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Christopher Maloney – The Death of Andy Kaufman

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<http://www.sugarbuzzmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/kaufgrave2.jpg> Interview by Christopher Duda (Sugarbuzzin- Bear Country)

“What’s real? What’s not? That’s what I do in my act, test how other people deal with reality.” – Andy Kaufman

How did you initially become interested in Andy Kaufman and how did that lead to the making of this film?

My awareness of Andy goes back to when I was about twelve years old. I happened to see some television special on Andy having to do with his wrestling career. It profiled his feud with Jerry Lawler and showed these old videotapes of Andy screaming at Lawler, taunting him with a barrage of insults and ridiculing him for being from the South. I thought, “A grown man can get away with this?” What struck me about him was that he was an adult, clearly acting like a child, and it was amusing. I hadn’t seen anyone else do that, and it made an impact on me. Years later, when the twenty year anniversary of Andy’s “death” came around, it brought about a renewed interest in Andy’s work for me. I became aware of these discussions being held concerning the



possibility of Andy faking his death, and my research on these

<http://www.sugarbuzzmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/maloney12.jpg> became sort of the catalyst for this film.

Is it romantic notion that Andy is still alive or deep down after making this film do you believe that there could be a grain of truth in “the greatest hoax of all time” theory?

It's both. It is a romantic notion to think of our heroes escaping death because death often seems to not be worthy of the people we hold in esteem. We like to think our loved ones somehow being above the reality of dying. At the same time, I absolutely believe that Andy had the ability and discipline to pull off a hoax of this magnitude. At different points in the making of this film, I felt different ways about whether or not he had faked his death. When I first started my research, I thought he was dead, but that there was enough evidence to the contrary to get a discussion going. In the middle of the film, I felt strongly that he was alive. By the end, I had gone back to thinking he was dead. Now, I'm caught in the middle. Certain conversations I had with his family contained enigmatic elements, and I wonder, deep down, if Andy isn't out there somewhere, letting us all go crazy with trying to figure out whether or not he's alive.

What projects previous to this have you worked on and do you have any future plans for upcoming releases?

This was my first film outside of film school. I started work on it just after finishing



classes.

<http://www.sugarbuzzmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/ak21.jpg> Since then, I wrote and directed a documentary about the Shakers called Come, Thou Fount: Thoughts on the Shakers, which is available on DVD. I'm currently in pre-production for a project called Cryptotrip, which is a documentary which will have me traveling around the country interviewing eyewitnesses who have had creature sightings. I plan to combine these accounts, along with my travels, to form a comment on America. After that, I may get out of the documentary world. I'm really eager to get my feature scripts produced.

Were there any barriers to making this film or regrets?

I wish I had a better camera, I wish I had better sound equipment, stuff like that. It's hard for me to look at it now, because I think I've come a long way as a filmmaker since then. I would have done things differently if I had just started work on it yesterday as opposed to three years ago. But that's just how it is with any career, I think. I don't regret how I made it. I'm still impressed that I got it made in the first place. I was working with absolutely no money. I eventually was able to raise about \$1000, but that only goes so far. I borrowed the camera, did all the editing myself, and managed to secure interviews without paying anyone for their time or appearance. I think I was naïve enough back then to not see all the things I was getting away with, so to speak. Movies are not made the way I made The Death of Andy Kaufman, and the fact that it's found an audience is thrilling. It's shown me that above technique and style, people love Story. If the Story is strong



<http://www.sugarbuzzmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/dak1.jpg>

enough, the audience will forgive the corners you had to cut to get it told.

There is mention of a person in Mexico that claims to be Andy Kaufman. Why did you feel it was too dangerous to go investigate that angle?

This guy sounded like a very unsavory individual. I didn't pursue him for a couple reasons. For one thing, after looking more into what he was all about, I discovered that he was little more than a bum who spent his time giving advice online to American men on how to travel to Mexico and start relationships with underage Mexican girls. I had no doubt in my mind that this jerk had nothing to do with Andy, and I didn't think someone like that deserved my time or the time of the people who would go on to watch the film. I take it as an insult that this idiot decided to try and ride the coattails of Andy's legacy for his own gain.

Was there anyone you would of liked to interview for this film? Ie:SNL cast, Taxi cast etc

I wanted to interview Carol Kane, who played Andy's love interest on *Taxi*. Apparently they had some conversations about faking his death and then moving out of the country, but I never heard back from her representatives. I made a conscious choice to avoid interviewing his showbiz friends in favor of interviewing the people who knew him outside of his work. Bob Zmuda, Lynne Margulies, and George Shapiro are always the go-to people to comment on Andy. I wanted to go a different direction because I wanted a different portrait



of Andy for my film. I spoke to George and Lynne, but ultimately <http://www.sugarbuzzmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/maloney21.jpg> decided to pursue other people to interview.

The overall film has a very “guerilla” type feel to it (that is a compliment!). It gives the overall viewer that this is not an overly polished documentary and that this is a film maker that actually cares about the subject. Was this intentional or budgetary or both?

I knew going into it that I had major restrictions as far as money and resources. I decided to make a film in spite of it, and the result clearly shows that I had to do without a lot of standards that most movie productions have. I remember telling someone at the time, “I have to focus on what I have instead of what I don’t have.” It’s too easy to allow something like that to keep you from doing what is in your heart to do. I don’t think anyone has a valid excuse to not get their film made. If it’s as important as this film was to me, there is always a way to get it done.

Some of the criticism of the film is that the first part on Andy’s life is very watchable however the second part of the film is tedious at times? It has also been stated that this might be better served on a whole as a short film. Do you agree with this critique?

I don’t read reviews, so I’m not familiar with these critiques. I know it’s had very mixed reviews, which is fine. Obviously I don’t agree with the short film idea because I made it as a feature.

Would you consider making another film in the same light....The Death of....?



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[content/uploads/andy1.jpg](http://www.sugarbuzzmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/andy1.jpg)) No the subject permeated my whole being, but now that it's made, the topic is basically over for me. One of the reasons I got into film is because it's such a vast world, and there's no reason to repeat yourself as a filmmaker if you don't want to. I'm too interested in exploring other subjects, so another "Death of" won't be coming from me.

How did your relationship with Wild Eye/MVD come to fruition?

The film showed at a great little independent theater in the Lower East Side called Two Boots Pioneer Theater. We had a great screening there. The theater actually ended up closing shortly after The Death of Andy Kaufman screened there, which I like to think is unrelated. Several months after the screening, the manager got in touch with me and said he knew some guys in the DVD distribution business and had recommended my film to them for distribution. Wildeye then contacted me and I agreed to give them the distribution rights. I think it's the first movie they've put out that hasn't had blood and gore and nudity, so it's kind of a departure for them. They've opened it up to a much larger group of people than I had exposure to, and more people have seen it because of them, so I'm grateful.



<http://www.sugarbuzzmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/ak5.jpg>)

There is next to no mention of the Jim Carrey Biopic. Did you refer to the film at all before your documentary was made?

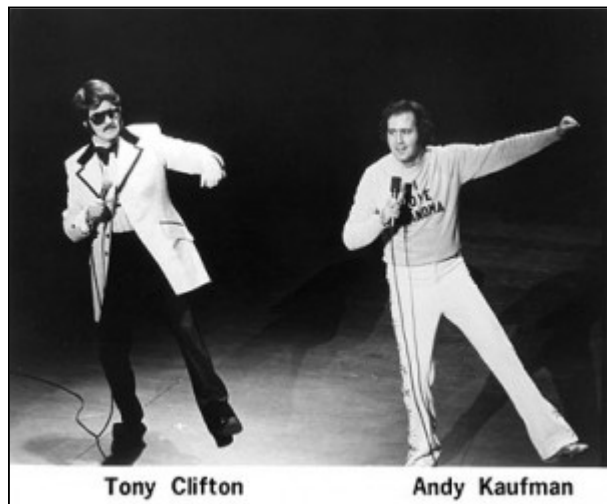
I saw it when it came out and enjoyed it. When I started the documentary, I hadn't looked at it in years. I did end up attempting to watch it while in production, and I had to shut it off. I think it's a valiant effort, but they totally missed the mark in portraying Andy. They kind of rehashed his career, but offered no insight into who he really was. When I see Jim Carrey doing his thing in that movie, I think, "He's doing someone, but it's not Andy." I know Andy's dad and brother felt the same way. Andy's brother told me I had come closer to understanding Andy than the Man on the Moon filmmakers had, which was very humbling to hear.

Was Tony Clifton not available for interviews?

I didn't think he could offer much on Andy anymore. I know that Tony Clifton continued to perform after Andy's "death" without really consulting Andy's family, which seemed kind of strange to me.

The internet is a treasure trove of information or misinformation on Andy. Was the internet a tool you used to decipher through truths and half truths?

Oh yeah. The Internet discussions on the possibility of Andy faking his death were very intriguing, and I ended up quoting some of these discussions in the film. I'm quite sure a lot of what I studied online was false, but if it's interesting, who cares? I've made it a habit in my films to highlight belief without commenting on whether or not that belief is true, believable, or founded. Belief is incredibly interesting to me, and when someone is



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[content/uploads/andyandtony.jpg](http://www.sugarbuzzmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/andyandtony.jpg)) convinced of something, their conviction makes for a fascinating topic, even if they're dead wrong.

How can we not be sure that this film is not merely a hoax perpetrated by Andy to keep him in the spotlight to some degree?

You can't be sure of it. If Andy were behind this, this is the kind of budget and production value he would have. If you look at his other film appearances (My Breakfast with Blassie, I'm From Hollywood), you'll see that the style and quality of my film is very similar to those. I could be working for Andy, for all you know.

Where do you see yourself in ten years as a filmmaker?

I'll be 35, which is how old Andy was when he "died". If I'm alive, I know I'll still be making films, but I'm not sure I'll still be making documentaries. If Andy resurfaces publicly, I think we'll be good pals.

Parting Thoughts?



<http://www.sugarbuzzmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/kaufman3.jpg> I would like to encourage everyone to continue buying DVDs of The Death of Andy Kaufman. I would like to be able to quit my day job soon, and this will help tremendously toward that effort. Seriously, for other struggling filmmakers, my word of encouragement is to get that film playing inside your head, find a camera, and get it made. I had no distribution plans or deals in place for this project when I began, but now it's been made available on DVD, and people are watching it. You can't wait for a secure deal or the promise of funds to create a film. If you make it truthfully and from the heart, people will respond.

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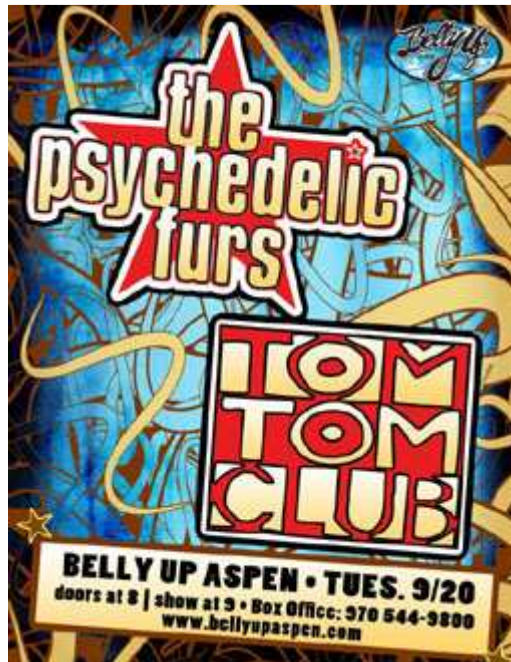
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