Knives Out

Knives Out (Dir. Rian Johnson). Starring: Daniel Craig, Ana de Armas, Chris Evans. Writer-director Rian Johnson follows his divisive galaxy far, far away blockbuster, *The Last Jedi*, with this ebullient murder mystery set in and around a remote country mansion. Daniel Craig plays Benoit Blanc, a Hercule Poirot-esque detective (who nonetheless speaks in a hilariously incongruous American Southern accent) investigating the untimely demise of mega-successful novelist Harlan Thrombey (Christopher Plummer). Thrombey's to-a-one spiteful family (played by, among others, Jamie Lee Curtis, Michael Shannon, Chris Evans, Toni Collette and Don Johnson, each clearly having a blast) are all suspects. But there's also something dodgy about the housekeeper, Marta Cabrera (Ana de Armas, the movie's beguiling heart and soul), who tended to the shrewd, sharp-witted patriarch is his final hours. Johnson does well maintaining the aura of suspense and misdirection. And he allows the story's more provocative undercurrents (very much of this particular moment) to emerge gradually. The film's surface cleverness, at which Johnson proves himself impressively adept, masks something profoundly and pointedly corrosive—a sublime dab of politicized arsenic on the luxuriant old lace. [PG-13] ★★★★

The Irishman (Dir. Martin Scorsese). Starring: Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, Joe Pesci. Martin Scorsese and gangster stories go together like peanut butter and jelly. Still, his 3.5-hour adaptation of *I Heard You Paint Houses*, the as-told-to-memoir of labor union leader/mob hitman Frank "The Irishman" Sheeran, surprises. Though it has some of the propulsive energy of *Goodfellas* and *Casino*, the overall tone is harrowingly melancholic, focusing on the, decades-spanning recollections of an elderly Sheeran, played wonderfully, at many different ages and with the help of some judiciously utilized digital spackle, by Scorsese muse Robert De Niro. Did this gun-toting, Candide-like hoodlum befriend and ultimately murder labor union majordomo Jimmy Hoffa (Al Pacino, equally excellent)? Or is he spinning a colorful tale to give his relatively unremarkable, and often inhospitable, existence some mythic meaning? Many legacies are being grappled with here, both on and off camera. (A hearty welcome back, as well, to Scorsese regular Joe Pesci who plays Sheeran's unnervingly cool

most vocal defenders—made a clown show of barging into the room, ostensibly to protest that the deposition was not being taken in an open session.

Some of those who participated in the sit-in had the right to attend the hearing anyway; some didn't. But the protest had nothing to do with substance. The point was to stage a noisy, made-for-television stunt in Trump's defense that could divert attention, if only for a day, from the facts of the case. The interlopers ordered pizza and brought in Chick-fil-A. Some took their cellphones into the secure room, which is very much against the rules.

I have deliberately not mentioned anyone's party affiliation, because the contrast I see between the juvenile behavior in the basement and the Cummings ceremony in Statuary Hall is more fundamental. It is between foolishness and seriousness, between nonsense and meaning, between trying to win the news cycle and trying to serve the nation.

Cummings knew the difference. We have lost a great man. The angels must be lining up to dance with him.

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trouble.

So, if you are an elected Republican who wants to remain loyal to the president, you need to defend an indefensible act of corruption, explain a massive national security blunder and sacrifice your moral integrity to excuse racism. And add to this the certain knowledge that Trump would not defend you for half a second if it didn't immediately benefit him.

This creates a political environment in which conviction has moved from impossible to unlikely. The national erosion of Trump's support has been significant. This has removed the political risk for Democrats moving forward with impeachment. But the removal of the president will probably depend on public opinion among Republicans in 20 red or purple states. In most of such places, at least for Republican officeholders, the political cost of criticizing the president remains high. Growing support for Trump's impeachment has generally resulted from the hardening of existing opposition, not the wearing away of support in the GOP.

Given the depth and durability of America's political divisions, and the deep redness of many red states, this may never happen. Yet for Republican senators, the full cost of complicity in Trump's corruption is becoming clear.

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and collected boss Russell Bufalino.) Scorsese orchestrates this introspective epic like a funereal dirge that, even at its bleakest, carries you to provocative and poignant heights. [R] ★★★★1/2

Ford v Ferrari (Dir. James Mangold). Starring: Christian Bale, Matt Damon, Tracy Letts. James Mangold's compelling trifle about the late-1960s racing rivalry between car companies Ford and Ferrari is the epitome of dad cinema, a film for any red-blooded dad who likes his Nascar with a dash of sentiment. Vehicle designer Carroll Shelby (Matt Damon) is tasked by Henry Ford II (Letts) with building a prize racer for the prestigious Le Mans competition. He enlists loose cannon driver Ken Miles (Bale) to his cause, despite the fact that loggerheads of varying kinds are assured. Don't you doubt, though, that these men-among-men will eventually put aside their virile differences and place that checkered finish line in their mutual sights. The film is good for what it is, though Mangold deserves credit for counteracting the corporate tongue-bath implied by the film's title. This is more a movie about two people caught in the capitalist machine, each doing their best to put love of sport and of family above money and other hollow validations. Your dad will shed a tear, at least, and sometimes that's enough. [PG-13] ★★★

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood (Dir. Marielle Heller). Starring: Tom Hanks, Matthew Rhys, Chris Cooper. Everybody loves Mister Rogers, though there was reason to suspect that this semi-fictionalized take on the soft-spoken, unflappably kind children's show host would lean hard into sugar and schmaltz. In the hands of *Can You Ever Forgive Me?*-helmer Marielle Heller, however, it becomes something much more interesting. Rogers (Tom Hanks) is more of an enigmatic supporting character, guru to cynical reporter Lloyd Vogel (Rhys)—loosely based on real-life *Esquire* writer Tom Junod—who has some familial baggage that could stand to be unpacked. Working with the great cinematographer Jody Lee Lipes, Heller creates a stimulating visual dialectic between Rogers' peaceable world and Vogel's jaundiced one (several key sequences are even shot on a similar kind of video to *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*). The film's overarching gentleness—which allows for both men's perspectives to register with equal, empathetic weight—proves to be its keenest quality. [PG] ★★★★ ∎

Al Pacino in *The Irishman*