

Features

'Clean and Sober' details gritty struggle with drug addiction

By Judith Trojan

New York (NC) — Actor Michael Keaton can hardly be accused of selling out for pretty boy roles. The star gives a tour de force performance in "Clean and Sober" (Warner Bros.), looking bloated and down-right blotto.

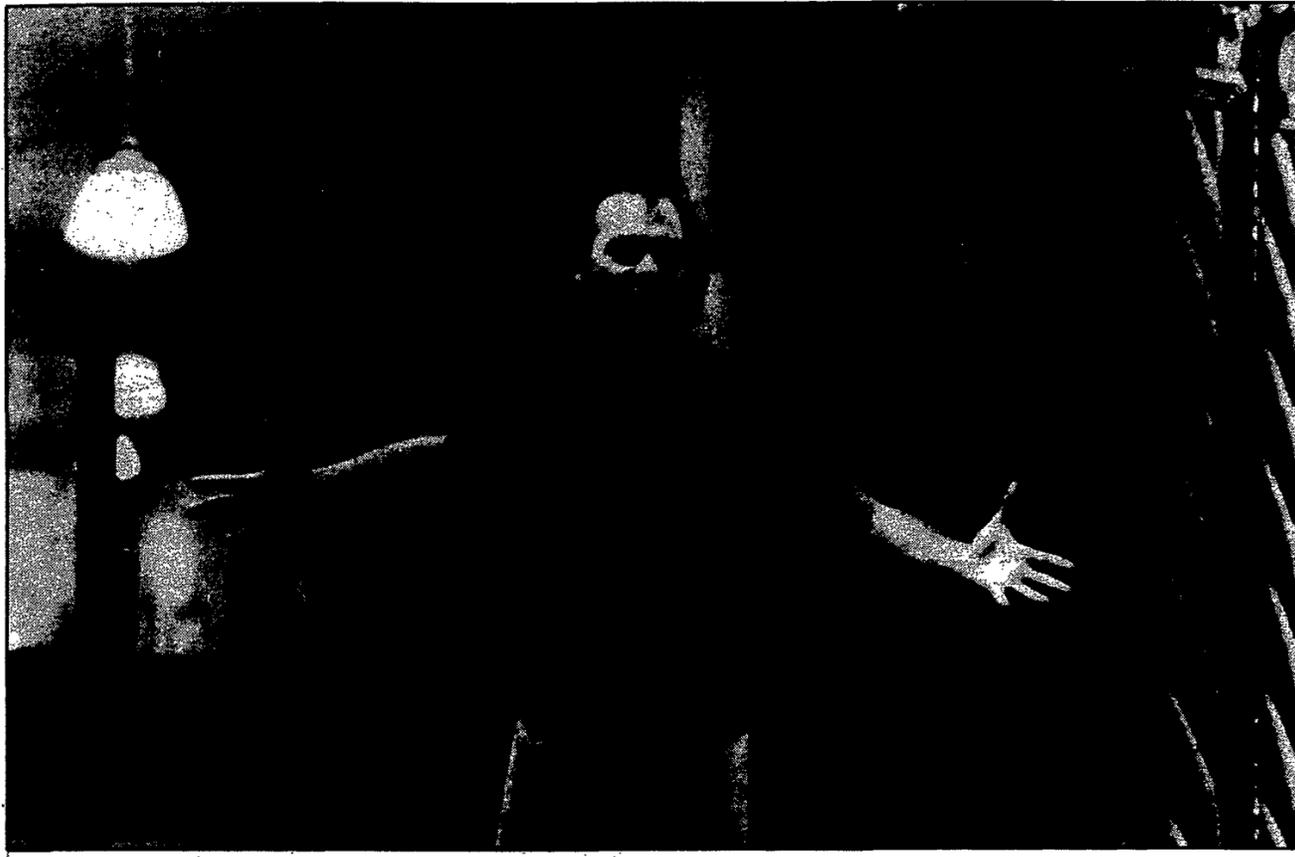
As Daryl Poynter, the yuppie cocaine and alcohol addict, Keaton is a man so obsessed with booze and drugs that he can't summon up a shred of guilt or comparable human emotion to handle the fallout from his addictive behavior. A casual date dies in his bed from a cocaine overdose; he embezzles big bucks from his real estate firm, uses co-workers as cover-ups and even hits on his mother to re-mortgage the family home for drug money. He even manages to use a 21-day stay in a detox clinic to hide from authorities investigating the embezzlement and the coed's death.

There are no happy endings here. The film follows Daryl's slow journey from denial to acceptance of his substance abuse problem. He is helped to acknowledge and ultimately change his miserably self-destructive existence through the intervention of a hard-nosed counselor (Morgan Freeman), the undaunted support of his AA sponsor (M. Emmet Walsh), and his infatuation with Charlie Sanders, a tough fellow addict (Kathy Baker) whom Daryl misguidedly tries to save.

Director Glenn Gordon Caron ("Moonlighting") harks back to gutsy 1950s film dramas with this hardhitting look at one man's struggle to face and conquer his addictions. While Charlie's reason for drug abuse is made clear, there is no real psychological understanding of why Daryl fell into this lifestyle — other than the ease with which men at his high income level can procure alcohol and cocaine.

However, the film successfully delineates the addictive psyche and its demands on those unfortunates who come in contact with it. The addict's inability to accept responsibility for his addiction and for his senseless psychological abuse of others comes through Keaton's marvelous performance as well as the wonderfully understated characterizations by Miss Baker and Walsh. Walsh turns in an award-caliber performance as a recovering alcoholic who teaches Daryl how to remain sober.

What distinguishes "Clean and Sober" from many of the gimmicky films released today is its emphasis on strong dialogue (with a script by Tod Carroll) and realistic characters with whom audiences can identify.



Daryl Poynter, portrayed by Michael Keaton in the film "Clean and Sober," explodes in frustration after he is ejected from a rehabilitation program. The U.S. Catholic Conference says the film "successfully delineates the addictive psyche." Due to much locker room language, some explicit drug and alcohol use and abuse, and brief nudity, the USCC classification is A-III; adults.

Due to much locker room language, some explicit drug and alcohol use and abuse and brief nudity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

One-dimensional hero

Director Francis Ford Coppola has always been torn between the dramatic and documentary potential of his subjects — so much so that his recent films, while highly original and often beautiful to behold, are lacking in substance. "Tucker: The Man and His Dream" (Paramount) is a perfect example of Coppola's inability to transcend the glitzy aspects of his medium to explore the psyche of his fascinating real-life subject.

Employing the best craftspeople cinema has to offer, and tapping his own enormous

talent to create larger-than-life scenarios, Coppola draws a superficial portrait of Preston Tucker (Jeff Bridges), a maverick inventor who bucked the top three car manufacturers of his time (postwar 1940s) to create a visionary automobile of innovative design with speed and safety factors that threatened the lackluster products of his competitors.

Of course, the big boys tapped every possible government and judicial connection they could to insidiously block Tucker at every turn, cutting off his access to steel and financial support. Ultimately, they see that he is tried unfairly for fraud — promising cars he supposedly couldn't deliver.

As depicted here, Tucker is a wide-eyed optimist. For every obstacle, he dreams up a solution. He and his insufferably understanding wife, Vera (Joan Allen), share a picture-postcard home life with their four indistinguishable kids, multiple dogs and Tucker's design-team cronies. This Ozzie-and-Harriet lifestyle works as a buffer to the real-life tragedy that befalls Tucker when he is forced to put the brakes on his dream car forever.

Bridges is wonderfully grand and peppy as Tucker. With slicked-backed hair and designer 1940s suits, Bridges ably depicts Tucker as unflappable through all setbacks. As scripted by Arnold Shulman and David Seidler, however, he and his wife are reduced to heroic one-dimensional cartoon characters. There is no exploration of the darker,

more human agonies that most probably occurred during the period depicted in this movie.

Unlike the strong characterizations featured in his two "Godfather" films, Coppola's "Tucker" can't get past the exquisite period production design and art direction by Dean Tavoularis and Alex Tavoularis, the dreamlike cinematography by Vittorio Storaro ("The Last Emperor"), and the slick costume design by Milena Canonero, to touch on the realities of a man vying honestly for a piece of the American dream. The only character in "Tucker" that eases toward empathy is Tucker's financial backer, Abe Karatz. Martin Landau is moving and almost unrecognizable in this role.

While the film's moral issues (good guys vs. bad guys) are clearly evoked, they are done so in black-and-white terms that will leave audiences oddly detached, as if they were watching a two-hour promotional film on Tucker and his legacy. Coppola opens the film with just such a documentary device to introduce his character. Unfortunately, Coppola doesn't know how to blend his documentary and dramatic approaches effectively, and ends up waffling hopelessly between the two.

Due to mild rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

How tact and good judgement can improve your future grades

By Christopher Carstens
NC News Service

It happens to everyone at least once. You really work hard on an assignment and turn it in with pride. You have done good work and the teacher is sure to recognize it.

But when it comes back, all you can see are a bunch of red pencil marks and a big C-minus at the top. As soon as the shock hits, you want to do something about the injustice, like tear the paper up in front of the class and tell that teacher just what you think about the stupid course — or just go home and cry.

Those are understandable impulses. But doing those things won't change the grade.

Wait before doing anything. Put the work in your backpack, take it home and look at it again later when the shock is over. Read the teacher's comments carefully. The grade may make more sense when you think about what the teacher wrote. Try to improve those areas on your next assignment.

On the other hand, it may not be any clearer to you than before. Then it's time to plan a talk with the teacher. But what are you supposed to say? Won't he or she just tell you to stop complaining?

Not necessarily. You may not get this grade changed, but a well-planned talk with a teacher can improve your next grade and the ones that follow. Give the teacher a message that says, "I care about my work and I want to do better."

It is better to find the right time and place, and it's smartest to let the teacher choose. If your teacher prefers to talk with students between classes or in the afternoon, go at that time.

Coming of Age

Talking to a teacher who is harried or in a hurry won't help you. You'll get half the teacher's attention. You're likely to leave such a discussion thinking, "The teacher doesn't care," when, truthfully, the teacher didn't have a chance. Make an appointment so you can talk calmly, and the teacher really can listen.

Most teachers sincerely want to help. When you discuss your work, emphasize the fact that you want to learn what you can do to make the work better. Often the teacher will give suggestions that will help a lot on your next paper.

In any case, your attitude gives the teacher a new feeling toward you. He or she will recognize that you are serious and want to do well.

You may not get the grade changed — this time. But if you use good judgment and show a desire to learn and if you pay attention to the suggestions you hear, the next paper is likely to come back with a more satisfying mark.

That, after all, is what you wanted to see in the beginning.

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Dr. Christopher Carstens is a clinical psychologist in San Diego, Calif., and frequently addresses youth ministry groups.

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We received 11 correct entries identifying Carly Simon as the person who wrote the 1973 hit "You're So Vain."



The winner was Michelle Bendavine of Rochester

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This week's question:

Who were the Everly Brothers trying to "wake up?"

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