

Morgan Spurlock Hawks 'The Greatest Movie Ever Sold'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 22, 2011 - 12:50am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – In a remarkable idea for a film, director Morgan Spurlock ("Supersize Me") funds his new documentary, "The Greatest Movie Ever Sold," by selling sponsorships for financing. However, the process is redundantly explored, and no new ground is broken.

Spurlock likes to tell his stories through humor, and there are many funny parts to Greatest Movie, but essentially the thesis of the film can't stretch to fit its 90 minute time frame. The same point is made over and over again, filled in with talking heads that again, make the same point.

The genesis of the idea is simple. To finance his new documentary, Spurlock will sell sponsorship shares in the film to as many products and companies as are interested. While in the process of financing the film, the nuts and bolts of it will become the documentary. As the plan unfolds, Spurlock is seen working the phones, making presentations to boardrooms and successfully convincing some of the companies to come on board.

At the same time, Spurlock seeks out some commentary from academics, advocates, film directors and entertainers. Famous folks like Ralph Nader, J.J. Abrams, Peter Berg, Noam Chomsky, Brett Ratner and Quentin Tarantino share stories of product placement and consumer woes, and other experts break down the marketing and advertising world through demonstrations of how the ad message infiltrates the system, including the use of "neuro-marketing" (the hooking up of a brain to a machine to determine pleasure reactions to ad images).



The Pitch: Morgan Spurlock Throws Down in 'The Greatest Movie Ever Sold'
Photo credit: Darren Marracino for Sony Pictures Classics

Our relationship to how stuff is hawked to us is excessively explored, down to the endgame of Spurlock donning a black suit decorated with the logos of the film's sponsors. How the medium becomes the message is the lesson here, told through a meta-documentary form.

There are some interesting things in this film. The premise of using sponsorship for financing (which is done cagily through product placement in other movies) is brilliant. That idea becoming the theme of the film is also provocative. The reaction to the pitches that Spurlock gives are also funny, as the commerce of America blankly stares at a dippy filmmaker as he tries to convince them that sponsoring a film that essentially mocks them is a good idea.

And give credit to those businesses that jump into the fray. They realized what they were getting into and still had the temerity to go along with the gag. And for their efforts, Spurlock rewards them with very funny pitches and commercial plugs within the film. Just for that effort alone, these businesses and products should be tried out. They've got creativity in their souls. Plus at the same time, Spurlock mocks the conventions of the advertising pitch, down to the absurd story and presentation boards he offers to his sponsors.

Less effective, and more redundant, is the constant beating over the head of the film's premise and point. Within the first half hour, this point (product placement is everywhere, so why don't I just make a movie about it) is made, and then it is made again, and so on, and so on. The interest level of this theme dries up pretty quickly. We don't know if the talking heads Spurlock chooses are experts or friends, they don't seem to add relevance beyond their fame. And that unfortunately includes consumer advocate Ralph Nader, but Spurlock does "get him" in the end.

Spurlock also spends an inordinate amount of time with a broke Florida school district that is selling ad space to fill the budget gap. Although the point here is that, "can't we even get away from it in school," the morality of school funding seems to be more important, no matter how many banner ads flap in the breeze. Yes, there is going to be more of this in the future, but what as a society do we expect, when capitalism is the goal. It's even the goal of education. As the old saying goes, "if you're so smart, why ain't you rich?"



Point Taken: Morgan Spurlock and Writer/Actor Peter Berg in 'The Greatest Movie Ever Sold'
 Photo credit: Darren Marracino for Sony Pictures Classics

Bottom line, the subject is not juicy enough to survive its own cleverness. Spurlock has proved he is a maverick and a creative filmmaker, with of course *Supersize Me* and his "30 Days" TV show. His second big feature documentary, "Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden?" was slightly softer, and this current effort is softer still. Whether it is success or a moderation associated with age, his focus needs to be sharper.

The logo suit, however, is great. He looks like a clown, and in many ways it's the clowns that do the best shilling. Let's hope with the next revelation Morgan Spurlock has, that his inner clown turns a bit more evil.

"The Greatest Story Ever Sold" has a limited release, including Chicago, on April 22th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Morgan Spurlock, and interviews with Ralph Nader, J.J. Abrams, Peter Berg, Big Boi, Noam Chomsky, Brett Ratner and Quentin Tarantino. Written by Morgan Spurlock and Jeremy Chilnick, directed by Morgan Spurlock. Rated "PG-13." [Click here](#) [15] for the HollywoodChicago.com interview of Morgan Spurlock.



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