

Frost/Nixon: Notes After the LA Premierre

By Jim Meskimen

My wife, Tamra and daughter Taylor and I went to the Los Angeles premiere of Ron Howard's new film, *Frost/Nixon* tonight, and it is very compelling and well made, and a story well worth telling in today's world.

I play a small role of one of Nixon's speech writers and memoir researchers, and I worked for about a month last year on the film. I recall thinking at the time that the script was a good one, based on a very solid play and dramatically interesting. But my overall impression was that it was an intimate sort of story, one that didn't have tremendously broad relevance or universality, entertaining, but a bit anecdotal.

Did *that* opinion change tonight!

In light of current events and the world scene, *Frost/Nixon* is compelling and cogent, and has everything to do with the large canvas of American politics and the immense global dilemmas that burn so hotly today.

Ethics, the struggle for survival, courage and truth... these are the themes that ring throughout this film, and why I believe it will have resonance for the larger public that still remember the voice, reputation and tragedy of Dick Nixon, and for whom the word "Watergate" has indelible significance.

As well, the smaller struggle of two men to reclaim past glory at each other's expense, distilled down to each character's struggle to survive and surmount past failures is quite universal and deeply moving. As an audience member, this hit me hard, in the way good drama always does- showing one's own life through the filter of another's different but completely congruous experience. This sort of story has special value as the challenges of this modern world press down on ordinary people striving to rise above overwhelming forces.

The performances by the two leads, Frank Langella (who won the Tony award last year for his portrayal) and Michael Sheen are simply masterful. All the supporting cast does splendidly too. All the film's departments, camera, makeup (Langella's nose and hairpiece are practically co-stars, yet never steal scenes), wardrobe, music, production design, sound, all support the story elegantly. But once again it falls on Ron Howard to bring it all together and make entertaining a story everybody already knows the ending to; as in his earlier *Apollo 13*, he accomplishes this with confidence and with a minimum of bells and whistles, doing justice to the tale and the historical circumstances.

This is not a film for everybody. I'm sure the under forty crowd will find it a bit fidget inspiring, and the narrative assumes that most of early seventies American history need only be briskly glossed over, but for

those of us who remember the names and the events (even if only by virtue of having a television on at breakfast before going to school) will find a warm familiarity with *Frost/Nixon*, for the “good old days” of that period, and the questions raised about integrity, responsibility, and that ghost that still haunts our country, “National security”.

And of course in this version of seventies politics, “expletives” are never “deleted”.

And I’m also pleased to report, you will actually see me in the film from time to time, along with several other of my fellow *Apollo 13* castmates who are peppered throughout the movie in supporting roles. Nice (very!) to work for a director who counts “loyalty” amongst his many virtues.

Enjoy the movie!

The End