

Superb Allegorical Story Told in Essential 'Christine'

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Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – In one of the great American films of the year, character actor Rebecca Hall interprets a based-on-truth incident from the 1970s, as she portrays the title character of "Christine." The film encapsulates the nature of mental health, gender issues and the pursuit of random numbers.

This is a deliberately told and provocative story by director Antonio Campos, and he tells it in a unique atmosphere. It unfolds in a series of linear and random scenes, all destined toward the endgame, which actually happened. The essence of the main character Christine is one we all can deeply empathize with, given that it is tied into a step-by-step loss of control within her ills and society's ills. This was America towards the end of the Watergate crisis (the summer of 1974), and the crumbling of institutions that is occurring in Richard Nixon's White House is paralleled with the breakdown of Christine's tenuous existence, and although she is a reporter, she cannot discern her own collapsing nature.

Christine Chubbick (Rebecca Hall) is an on-air features reporter for a low wattage TV news show in Sarasota, Florida. She is bamboozled by her tough and crass station manager Michael (Tracy Letts) and anchorman George (Michael C. Hall), who she has a secret crush on. She lives with her mother (J. Smith-Cameron), after having had a nervous breakdown at her former job in Boston.



Rebecca Hall as the Title Character in 'Christine'

Photo credit: *The Orchard*

She is given an opportunity to up her game at the station, after confronting Michael for better assignments. At the same time, anchorman George is showing some interest in her, which confuses her more than excites her. This all starts to take a toll on her fragile mentality, and Christine begins to slide downward, leading to her to commit suicide while reporting live on the air.

This is not giving away the ending, because that ending already occurred. This is a true incident, and interestingly the footage of the real Christine's actual demise has never been seen (the wife of the station manager claims to have the tape, but will never show it). Suffice to say it is shocking as depicted in the film, only because Christine is a sympathetic character as we follow her, and plainly she wasn't meant for a world so unbearable.

Rebecca Hall (probably best known for Woody Allen's "Vicky Cristina Barcelona") embraces the role of Christine as if she is channeling her, or channeling the representation of her. She rolls through the various circumstances of Christine's life with an edge-of-tomorrow sorrow, not so much passive aggressive as clueless aggressive. Her interpretation embodies the consequences of being a woman in the 1970s, as they first challenged the workplace, in tandem with her strained inner struggle. In a way, she also symbolizes the summer of '74, when a president is failing the nation – while John Denver croons "Annie's Song" on the airwaves – undertaking a false facade to mask a corrupted system.



Christine Confronts Station Manager Michael (Tracy Letts) in 'Christine'

Photo credit: The Orchard

The supporting cast intensifies the impending crisis. Tracy Letts, who is having a killer year on film (see also "Indignation") portrays a "Lou Grant" in reality – a sexist, ruthless toadie of a station manager, who doesn't care about people as long as they're delivering the ratings. His dismissiveness of Christine is chilling and magnificently played. Michael C. Hall ("Dexter") is back in a role slightly against type – his anchorman is a bizarro Ted Baxter who is an ex-jock, and has the devil-don't-care attitude to match. Both are great characters.

This is a film to savor as an after sense. It lingers on the consciousness like a fog clouding a window. And it doesn't dissipate that easily, the cloudiness remains for awhile – obscuring the light and darkness that goes on through that fog. What occurs in the film is never ending, until we work to clear the way, and finally acknowledge what is on the other side.

"Christine" opens in Chicago on November 18th, part of a nationwide roll out. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Rebecca Hall, Michael C. Hall, Tracy Letts, J-Smith Camerson and Maria Dizzia. Written by Craig Shilowich. Directed by Antonio Campos. Rated "R"



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [16]

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