



## FILM: I TONYA

FDG RATING: 3.4 ☺☺☺☺○  
Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Craig Gillespie: *director*  
Margot Robbie: *actress, Tonya Harding*  
Allison Janney: *actress, LaVona (Tonya's mother)*

DATE: February 18, 2018

### DISCUSSION SUMMARY: I TONYA

You may remember seeing the incident on TV when on January 6, 1994 figure skating fan favorite Nancy Kerrigan was bludgeoned on her knee with blunt heavy weapon after practice for the Olympic trials competition. The prime suspect was Tonya Harding's "bodyguard", an assailant hired by Tonya's ex-husband. Tonya Harding, with a reputation for being rough and gritty trailer trash, was Kerrigan's competitive rival. Nancy recovered in time to compete at 1994 Winter Olympics, where she won a silver medal. It was bad enough for the incident to happen. Some of us had no interest in delving deeper, so the film was a bit of a waste of time and a waste of talent.

Others appreciated the mockumentary style and enjoyed the interview approach to get each character's take on what happened. The narrator is never a reliable source so we still don't know the truth. But we do see Harding's side of the story which was overlooked when the media rallied around Kerrigan.

The film reveals Harding's relationship with her chain-smoking, pushy, stage mom, La Vona, who believes in the motivational power of verbal abuse, (a stellar performance by Allison Janney who as one viewer observed, stole every scene she was in). We see Tonya's "trailer trash" life and understand why after showing exceptional skating ability at age 4, skating was her escape and savior. She was determined to have her skating prowess recognized (in 1991 she was the first American woman to complete a triple axel during a competition) although she didn't fit the skating world's mold and was treated unfairly by the skating commission who wanted a "darling", not a gritty, unrefined athlete.

Harding was a fighter both in competition and in life, marrying her first boyfriend who also physically abused her. Sadly, she was penalized more severely than the others for her involvement in the Kerrigan incident, after admitting that she was not involved in the attack but pleaded guilty to conspiring to hinder prosecution. She was banned for life from the Figure Skating Association which left her devastated. (Jeff Gillooly, Harding's former husband, and three others, including her bodyguard, Shawn Eckhardt, accused of having hatched the plot, spent a short time in prison. Harding ended up competing in boxing and other combat sports.)

Margo Robbie's portrayal of Harding was applauded, but a few discussion participants thought a "character" actress would be more believable since Margo's natural, very pretty femininity shines through her best efforts at being tough and gritty.

If the film's purpose was to paint a more positive picture of Harding, the mockumentary style and buffoon bodyguard erased any sense of credibility. The story is too painful for a comedy. So it really didn't succeed in either area. It was more like a parade of dysfunctional and toxic relationships as aptly described by one resident reviewer. On the flip side, it was quirky, original, and engaging for some discussion participants who said the film surprisingly exceeded their low expectations.

I Tonya garnered enough unexpected applause to score 3.4 on our scale of 1 to 5. 5 is the best.



See you at the movies!

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