

'Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work' Reveals the Woman Behind the Face

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 18, 2010 - 11:32am

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – One of the most revealing insights to be gleaned from “Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work” is the lifelong desire of its titular comedienne to be a serious actress. The sad irony is that Rivers has rendered her most vital acting tool (her face) utterly immobile, thus making her ineligible for any dramatic screen role, save for the Elephant Man.

Though some viewers may be initially reluctant to view Rivers' plasticized face on the big screen, “A Piece of Work” forces its audience to look under the Botox mask and observe the angry, brilliant, brutally honest and fiercely insecure woman hiding beneath. It becomes quickly apparent that Rivers's deformed features are the result of a desperate spirit that refuses to grow old, retire and be labeled a legend. She's gradually become the punch-line of her own jokes about age, beauty, identity and especially plastic surgery. Some time after her husband Edgar committed suicide, Rivers joked that she was the reason he did it, because, while they were making love, she took the bag off her head.



[Read Matt Fagerholm's full review of “Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work” in our reviews section.](#) [8]

Behind every self-deprecating comic is a tale of heartbreak, yet Rivers is anything but self-pitying. In fact, she never gives herself a break. When her calendar consists primarily of blank pages, she literally feels as if her entire life has been a failure. This is a woman bound and determined to either die laughing, or die in the midst of laughter elicited from the mouths of adoring fans. The stage has become her life. While coping with the loss of her husband, Rivers and her daughter Melissa co-starred in a TV-movie where they played themselves coping with Edgar's death. Rivers admits that it “probably sounded sick” to most people, but it somehow proved to be “healing” for her in the long run.

Yet after several painful TV appearances along those lines, Rivers has gradually become an eyesore. Anyone seeking classic reruns on TV Land will be dismayed to see Andy Griffith get interrupted by a pop-up ad of Rivers wrestling bags of money to promote her show, “How'd You Get So Rich?” Such an unpleasant cameo will undoubtedly cause irritated viewers to reply, “How'd you get so stiff?” Though “A Piece of Work” doesn't quite attempt to answer that question, it does generate genuine empathy for a woman who was once widely considered to be a national treasure. Cutting-edge female comics, from Kathy Griffin and Margaret Cho to Sarah Silverman, owe Rivers a great debt for the trails she's been blazing since the mid-60s.



[Continuing reading for Matt Fagerholm's full “Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work” review.](#) [8]

‘Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work’ features Joan Rivers, Melissa Rivers, Larry A. Thompson, Mark Phillips, Kathy Griffin and Don Rickles. It was directed by Ricki Stern and Annie Sundberg. It opened on June 18th at the Landmark Century, Century 12 Evanston and the Landmark Renaissance Place. It is rated R.



Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work

Photo credit: IFC Films

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