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DVD Review: The Death of Andy Kaufman

by [Chris Delloiacono](#)

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My father introduced me to *Taxi* as a kid in the early '80s, so Andy Kaufman has been in my consciousness for most of my life. I have first hand memories of the crazy feud with Jerry Lawler, SNL standup, and the love story of Latka and Simka on *Taxi*. Although just a kid, I followed the news of Kaufman's death and all those rumors that it was a scam. There was the Jim Carrey film "Man on the Moon" in the '90s and a hoax press release proclaiming he was alive a few years back. I'm not an expert in all things Andy, but I've certainly ridden the waves of news through the years.

"The Death of Andy Kaufman" is a documentary that doesn't shed too much light on the eternal question: Did Andy Kaufman fake his death in 1984? This isn't a big budget Michael Moore documentary, but instead plays more like a film school piece. Most of the footage of Kaufman is simply from the public domain and there aren't a lot of interviews. Still it's well researched and there's a noble journey undertaken by writer/producer/director Christopher Maloney.




When I sat down to watch the film I assumed it would purport that Kaufman was still alive. As the first half of the film unfolds Maloney leads us in that direction. Several theories and inconsistencies in the death are illustrated, and on first glance they are compelling. The evidence is rather sketchy, but Kaufman's own claim that he wanted to fake his death lends a small amount of credence. Most conspiracy theories look credible when the evidence is presented from one side.

About halfway through the picture Maloney's thesis takes a drastic shift. It was surprising to see, but we essentially get the other side to the argument. It even seems like it's going to be a cursory devil's advocate type review, but it in the end you are left with Maloney's belief that Kaufman is in fact dead. You can make your own decision, but it's pretty balanced reporting.

"The Death of Andy Kaufman" certainly presents both sides to the argument, but there's not very much meat. We get interviews with a 'friend', a doctor, and Kaufman's brother. I know the film was made rather cheaply, but I would have enjoyed an interview with Bob Zmuda who has continued to appear as Kaufman's Tony Clifton character. Since the footage of Kaufman is all in the public domain it tends to be rather grainy and unenlightening. This all creates another problem: too much of the film is Maloney simply recounting information about Kaufman. There really needed to be further input from other sources.

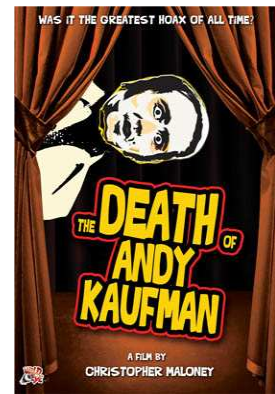
As with most cases of supposed faked celebrity deaths there's no real proof. It's fun to look around for Elvis, Jim Morrison, or Andy Kaufman or wait for their stunning reappearance and subsequent media circus. Sure, it's possible that Elvis and Jim faked their way to obscurity to escape the unwanted spotlight. Yet, if Kaufman really did fake his death, supposedly it would have been to create a massive sensation. I think the shelf life on that has long since passed.

There's nothing particularly enlightening in this film. The special features amount to a short interview with documentarian Christopher Maloney. It's not a terrible piece by any stretch, but it's also not earth-shattering. If you want to learn a bit about Kaufman you may find it interesting, but it's in no way a must buy.

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**Rating:** **NOT RATED****Country:** USA**Release Date:** July 26, 2011**Distributor:** Wild Eye Releasing**Director:**

• Christopher Maloney

Grade: C

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