Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 118 minutes

This film premieres on Netflix on Oct. 25.

Back in my teenage and college years, this film enthusiast spent many a night seeking out and watching the most eccentric and unusual features out there. In fact, my friends and I would often try to outdo each other, finding and bringing VHS tapes of odd, obscure midnight movies and soon-to-be cult films. One such discovery was *Dolemite* (1975), a bizarre and over-the-top-in-every-imaginable-way action/comedy starring Rudy Ray Moore. To the eyes of someone living in another country, the movie was equal parts hilarious, awkward and at points, completely mystifying.

Nearly 45 years later, the story behind this surreal flick has been given the Hollywood treatment. *Dolemite Is My Name* reveals the story of the man who co-created and starred in the film, detailing his struggles getting into show business and his attempts to hustle his way into the limelight. Obviously, for this reviewer, there’s an element of personal nostalgia in seeing an official producer take on a crazy movie that my friends and I first found on a store shelf so long ago. Still, it’s hard to imagine anyone not being both charmed and amused by the story being told.

Rudy Ray Moore (Eddie Murphy) has tried just about everything to get his big break, including recording his own rhythm & blues singles (which he can’t get any L.A. disc jockeys to play). When a local transient begins telling outrageously raunchy stories involving a mythical figure, Moore is inspired. He creates an on-stage persona of the character, starts performing in clubs and begins selling records out of his car. Soon, he finds some measure of success and aspires to create a comedy film that will serve his audience and sense of humor.

However, the process is challenging, as the performer attempts to overcome a series of barriers. To get his unique vision up on the big screen, Moore enlists the help of earnest playwright Jerry Jones (Keegan-Michael Key), and egotistical actor D’Urville Martin (Wesley Snipes).

The performances and characters in this underdog story are utterly endearing, and Murphy really does a great service to Moore. His positive demeanor and enthusiasm make him incredibly likable, but there’s a deeper layer to the man that the actor also manages to uncover. This includes an abusive father and some insecurity about his appearance (he’s constantly told that he doesn’t have the looks to be a movie star). The same is true for some of the other roles, including friend and eventual co-star Lady Reed (Da’Vine Joy Randolph), who offers some valuable advice when Moore describes his worries about shooting a particular moment in his film.

Of course, there’s even more humor present as the film depicts Moore’s sudden rise to celebrity and attempts to leverage his position to the next level. There’s an absolutely hilarious brainstorming session as Moore, a man with limited filmmaking or screenwriting experience, fires off random ideas for the movie with co-writer Jones. And of course, the low-rent production results in some strange scenarios that certainly earn plenty of laughs. Snipes manages to steal most of his scenes as the heavy-drinking actor/director D’Urville Martin.

Stumbling around and full of tics, Martin clearly believes himself to be above all of his peers, mixing dismissive and disinterested comments with occasionally inspiring words, sometimes all in the same conversation. He’s a treat to watch.

Credit should also be given to screenwriters Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski (*Ed Wood***,**

The People vs. Larry Flynt
,
Man on the Moon
,
Big Eyes
) for condensing a life story and managing a wide variety of characters, giving many some individual moments to shine. Of course, based on their other penned works, they have a great deal of experience in adapting real life stories into narratives - this title in particular seems to share a lot of commonalities with
Ed Wood
.

Perhaps the only unfortunate aspect of catching up with the film on Netflix for many will be seeing it for the first time on the small screen. This reviewer was able to see a preview at the cinema. The picture looked impressive and the funky, music-heavy soundtrack was spectacular to hear. Hopefully those watching at home or on a smaller device will be able to appreciate just how well-made this picture truly is.

In the years since, Rudy Ray Moore has been dubbed “The Godfather of Rap” and has received great accolades and respect for his unusual, if somewhat foul-mouthed work. While it may seem weird to use Dolemite and the word sweet in the same sentence, *Dolemite Is My Name* is a sweet, genuine, and appropriately bawdy ode to a man who wanted nothing more than to make something of himself and refused to give up despite advice to the contrary. And it may also help find him a new generation of fans (for those curious, the 1976
Dolemite
sequel,
The Human Tornado
, is an even crazier film than the original). It is a film worth seeking out in the best format available.

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