



Christian McKay stars as Orson Welles in *Me and Orson Welles*, FirstPerson Cinema

## Review: ***Me and Orson Welles***

By Robert F. Adams / Special to Casa

**F**EATURING Zac Efron, Claire Danes, and the British actor Christian McKay in a breakthrough role, *Me and Orson Welles* tells the story of the historic 1937 Mercury Theatre production of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, an Italian-Fascist, modern-dress version.

The question anyone might ask in venturing to see this film is whether or not the actor who plays Orson Welles will be convincing. In so many biographical movies, actors playing figures from history are staid (reference Tim Robbin's *The Cradle Will Rock*, also about Welles, among others). Exceptions are few, and may include Cate Blanchett's portrayal of Katherine Hepburn in *The Aviator*. Christian McKay is another exception. A former concert pianist, he has fathomed the charm, cruelty, and genius of the young Orson Welles. His amazing performance makes the movie a delightful visit to pre-WWII Broadway, where a truly American Theatre was emerging: unstoppable, pertinent, and energetic.

And what fascinates audiences about Orson Welles of the 1930s? Is there a vital story about the rise of a figure whose contributions to the development of American theatre and film have never been equaled? Welles' early promise and self-destructive nature has been captured

in this film.

Outside of this central performance, the movie is an engaging coming of age tale with Zac Efron (a dead-ringer for the young Tyrone Power) who lands a pivotal role in the production. The interesting part of his journey is how he interacts with the dominating Welles and the other personalities of the Mercury Theatre.

Well-cast and directed by Richard Linklater, the scenes have a rapid, spitfire pace. The excitement of radio broadcasting has not been portrayed as vividly since Woody Allen's *Radio Days*. Claire Danes plays an ambitious theatre administrator and the portrayal is both sexy and chilling, and a performance from the young theatre sensation Zoe Kazan (the granddaughter of Elia Kazan) is a highlight.

Unforgettable, this film is a late-year treasure in 2009 cinema.

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