

## Portrait of a Cynical Genius in 'The Bitter Buddha'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 15, 2013 - 2:42pm

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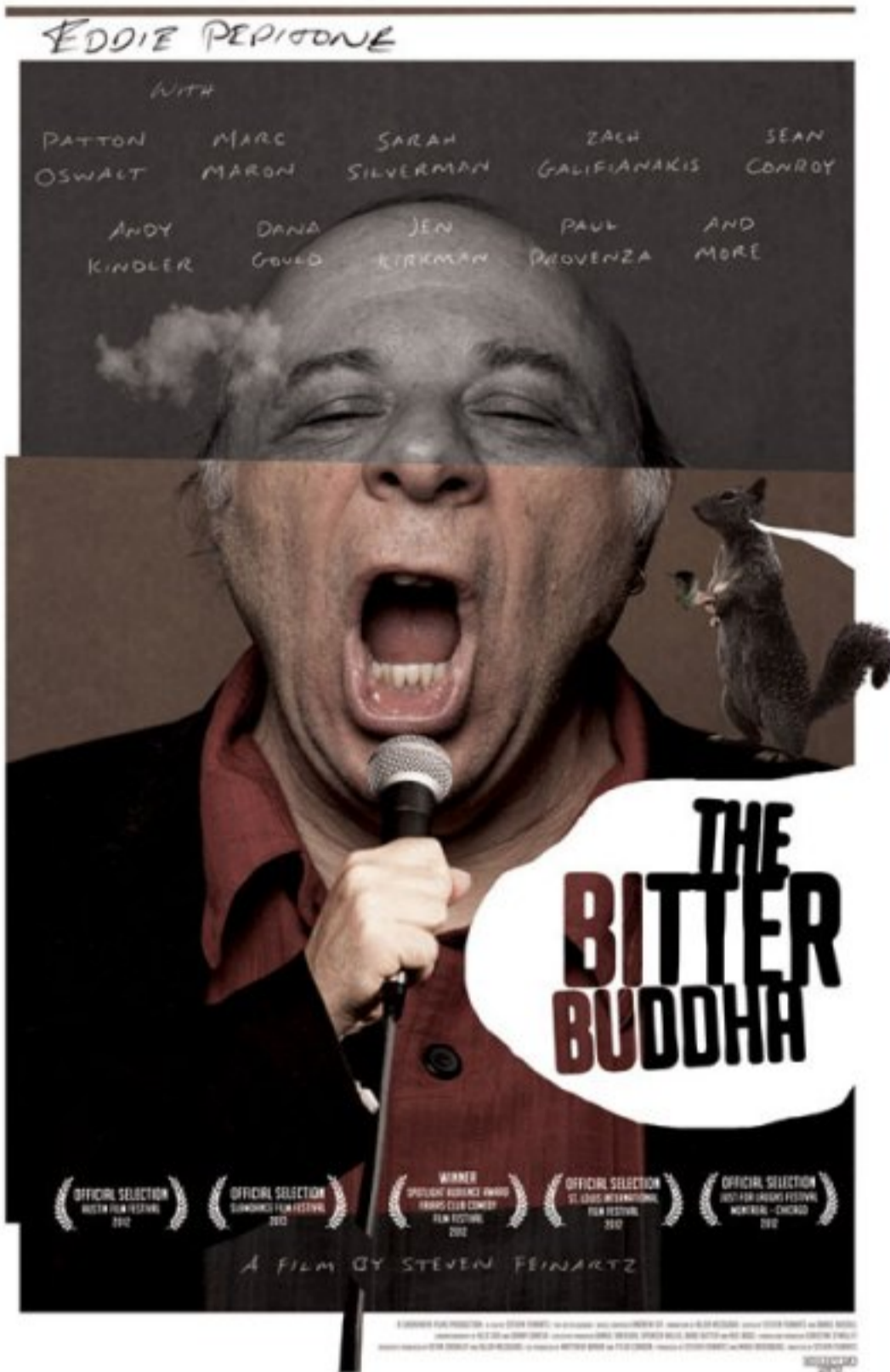


Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – We live in such a cynical world that when a film critic tells you a stand-up comedian is damn funny, it might not hold as much weight as it did in a universe before everyone had an opinion on everything online. So how can I convince you that Eddie Pepitone, the subject of Stephen Feinartz's "The Bitter Buddha," opening this weekend at the Music Box Theatre in Chicago, is damn funny? Do you like Marc Maron, Sarah Silverman, Dana Gould, or the amazing Patton Oswalt? They think he's hilarious. And if that doesn't do it, the movie will. Just trust us.

Eddie Pepitone is a comedian's comedian, a guy who other funny people know and respect but who simply hasn't broken out beyond the critical and comedic communities. Someone compares the record sales of REO Speedwagon to that of Elvis Costello, noting that the former sold many more copies but almost everyone would admit the latter is better artistically. I'm not sure Eddie Pepitone is the Elvis Costello of comedy but the comparison is apt when one sees the variety of respectable, successful comics who took time for a documentary about this cynical genius.

Pepitone's act is hard to put a finger on (which is why widespread success has eluded him as I think producers and even comic club bookers don't know how to sell him). At first, he seems like an angry preacher type like Sam Kinison but he doesn't have Kinison's ego. He has echoes of Lewis Black but not as politically angry. And there's certainly some Rodney Dangerfield in him with his noted lack of respect from the world. Whomever one compares him to, Eddie Pepitone has his own rhythm and his own unique, multi-layered approach. Few comics with this degree of rage have been this self-aware and comical about it. He's a fascinating blend of NYC anger and L.A. trends. He's a wannabe vegan with road rage. 'Nuff said.



The Bitter Buddha  
Photo credit: Bitter Buddha Movie, LLC

In "The Bitter Buddha," Feinartz tracks Pepitone's work on a routine to bring to the legendary Gotham Comedy Club in New York City, the first time that the comic will headline there and the first time he'll be coming back to his hometown in years. His dad, who lives on Staten Island, may even venture into the city for the first time in seven years. Pepitone is over 50, ancient in show business, and he's wondering if he'll make it while auditioning for sitcoms and praying that "Bob's Burgers" uses him again. And yet Pepitone seems very much a part of today's cynical comedy scene. He fits right in with the increasingly-popular Marc Maron, with whom he does stage shows.

Not to spoil anything but Pepitone's Gotham set is fantastic. In fact, I wish the movie had included more of it, maybe even the entire thing. "The Bitter Buddha" kind of feels like it's over just as Pepitone is about to make that next step to stardom. But perhaps that's the point. Perhaps we'll look back on this in years and wonder how Eddie Pepitone was ever not famous. Or perhaps, like the great Bill Hicks, we won't recognize his brilliance until after he's gone. Which is not to imply he's going anywhere soon. I'd hate to get that in Eddie's mind. Lord knows he doesn't need anything else to worry about.

*"The Bitter Buddha" stars Eddie Pepitone, Patton Oswalt, Sarah Silverman, Marc Maron, and dozens of other comedians. It opens on March 15, 2013 at the Music Box Theatre in Chicago, IL and is also currently available On Demand.*



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