

Vidal Sassoon: The Movie



Dir. Craig Teper. 2010. PG. 90mins. Documentary.

"It was the age of the golden pussy," recalls Vidal Sassoon wistfully in the profile that bears his name—and if the hairdresser's sexual exploits in *Swinging London* come as a shock, wait until you hear about his days as an Israeli freedom fighter. A labor of love from first-time director Craig Teper, *Vidal Sassoon: The Movie* unpacks the man's story with a dramatic flair that might be mistaken for Zoolanderific, if it weren't so aptly accessible. Taking the subject's lead (via thoughtful interviews with the octogenarian), the movie is a tale of reinvention: an impoverished East End childhood, years in an orphanage, singing choir in synagogue and—most crucially—experiencing shame at his Cockney accent that wouldn't let him through the door of any modern salon. (Not that such emporiums really existed—yet.) So he changed.

Of course, the documentary takes off with his five-point bob, the geometric style Sassoon invented circa 1963 out of pure motion and a vision of empowered femininity.



YOU'VE GOT THE LOOK
Models flaunt their bobs.

(Can one really say the man doesn't deserve the gush?) For the black-and-white footage of Sassoon working on Mia Farrow alone, the film is crucial for movie lovers, a missing link in the context of cinema studies and a keyhole into the evolution of onscreen style. Teper is less sure-handed on the personal details that his scope would require;

the hubristic rise and fall of Sassoon's product line is only touched upon, while a tragic family suicide adds little depth. Even with those loose ends unsnipped, there's much of substance here, as we sail through the 1960s and '70s on a perfectly coiffed permanent wave. (Opens Fri; Village East. See also story, page 57.)—*Joshua Rothkopf*

The Eagle



FILM OF THE WEEK

IS THAT A SWORD IN YOUR POCKET? Tatum assumes the battle position.



Dir. Kevin Macdonald. 2011. PG-13. 111mins. Channing Tatum, Jamie Bell, Donald Sutherland.

Do you like movies about gladiators? Well, lend me your ears: *The Eagle* will more than gratify your sword-and-sandal cravings. Roman centurion Marcus Aquila (Tatum, whose abs are as adorably key-lit as Joan Crawford's peepers) is sent to

the British boondocks to command a corps. He's the offspring of an infamous general who, it's rumored, abandoned his soldiers in battle and lost their precious standard: a golden eagle. Marcus's troops therefore look skeptically upon him (like father, like son?), until he valiantly proves himself. But the price of such heroism is an injury that results in an honorable discharge—an embarrassing fate for a young military man. Then

Marcus hears whispers that the lost eagle has been seen up north, in the no-man's-land beyond Hadrian's Wall. So off he sets, with his faithful slave, Esca (Bell), in tow.

What follows is a beautifully executed piece of pulp fiction, possessed of the stripped-down momentum of Neil Marshall's *Centurion* (which it most resembles), without that film's self-satisfied B-movie pretenses. The choice to have American actors play the conquering Romans gives the story the right amount of modish allegorical kick, while Tatum and Bell are perfectly paired. They know just how far to push the master-servant dynamic, and the attendant eroticism, without succumbing to too-cool-for-school bromantic irony. There are a few missteps—namely, too much of Anthony Dod Mantle's jitter-cam during battle sequences and some stray moments of let's-go-native exoticizing after Marcus and Esca are captured by the warmongering Seal People. These latter scenes, in particular, recall the borderline-racist hash director Kevin Macdonald made of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in *The Last King of Scotland* (he should stick to historical fantasy), though they're scattered enough that the movie's many virtues reign supreme. (Opens Fri.)—*Keith Uhlich*

Cedar Rapids



Dir. Miguel Arteta. 2011. R. 86mins. Ed Helms, John C. Reilly, Anne Heche, Isiah Whitlock Jr.

You get not one but two comedies with this tale of a small-town insurance agent (Helms) getting into wacky misadventures during a weekend conference in the titular city. (Whoa, two comedies? you can hear the film's sheltered, super-square hero saying, being the kind of guy who gets wide-eyed over hotel pools or free peanuts on airplanes. Awesome!) One is a wry study of everyday people—a speciality of executive producer Alexander Payne—where even the kitschiest Americana touches and khaki-wearing provincial rubes are treated with amused affection. Here, the tacky decor of a chain-hotel bar doubles as social anthropology and a visual gag.

The other is an attempt at a frat-pack gut-buster, in which the guy from *The Hangover* accidentally smokes crack, gets into fistfights and endures humiliation from a foul-mouthed alpha-male, played by Will Ferrell's usual foil (Reilly, in prime macho-stupid mode). One minute, our hero is smitten with a hot fellow conventioner (Heche) and the sense that a world exists outside the cloistered safety of his usual Podunk existence. The next, naked men are hugging at inappropriate moments, and people are talking loudly about their beer-shits at breakfast.

So is *Cedar Rapids* a tarted-up look at the quiet desperation of Midwestern males in a mundane world, or more of a kinder, gentler gross-out? Director Miguel Arteta (*Chuck and Buck*) never really makes up his mind, nor does he fuse these two styles together into anything resembling a coherent hybrid. Instead, the movie just ping-pongs between empathetic chuckles at Helms's charming social awkwardness and putting him through a raunchfest ringer. Occasionally, Arteta milks a laugh and a life lesson out of the comic schizophrenia. Then you go back to checking your watch. (Opens Fri.)—*David Fear*



WALLFLOWER Helms, center, climbs his way to competitive corporate glory.

Film

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HAIR, THERE AND EVERYWHERE
The dapper Sassoon helped turn cuts into a cult of beauty.

Veni, Vidi, Vidal!

The man who helped style the world's coifs gets the documentary treatment. By **Stephen Garrett**

Quick, name some of the great monuments of 20th-century design: Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building; Marcel Breuer's Whitney Museum of American Art; Vidal Sassoon's five-point haircut. Wait, what?

You're forgiven if you only recall Vidal Sassoon as the name on a series of shampoos and conditioners, or as the elegant man on early-'80s TV commercials who insisted, "If you don't look good, we don't look good." (Extra points if you remember Mia Farrow giving Sassoon a shout-out for her iconic pixie 'do in *Rosemary's Baby*.) But a groundbreaker? "His work helped launch the revolution of the '60s," explains director Craig Teper, whose documentary on the British hairdresser, *Vidal Sassoon: The Movie*, places the style icon in a much broader cultural context. "Most people said, 'Oh, he's a real person.' But it's difficult to think of someone who affected their industry as much as Vidal. Henry Ford isn't the only one who innovated cars. Steve Jobs isn't the only technology innovator. But Vidal changed every single aspect of contemporary beauty. It wasn't just how one cut hair; it was the way hairdressers dressed, your manner of speech, the level of service, the way the salon looked. It freed women from having to sleep in rollers. He dragged

the whole industry kicking and screaming into the modern world."

Teper's portrait certainly makes a compelling case. Producer Michael Gordon (founder of Bumble and bumble) originally wanted to commission a short tribute to honor his friend as an 80th-birthday present, and hired the director for the job. But as Teper became more familiar with Sassoon and his story, he pushed Gordon to let him make it an all-access, feature-length film. It wasn't just the story of a man redefining 'dos, Teper insisted; this was the story of a man who redefined and refined himself. Born a poor Jew in Depression-era England, raised in an orphanage and yoked with a thick Cockney accent, Sassoon was someone who'd struggled to rise above his station in a class-conscious society. During an early attempt to get a salon job, a receptionist heard his voice and told the future stylist to the stars to learn proper English first. Most would see that as an insult; Sassoon saw it as instruction. He took elocution lessons for three years from a diction coach at the Old Vic theater, and learned not only how to speak more properly but also (and most important) how to project, charm and seduce.

And as Sassoon himself recounts, once he'd reinvented a rough, Dickensian street urchin as a gent of

taste and talent, he still had to change the image of his chosen profession. "You have to remember, 50 or 60 years ago hairdressers were treated like pariahs," says the 83-year-old Sassoon, talking to *TONY* over the phone. "Hairdressers were making people look pretty, but did it last? For me, however, it was an art form. I wanted to eliminate the superfluous." Sassoon's inspiration, he claims, was the Bauhaus movement; as we see in the film, his great innovation was to cut hair according to the bone structure, minding the shape of a client's cheeks, jaws and head. He brought geometry into the mix, using the clean lines of midcentury modernist architecture as his guide, and created looks that were tailor-made to a person's features, beautiful shapes that were as eye-catching as they were unique—and, most of all, easy to maintain.

Vidal Sassoon: The Movie covers the stylist's Horatio Alger-like narrative from his days of plucky salon crimping to his reign over a multimillion-dollar financial empire. Along the way, we see his successes: When his technique exploded in the early '60s, it led to the opening of

Sassoon Hair Academies to train more practitioners; the '70s saw the launching of a merchandising freight train of hair products. In Teper's eyes, the branding of Sassoon into a household name was inevitable; it was the natural consequence of Vidal's mission to bring the hair equivalent of haute couture to the masses. "He democratized haircuts," the filmmaker says. "If you went to a Sassoon salon, you would see a duchess sitting next to a receptionist sitting next to an actress. And everyone got the same kind of haircut." The fact that Hollywood had taken note and summoned him to style its stars only increased the icon's cachet. Sassoon remembers being requested to snip, shape and

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whiten the hair of Peter O'Toole for *Lawrence of Arabia*. "The whiter you went, the bluer the eyes became," Sassoon points out. "John

Gielgud said, 'Peter, if you make him any prettier, they'll have to call it *Florence of Arabia!*'"

And then there was that catchphrase, a ubiquitous Reagan-era mantra that helped push Sassoon into the stratosphere, which he still hears people invoke. "I went to a dinner party and I was introduced to Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy," the icon explains. "And Kennedy said, 'If you don't look good, we don't look good: I was inspired by that!' I don't know how it inspired him at all, but he said it."

Vidal Sassoon: The Movie opens Fri 11 at Village East.