

Ryan Gosling, George Clooney in 'The Ides of March'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 7, 2011 - 9:35am

- [Brian Tallerico](#) [2]
- [Evan Rachel Wood](#) [3]
- [George Clooney](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Jeffrey Wright](#) [6]
- [Marisa Tomei](#) [7]
- [Max Minghella](#) [8]
- [Movie Review](#) [9]
- [Paul Giamatti](#) [10]
- [Philip Seymour Hoffman](#) [11]
- [Ryan Gosling](#) [12]
- [The Ides of March](#) [13]



Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – George Clooney’s “The Ides of March” is a star-studded political thriller of the variety that was made much more commonly in the ‘70s and would therefore seem like a perfect vehicle to restart for today’s controversial times. We could use more political thrillers with complex dialogue aimed at adults to offset the fact that a vast majority of motion pictures are aimed at children. Sadly, “The Ides of March” is not the film to use as proof that there is still vitality in this genre. A striking disappointment, the film barely works due to the sheer force of talent brought to it by the ensemble but it’s not even close to the landslide victory that it should have been.

Stephen Myers (Ryan Gosling) is the hot, young political talent. He’s the right-hand man to a legendary campaign runner named Paul Zara (Philip Seymour Hoffman), who himself has the ear and sometimes even the voice of Governor Mike Morris (George Clooney), a man widely considered to be the frontrunner for the next President of the United States. Morris is in arguably the most important days of his campaign as he’s watching polls in the day up to the Ohio primary that pundits think will turn the entire Democratic nomination and, given the lack of strength on the other side, likely determine the President.



The Ides of March

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

There are other personalities circling Stephen’s world including rival campaign manager Tom Duffy (Paul Giamatti), reporter Ida Horowicz

(Marisa Tomei), fellow staffer Ben Harpen (Max Minghella), influential Senator Thompson (Jeffrey Wright), and tempting young staff member Molly Stearns (Evan Rachel Wood). Each will play a role in the biggest drama of Stephen's life as he first makes a crucial career mistake and then discovers a potentially campaign-ending secret about his mentor. Neither will be revealed here, but let's just say that Stephen spends most of the movie scrambling to keep his own professional reputation above water while realizing that he could essentially shape the future of the country through his actions.

There is a deep, nearly-fatal flaw in the core of the screenplay for "The Ides of March" by Clooney & Grant Heslov and Beau Willimon in that the protagonist, as well played as he is by Gosling, never feels fully defined. Who is Stephen Myers? If he's the new whiz kid of K Street, the guy who's going to shape politics for years to come, why does he make so many AWFUL decisions? It's impossible to believe, based on his actions here, that Stephen really would have climbed this high up the ladder. So, perhaps "Ides of March" should be viewed as a story about the loss of innocence and idealism (and some intelligence)? Even there, the script doesn't come together because the action of the piece doesn't allow for enough character. Stephen is a cipher, perhaps even to himself, but that makes for a thriller without a hero. As much as Gosling brings to the part (he's typically fantastic), he's just not an engaging lead.



The Ides of March

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

It helps "The Ides of March" significantly that the problems with the protagonist are off-set by a stellar supporting cast. In particular, Hoffman, the most likely Oscar nominee to come out of the piece if there's any, is stellar, totally nailing the world-weary toughness that must come with running campaign after campaign. He plays Paul as a guy who still has that kernel of idealism that tells him he's doing something important but who also knows that it's getting harder to see the good under all the sh*t that comes with modern elections. He's fantastic. Giamatti only has a couple of scenes but he's great as well and Clooney, Wood, and Tomei are well-cast if not overly memorable. I will say that Clooney gets one late movie scene that stands with his best. But one can sort of tell that this character wasn't even in the original source material (he was referenced but not on-stage in the play). He's thinly drawn.

Everything about "The Ides of March" is thinly drawn. It's flat when it needs to peak. And it just doesn't crackle like the '70s thrillers that so clearly inspired it. Perhaps we are in a more cynical time now that makes us demand more of films like "Ides." We know the story of innocence lost in the political world. We can read it every other day on Gawker. We need characters to make it feel more real and "The Ides of March" just doesn't provide them. The cast that Clooney assembled makes up for the deep weaknesses in the screenplay he co-wrote, so the film is a marginal winner but just barely. It's like that candidate who just squeaks out an electoral win but not the popular vote. Ironic if you think about it.

"The Ides of March" stars Ryan Gosling, George Clooney, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Paul Giamatti, Max Minghella, Marisa Tomei, Jeffrey Wright, and Evan Rachel Wood. It was directed by George Clooney and opens nationwide on October 7th, 2011.



[14]

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