



FILM: **BOMBSHELL**

FDG RATING: 3.3 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Jay Roach: *director*
Charlize Theron: *actress, Megyn Kelly*
John Lithgow: *actor, Roger Ailes*
Nicole Kidman: *actress, Gretchen Carlson*
Margot Robbie: *actress, Kayla Pospisil*

DATE: May 17, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **BOMBSHELL**

A stellar cast: Charlize Theron as Megyn Kelly, star anchor of Fox News; Nicole Kidman as Gretchen Carlson, host of Fox and Friends; and Margot Robbie as young ambitious Kayla Pospisil, play the women who brought down the Fox News mogul lecherous womanizer Roger Ailes, (an outstanding John Lithgow) in the 2019 film Bombshell, exposing the system of sexual harassment that he used to run his network.

The film begins with the 2016 presidential campaign in full swing, and Kelly, before the Republican debate hosted by Fox News, is preparing to lob a grenade at candidate Donald Trump in the form of a question about his egregious treatment of women. But on the day of the debate, she gets violently sick. It turns out that someone had poisoned her coffee. The debate creates headlines with Trump responding to Megyn's accusations with his typical vile remarks. But Ailes is a right-wing ideologue, who loves Trump. Kelly, tough, a former lawyer, known for her quick wit and contentious interview style, is emboldened to address the misogynistic harassment she has experienced, a side she has kept hidden as Fox News continues to sell a kind of on-air pornography showcasing blonds in short skirts sitting behind plexiglass desks that expose their legs.

An absolute cringingly uncomfortable scene is when a pretty blond, naïve millennial, Kayla, (not based on an actual person, but rather a composite to typify the initiation of aspiring young journalists) sidles up to Ailes' assistant to try and get closer to the top dog, and is then invited to Ailes private office, where we see his ogre-like qualities. He knows how to woo young talent, he's gentle, fatherly, a good listener; as he grooms her talking about loyalty and what he requires from those who want to be on television. "It's a visual medium" he explains and tells Kayla to get up and do a spin for him, which is his ritual but then, as he asks her to hike her skirt a little higher, then higher still, Robbie lets us feel the pressure-cooker agony of what's going on inside her.

It's Gretchen Carlson, also a harassment victim, who gets the ball rolling after being fired by Fox. Gretchen decides to take action when her lawyers come up with the strategy of having her sue Roger Ailes, personally; that way, the company can't come back at her. But for the suit to stick, other women must come forward which Megyn and Kayla decide to do. It is Gretchen's extremely calculated shrewd approach using tapes of conversations that gives the women the confidence to pursue their battle.

Several discussion participants felt that they couldn't relate to the female characters who seemed a bit like caricatures without depth. They really didn't come alive noted another participant. Had the story been about young women in jobs similar to our own personal experiences, we might have felt more empathy for the women. As noted by another participant, a story without high profile characters. would have been easily squashed. But even a story showing the women fighting against harassment and losing would be more relatable, commented another. One resident reviewer thought the women didn't seem angry enough about having to keep their mouths shut to get ahead. Ailes imagined that since he had built the network, anything questionable he did would be excused. Another participant was actually surprised that such prominent, successful news women were held hostage to a boss who expects sexual favors. Even though Gretchen won the suit, Ailes was let go with a \$40million exit payment. Actually, in total, more than 20 women accused Ailes. He was forced to resign from his position in July of that year, 2016, receiving a \$40 million exit payment. He died a year later, at 77.

An important story that could have been told better, Bombshell mustered a score of 3.3 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).

See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net

www.filmdiscussiongroup.com

