



The Main Feature

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Director and writer Martin McDonagh
 Cinematography Ben Davis
 Music Carter Burwell
 Editor Jon Gregory

Cast

Frances McDormand	Mildred
Sam Rockwell	Dixon
Woody Harrelson	Willoughby
Caleb Landry Jones	Red Welby
Lucas Hedges	Robbie Hayes
Peter Dinklage	James
John Hawkes	Charlie Hayes
Clarke Peters	Chief Abercrombie



This is one of the angriest films in recent memory. Yet it has moments of unlikely (yet hilarious) comedy and sincere tenderness, along with acts of nearly unwatchable violence.

British-Irish writer-director Martin McDonagh's second set American drama (after *Seven Psychopaths*) has a subject that is no laughing matter but as with his 2008 debut, *In Bruges*, his Chaucerian ear for obscenity provokes giggles, guffaws and gasps.

Like Mildred, Martin McDonagh can be a provocative, polarising figure. An upstart playwright turned filmmaker, his work rides roughshod over Ireland, the US and the historic city of Bruges, exploding in a splash of bloody violence and plumes of pungent dialogue. One suspects that if he can't be adored, he'd just as soon be loathed. "I'm coming from a punk-rock background," he says by way of introduction. "The Clash and the Pogues. It's all about trying to shake things up."

McDonagh has choreographed an almost impossible feat of a brutally dark comedy that, thanks to both Sam Rockwell and Frances McDormand, elicits an emotional response you simply don't see coming.

While traveling through the Southern United States in around 1998, Martin McDonagh came across a couple of accusatory billboards about an unsolved crime, which he described as "raging and painful and tragic" alleging the murder of a woman in Texas. The billboards highlighted the incompetence of police work and deeply affected McDonagh; he said that the image "stayed in my mind [...] kept gnawing at me".

He wrote the script with McDormand in mind and could never envisage anybody else in the role. McDormand initially felt that she was older than the character as it was written, and suggested that Mildred instead be Angela's grandmother; McDonagh disagreed, feeling that it would change the story too much. McDormand's husband Joel Coen persuaded her to take the part regardless.

The director recalled "As a kid, I used to idolise actors like Marlon Brando and James Dean, I used to try to model myself on those men. And little girls just don't have those kind of characters to emulate – nobody that you'd want to walk and speak like. So this feels like a good film to be putting out at this time. It's a good character to have walking out into the world. Because I didn't plot it out beforehand, I never knew what she would do, from scene to scene, and I think it probably shows in the film. I didn't know any of that was going to happen, but I had a suspicion that it wouldn't end well. There was something joyful about following a

person like that, through a town and through a state. The level of self-confidence in a person like that, absolutely taking no prisoners and taking no shit, is so freeing. It's how we would all want to behave in life, if we had the guts to."

The ways in which the writer/director keeps repositioning these people, and letting them motivate each other's *better* nature, is a welcome oasis of warmth in what could've easily been a sneer-fest.



These are probably the most complicated, compelling characters you will see on screen all year.

Three Billboards has anger, violence, tragedy, forgiveness, and revenge of Hellenic proportions, and all because a woman asks a question of a man.

McDormand took inspiration for her character from John Wayne; and Rockwell, wanting to make his character "the exact opposite" of Mildred, took inspiration for his character in part from Wayne's co-star in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Lee Marvin.

In an interview Rockwell stated "Racism and misogyny has been very prevalent in the United States so I think that shines a new light on some of the scenes in this film," he says. He sighs again. "Yeah, I think it's horrible. What are you gonna say?"

Rockwell's character in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* isn't exactly a model of humanitarian goodwill either. "He's very gullible," says Rockwell, trying to explain how he got inside the head of the character. "There's an innocence to that so you just stay in the moment. If you're truly in the moment and someone tells you there's a pink elephant in the moment, I'll kind of go like that [he looks over his shoulder]. That's the moment. I'm open to you telling me there's a pink elephant. I think you have to stay open and then you look kind of gullible or stupid. I think that's the key to that. Kinda..."

As this last quote makes clear, Rockwell isn't particularly good at explaining his craft. McDonagh, however, considers him "the greatest actor of his generation" and wrote the part with Sam's voice in his head (this is the third time they've worked together, after *Seven Psychopaths* and the play *A Beheading in Spokane*).

Indeed, Rockwell's performance was so good it altered the focus of the movie, bringing humanity to a character that McDonagh had hoped was there, but couldn't be sure would be transmitted on screen. "I was surprised at how rounded his journey is," confirms the filmmaker. "It's Frances's film but he comes in close behind and it's because of the change in his humanity that we get there together with the two of them. I think I thought it was Mildred's film," he adds. "And then it became their film."

Allison Outdoor Advertising of Sylva built the actual billboards, which were put in a pasture near Black Mountain, North Carolina because that location was best. Most of the time the billboards were covered because people in the area found them upsetting.

The film will make you laugh -- and then make you wonder whether you should be laughing. With three lead actors on top form, some memorable one-liners, well drawn characters, and an ending that will have members debating what truly happened after the screen has gone dark, this Oscar winner was one of last year's best and most memorable films.

Iain McGlashan



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Frances McDormand praises Grenfell Three Billboards stunt

Frances McDormand said it is "really exciting" that the film she won an Oscar for inspired people to campaign about the Grenfell Tower fire.

Last month the Justice 4 Grenfell group hired vans with adverts which read: "71 dead. And still no arrests? How come?"

The parade mimicked scenes in Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri, where McDormand's character demands answers about her daughter's murder.

A police investigation into the fire is ongoing and no arrests have been made.

After winning the gong for best actress, McDormand said she enjoyed seeing billboards moving "off the screen and onto the street".

"Activists are taking that kind of statement and putting it out there - billboards still work, so I think that it's really exciting," she added. "It started actually with the Grenfell Tower fire investigation then it leap-frogged to (the) Miami gun control situation. It was outside the UN... that's the kind of power that an image can have and that's what we're making, we're making powerful images."



Moyra Samuels, one of the organisers of the Grenfell stunt, compared McDormand's "very positive" words with the reference to the fire Stormzy made at the Brit Awards.

"It's not just politicians who are taking note of what happened, realising that it's not being dealt with effectively by both the council and the

government," she said. "We are being effective at raising the issues on a worldwide stage."

Kim Taylor Smith, deputy leader of Kensington and Chelsea council, said there is an "army" of 300 staff members "working around the clock, doing everything they can" to rehouse survivors of the blaze, which killed 71 people last June.

The council has spent £235m to secure 307 homes, she added.

A government spokesman said it is working with the council in the rehousing effort, and it is committed to making sure everyone affected by the fire gets "the support they need".

Ms Samuels said the Grenfell billboards combated "campaign fatigue" by reminding the public of the "broken promises and unfulfilled needs" ongoing after the fire.

A petition calling for Prime Minister Theresa May to take action to build public trust in the inquiry into the fire has reached 100,000 signatures - the number needed for it to be considered for debate in Parliament.

Comments and reactions to: **The Death of Stalin**

Score **0** **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **7** **8** **9** **10**
 1 2 ~ 1 4 5 7 6 14 3 ~

No of reaction slips received = 43

Average Score = 6.26

Very distasteful – one of the worst films I’ve ever seen!

The actors had fun

Really effective satire – great casting

Wonderful satire

Good entertainment, at time hilarious

Not funny – I was disgusted

A strange subject for a comedy

Not as clever as it thinks

What a load of rubbish. Hardly a Christmas film!

Disappointing – very confused

A parody but brilliant demonstration of such violent rule

Truth stranger than fiction

As funny as the first time I saw it

Live by the sword, die by the sword!

Too much like our Parliament at the moment to be funny

Jason Isaacs stole the film

Very powerful! Humour highlighted the true terror. Keep laughing!!

Sorry didn’t enjoy the film at all. Funny in parts but mostly distasteful

A wonderful production, and entertaining from beginning to end

Much to admire, but still left a bad taste in the mouth. Shame as cast was excellent, but high farce and violence didn’t work for me

Position	Film	Average Score
1 st	Darkest Hour	8.08
2 nd	Guildford in the Great War	7.56
3 rd	The Violin Teacher	7.2
4 th	L’homme du train	6.71
=5 th	Bar Bahar (In Between)	6.26
=5 th	Death of Stalin	6.26
7 th	The Levelling	5.6
8 th	Phantom Thread	5.16

Next on 24 January:



“One of the overlooked great classic silent films.”

“A drama of sexual and racial politics set against the buzz of jazz-age London culture, Piccadilly is an incredibly modern silent film featuring a career-best performance from Anna May Wong.”

“A visually eloquent and sometimes dazzling backstage melodrama.”

“A wonderfully entertaining last hurrah from England's silent cinema.”