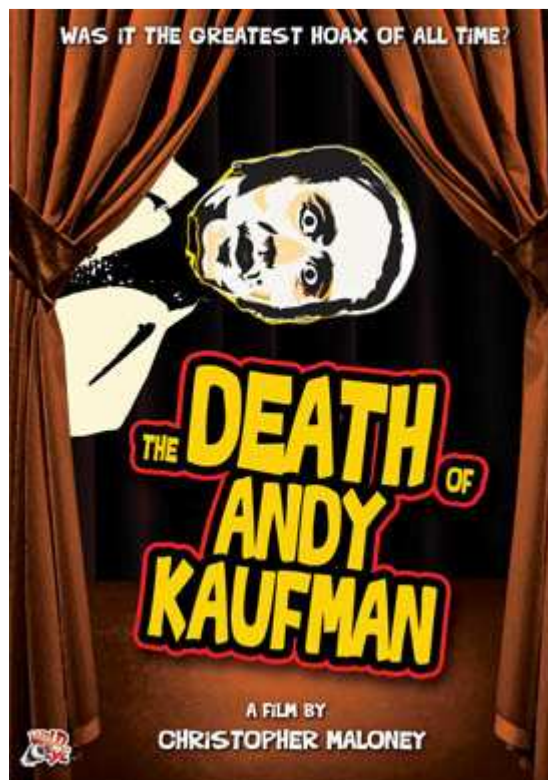
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Review: 'The Death Of Andy Kaufman Is A Kaufman Fan's Labor Of Love



Even though he died over 25 years ago, **Andy Kaufman** can still ignite impassioned arguments over his brand of humor, his career and whether or not he faked his own death in 1984. The misunderstood Kaufman will typically find themselves at a loss when trying to articulate exactly why his work was so important; you get it or you don't. Most people who do not understand Kaufman's unique style of audience interaction vilify him as untalented or a ha

His fans, however, will defend him to the death, to speak, often citing him as the most important comic of all time. (The label of "comedian" is erroneously attributed to Kaufman, who did not take the title. He preferred to be considered a stand-up dance man.) Filmmaker **Christopher Maloney** is clearly a devoted fan of Kaufman. His documentary, "**The Death of Andy Kaufman**" obviously comes from a place of love and respect for the late star. Unfortunately, however, the experiment lacks in technical proficiency in addition to feeling stretched thin, trying to

compress an 80 minute feature out of what would have worked much better as a short film.

For those unfamiliar with Kaufman, he was most widely known for his role as Latka Gravas on the show "**Taxi**" from 1978-1983. His status as a legend, though, was built on his highly unusual and misunderstood style of humor. His "**Mighty Mouse**" routine on "**Saturday Night Live**" was

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example of the type of high-concept performances he gave throughout his career. Kaufman is a comedian, though he never told a single joke, because there is no other readily available description of what he did. His groundbreaking experiments in audience manipulation paved the way for comedians **Zach Galifianakis**, **Demetri Martin** and **Sacha Baron Cohen**.



“The Death of Andy Kaufman” is about the belief held by some fans that the star faked his own death and never actually had cancer to begin with. Maloney does a good job giving both sides of this theory and why each, in its own right, may be true. Kaufman allegedly talked to many friends about his plan to fake his death as the ultimate hoax, resurfacing at some future date. There are even enough peculiar circumstances surrounding his passing at Cedars Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles to give at least a modicum of credence to the possibility of it being true.

Maloney clearly put a lot of time into researching his subject and, although most of the information repeated from the myriad resources on Kaufman’s life, he manages to dig up some information that may be surprising to even the most astute Kaufman scholars.

But as a director, Maloney falters in the technical details of the production. Filmed on a hand-held camera with no sound equipment, the low production value at times becomes a hindrance to the storytelling, particularly in what would have been a very moving interview with Kaufman’s brother, **Michael Kaufman**. The camera, placed at a distance, picks up not only the movement of the subject as he interviews his subject, but the bizarre whirring sound of a ceiling fan left on overhead, underscoring the intimacy of the discussion and creating an uneasy distance between the audience and what is arguably, the most climactic moment of the film.

True Kaufman fans will appreciate even the smallest amount of new information about the man who shocked a generation and Maloney deserves credit for taking on a project about which he is so passionate, but ultimately, the passion is somewhat trumped by the inattention to detail in the technical aspects of the filmmaking and the lengthy intro of who Andy Kaufman was before arriving at the investigation. [C+]

“The Death of Andy Kaufman” is available online on DVD.

Matthew Newlin posted to [Review](#) at 11:47 am on July 31, 2011 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

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