

Review

Eastwood's 'Sully' stubbornly refuses to soar

In "Sully," Clint Eastwood's haunted and sterile docudrama of Capt Chesley Sullenberger's 2009 landing of Flight 1549 on the Hudson, Eastwood has drained away all the superficial, rah-rah heroism of Sullenberger's great feat, but he has also sucked the life out of it. "Sully" is every bit an Eastwood picture. Instead of the rush of euphoria that the "Miracle on the Hudson" swept through a New York accustomed to only tragedy from the air, we get a weary parable that, as Eastwood has often done, pulls the curtain away from a celebrated public figure and reveals the inner trauma and sense of responsibility that lies inside a regular man thrust into an unwanted spotlight.

Sullenberger, played with typical dignity and sensitivity by Tom Hanks, is not celebrated here with a parade of a movie. He is beset by demons and anxieties, and the almost comically harsh scrutiny of an aviation safety panel, which, relying on automated flight simulations, believes Sullenberger could have safely returned to LaGuardia or made it over the New Jersey shoreline to Teterboro. Their snide, judgmental presence is there throughout "Sully," as they try to second guess his decision-making. It's an exaggeration. The film's climactic grilling of Sullenberger at a public hearing was referred to in news reports as "gentle, respectful and at times downright congenial."

Preternatural calm

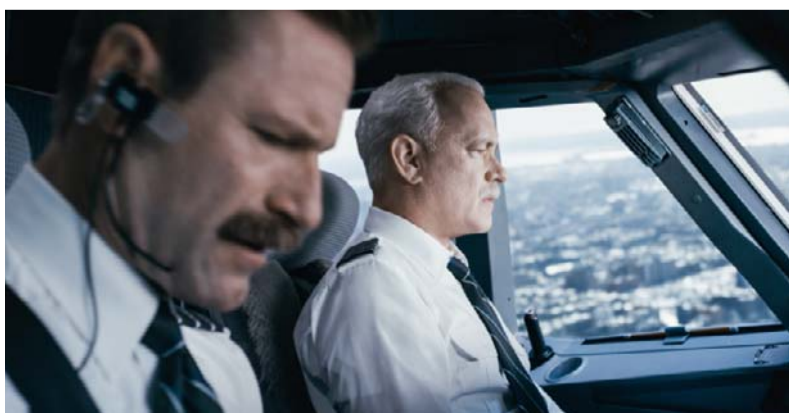
But Eastwood and screenwriter Todd Komarnicki working off of Sullenberger's book "Highest Duty: My Search for What Really Matters," had to find drama somewhere. The entire flight lasted less than six minutes. It was just 208 seconds from bird strike to the frigid Hudson. How do you make a film out of mere moments, handled with preternatural calm? Eastwood lingers in its aftermath, as Sully remains holed in a Manhattan he has little love for. The narrative is fractured, flashing backward and forward, into the pilot's past and occasionally into his nightmares. Hanks, white haired and sub-

dued, finds Sullenberger's essence not in the miraculous but in the mundane: A man just doing his job, not so unlike his "Captain Phillips."

And though the film bears his name, "Sully" is really a two-hander. With Sullenberger throughout is his co-pilot Jeff Skiles (a top-notch Aaron Eckhart), his partner in flight and on the ground. They huddle together in midnight runs and in testimony, leaning on each other through the surreal media storm. Eastwood moves slowly to the landing but gives it its full due. Filmed on IMAX, his big, clear images nevertheless remain somber - as does Eastwood's own quiet score - in the big, awaited moment. Nowhere is much of a sense of New York or the cathartic relief that lifted the city.

Disappointing emptiness

Instead, "Sully" remains, stubbornly, a refraction of Sullenberger's interior, as filtered through Eastwood's elegiac lens. "I eyeballed it," is how the pilot explains his intuitive response, built up over 42 years of flying. It's not hard to feel Eastwood's own identification with the man. He, too, is an old hand who works quickly: workmanlike and instinctually, "eyeballing" it. You can imagine Eastwood, too, up there on the stand responding to what computers say he should have done differently. "Life's easier in the air," Skiles and Sullenberger agree. Eastwood, of course, does too. Only being aloft for him is to be in the director's chair, far from other concerns. His focus in "Sully" is both its greatest attribute (this is, after all, a serious and thoughtful film that sees a universally known event through a fresh perspective) and the reason for its disappointing emptiness. In testimony, Sullenberger criticizes the simulators for "taking all the humanity of the cockpit." Eastwood has put it back in. But the story of Flight 1549 was bigger than that. "Sully," a Warner Bros release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "some peril and brief strong language." Running time: 96 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. —AP



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Tom Hanks, right, and Aaron Eckhart in a scene from 'Sully.' — AP



Singer Usher sits on his newly unveiled star after becoming the 2,588 entertainer to receive a Hollywood Walk of Fame star in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Usher calls on fans to keep his Walk of Fame star shiny

R&B singer Usher accepted the 2,588th star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame Wednesday, imploring fans during a tongue-in-cheek speech to keep vigil over it and ensure it stays clean. The star was unveiled in front of a number of musical and film luminaries, including pop and soul icon Stevie Wonder, Black Eyed Peas front man will.i.am. and movie mogul Harvey Weinstein. "It is because of you guys that I have this moment. It is because of you that this shining star will be here and I leave it up to you-it's your responsibility-to come down here every chance you get to shine my

star," he joked to fans.

"Hey listen, that's the smallest thing that I could ask of you right now, especially given the fact that I'm going to be walked on." Usher, 37, has won eight Grammy Awards and sold more than 65 million albums, with nine Hot 100 No. 1 hits and 18 Hot 100 Top 10 singles. His 2004 record "Confessions" was the best-selling solo album in the first decade of the 21st century in the US and brought him one of his three Grammys in 2005.

Born Usher Raymond IV in Dallas, Texas, he was raised in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and later moved to Atlanta. His mother

entered him in singing competitions when he was 12 and he caught the attention of an executive from LaFace Records. His hits include "Can U Get Wit It," "U Remind Me," which brought him his first Grammy in 2002 for best male R&B vocal performance, and "U Don't Have To Call," which brought him his second in 2003, in the same category.

Usher's acting career has taken in Broadway, television and a number of feature films, culminating in an acclaimed turn as boxing champion Sugar Ray Leonard in the recently released Roberto Duran biopic "Hands of Stone." — AFP

Meg Ryan uses 'fierce' maternal instincts in her directorial debut

Hollywood actress Meg Ryan goes behind the camera for her directorial debut "Ithaca", a World War II drama for which she said she used her maternal instincts in telling the story.

The movie, based on William Saroyan's novel "The Human Comedy", follows a teenager who wants to help his widowed mother financially by getting a job as a messenger. He soon gets some tough lessons in life as he delivers messages to families who have lost loved ones in the war.

"I felt like it really is, in its deepest part of DNA, a story that I felt should be told from a maternal point of view," Ryan said in an interview. "And I felt like it was simple ... it's a simple narrative about complicated things." The "When Harry Met Sally" actress, who also stars in the film, said she was surprised how much she liked directing. "The intimacy you end up having with every single thing in a movie when you're directing it ... makes you love it," she said. "The most fierce I ever am is as a mum and, it turns out, as a director, trying to protect the artists who've come to help me out." Tom Hanks, with whom Ryan starred in "Sleepless in Seattle" and "You've Got Mail", has a small role in the movie. "He doesn't need much directing," she said. "Ithaca" is released in the United States today. — Reuters

