

**Chiasso - Cinema EXCELSIOR****18.15****Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020****THE MULE****2018****116 min**Directed by **Clint Eastwood**

Starring: Clint Eastwood, Bradley Cooper, Laurence Fishburne, Michael Peña, Dianne Wiest

Earl Stone, in his 80s, is an award-winning horticulturist and Korean War veteran in Peoria, Illinois. He is facing financial ruin and is estranged from his ex-wife Mary and daughter Iris for always putting work before family. He is still on friendly terms with his granddaughter Ginny and attends her wedding rehearsal. Desperate for money, he takes up an offer from the friend of one of Ginny's bridesmaids and becomes a "mule" transporting cocaine through Illinois for a Mexican drug cartel. Facing little suspicion due to his age, race, spotless criminal history, and strict adherence to driving laws, Earl is soon trusted with huge amounts of drugs and is paid large amounts of cash. With the money he buys a new truck, settles his financial problems, and pays for renovations of the local VFW Post, as well as his granddaughter's wedding and education. He becomes friendly with the cartel members, who call him "Tata" (grandfather).

Meanwhile, with details from an informant, a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) task force is narrowing in on the cartel's deliveries to Chicago. Tensions within the cartel erupt when Gustavo, a power-hungry cartel lieutenant, assassinates cartel boss Laton, and subsequently demands Earl be kept under tighter control.

In the middle of a \$12 million cocaine shipment, Earl learns that Mary is gravely ill. After Ginny talks some sense into him, he postpones the drug delivery to make peace with Mary and stays by her side until she dies peacefully days later. After attending the funeral and finally reconciling with his family, Earl resumes the delivery as both the DEA and the cartel close in on him.

The cartel's enforcers catch him and, upon discovering he was away to attend his wife's death and funeral, which they respect, call the cartel leader to request leniency. The cartel underboss allows him to continue, with the caveat that if anything goes wrong it will be on the enforcers' heads. Earl continues towards the drop point, but the DEA agents finally catch up to him and arrest him. In court, disregarding his age as an excuse and guilt-ridden over his crimes and for failing his family, Earl pleads guilty to all charges and is sent to federal prison with his family showing him their support. In prison, he returns to horticulture.

**Critics' comments:**

The website's critical consensus reads, "A flawed yet enjoyable late-period Eastwood entry, *The Mule* stubbornly retains its footing despite a few missteps on its occasionally unpredictable path." On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 58 out of 100, based on 37 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews". Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A—" on an A+ to F scale, while those at PostTrak gave it four out of five stars.

Peter Debruge of *Variety* wrote, "It's a great true story, colourfully told by Sam Dolnick in *The New York Times*".