

# I'm Not There keeps Dylan shrouded

Watching multiple actors play Bob Dylan is frustrating, but ultimately rewarding

## filmreview

### I'm Not There

Directed by Todd Haynes  
Starring Christian Bale, Cate Blanchett, Marcus Carl Franklin, Richard Gere, Heath Ledger, and Ben Whishaw  
Garneau Theatre

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The current trend in the mainstream film industry today is to produce biographical pictures of legendary, recently deceased music artists—the Ray Charles biopic *Ray*, Johnny Cash's *Walk the Line*, and director Gus Van Sant's Kurt Cobain-inspired *Last Days* come to mind. Director Todd Hayne's latest feature, *I'm Not There*—which, according to the film's opening credits, is “inspired by the many lives of Bob Dylan”—breaks this trend by portraying the life of the living legend through six different actors of varying age, gender, and even ethnicity.

Like a kaleidoscopic dream, *I'm Not There* can be best described as a loose portrayal of Dylan's life at varying stages of his career, spanning the '50s, '60s, and '70s. With its chopped-up narrative, the film is perhaps as fractured and complex as Dylan's personal and professional life. Marcus Carl Franklin portrays Dylan as a rail-hopping African-American youth, escaping his turbulent past while entertaining and befriending hobos and good samaritans throughout his journey of

discovery in the late 1950s.

Fast forward to the early '60s, where Dylan is depicted as the character Arthur Rimbaud (portrayed by actor Ben Whishaw), a young man in his early 20s being interviewed by government officials about his true identity. The Arthur Rimbaud scenes, filmed entirely in black and white film, are scattered throughout the movie, conveying Dylan's changing persona and musical styles. Such chameleon-like changes include Dylan's emergence on the early '60s Greenwich music scene as singer Jack Rollins (Christian Bale), singing clean, innocent-sounding folk music tunes while making gains as a film and television star.

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With the turbulent social and political events of the '70s, the film focuses on the life of Robbie Clark (Heath Ledger), a character on the verge of divorce and radical change. Once these adjustments occur, the next stage of Dylan's life is marked by Cate Blanchett's convincing portrayal of Dylan as a mainstream rock star who parties with the likes of The Beatles and drunkenly insults fashion models while passing out on alcohol and illegal substances—a literal and

metaphorical breakdown of the artist during the late '60s. Fortunately, Dylan's revival is represented by Richard Gere's portrayal of an older Dylan—a reclusive man, living in a rural, forested area near a town littered by exotic circus performers and frontier-era townsfolk; a depiction of Dylan's later life as a singer returning to his original country music roots.

Each actor's variation of Dylan provides a convincing portrayal and a unique perspective of the musician's life, especially with the film's many subplots, historical events, and narratives. All of these are presented in an asynchronous, non-chronological order, interspersed with documentary-style interview, historical archival news footage, and dream-like sequences. This non-chronological style may prove confusing or difficult for some viewers to grasp, especially with the film constantly jumping back and forth throughout the timeline of Dylan's life.

However, the real star of *I'm Not There* is the music. The film's soundtrack is comprised of over two dozen songs written or performed by Bob Dylan, along with covers by Iggy Pop, Sonic Youth, Ritche Havens, and other contemporary artists and bands—a soundtrack that is perhaps more comprehensive than any of Dylan's *Greatest Hits* albums.

*I'm Not There* is another coming-of-age type film, richly infused and illustrated with music, where the journey throughout Dylan's life is more entertaining and important than the final destination and the film's ending.



# The Mighty Carlins offers dark, hilarious take on family and alcohol

## theatrereview

### The Mighty Carlins

Runs until 20 January  
Directed by Michael Clark  
Written by Collin Doyle  
Starring John Wright, Frederick Zbryski, and James Hamilton

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The word *fuck* can be quite versatile, no matter how it's used. In the case of *The Mighty Carlins*, the expletive certainly receives more than its share of stage time over the course of the funny and insightful play that examines serious issues such as family dysfunction, alcoholism, mental illness, and suicide.

*The Mighty Carlins* depicts old curmudgeon Leo Carlin (John Wright) and his two adult sons, Mike (Frederick Zbryski) and Davey (James Hamilton), who have a reunion and a “sharing circle” once a year on the anniversary of the boys' mother's death. Fuelled by large amount of alcohol, the event frequently degenerates into accusations and shouting matches, along with the occasional body part ending up between someone else's teeth.

The actors portraying the three men use this performance to show why they've earned the reputation of being three of Edmonton's finest performers. John Wright as Leo Carlin creates a cross between Jack Lemmon in *Grumpy Old Men* and Archie Bunker from *All in the Family*. He's gruff, crass, racist, and applies just the right

amount of cantankerousness when delivering some lines while adding a touch of gentleness when necessary. Evoking sympathy for the alcoholic Leo isn't be an easy task, yet Wright is able to incorporate enough nuanced sensitivity into Leo's swearing and insults to do just this.

Zbryski and Hamilton are also perfectly cast as sons Mike and Davey. Zbryski matches Wright's strength and stage presence, while Hamilton brilliantly counterpoints the two rougher characters with the more fragile and sensitive Davey. Together, the trio depict a dysfunctional family that has been, and continues to be, ravaged by alcoholic hopelessness.

As we learn more details about Leo's relationship with his wife, we see many of the same patterns taking hold in Davey as he relates tales of his own relationship with his girlfriend. *The Mighty Carlins* portrays a potent message about dysfunctional patterns of behaviour and how they manifest themselves from one generation to another—a message that might have been lost had it not been carried out by such a strong trio of actors.

Due to the difficult topics explored in this play, the group expends enormous amounts of energy conveying one emotion after another. At times, Wright's and Zbryski's faces actually turn red as they accuse each other of terrible things while cursing and gesturing wildly. Given the moderately sized set, the men don't overpower the space, instead using it to their advantage to portray the limited and broken world of alcoholism in which they all live. Furthermore, the actors never run out of steam, maintaining their energy levels and level of emotions for the entire piece.



Tackling such difficult topics can't be easy, but the script infuses enough humour and lighter moments to keep the audience's interest and to help create more human characters. The humour is dark and the one-liners sharp, supported by the actors' wonderful comic timing.

While the use of the word *fuck* borders on gratuitous at times, it also perfectly keeps with the theme of the play: the script's crass

language and conversational topics, along with the run-down appearance of Leo's kitchen, outwardly reflect the brokenness of the characters' lives.

This fantastic production of *The Mighty Carlins* allows the audience to feel compassion and sympathy for this trio of highly flawed characters. And that's pretty fucking amazing.