

Reaching Higher Ground

Warren Miller has something for everyone.

HIGHER GROUND. Warren Miller Entertainment, Time4 Media. Producer/Director Max Bervy. Skiing and snowboarding talent Dave Barlia, Jeremy Bloom, Jeremy Nobis, Seth Morrison, Shane McConkey, Glen Plake, Bridger Gile, Ingrid Blackstrom.

The best moments of Warren Miller's newest, *Higher Ground*, are not when the pros are slicing through virgin powder in Alaska, dropping sickening cliffs in B.C. or hitting impossible rails at a competition in Vail. The classic, gorgeous cinematography that sets Miller apart from the pack (along with sheer longevity) is there, sure. But the highlight of the film comes early and isn't even mentioned in the press pack: 85-year-old Klaus Obermeyer (yes, the founder of the outerwear company) launching himself into a 360 more than 15 feet above the lip of a halfpipe and landing clean.

"It's nice when you go backwards because you can always see where you were," Obermeyer says with a grin as he heads backwards into a jump. Obermeyer's narration, which is juxtaposed with clips of 5-year-old child prodigy Bridger Gile, includes quite a bit about then and now. Said by someone with less passion for the sport, it would be unbearably cheesy. But it's not. It's unbelievably cool.

It's at that moment that *Higher Ground* raises the bar and Miller clearly distinguishes himself from adrenaline-pumping movies that are geared only for boys in their 20s and 30s. The music is so odd at times it's noteworthy. The movie opens with a weird emo-opera song but quickly gets a little more traditional. Still, the soundtrack steers away from the distortion-laden post punk stuff and more toward solid, melody-driven rock. We're not sure exactly who Miller's target audience is, but this film, his 56th, has something for everyone.

He's got the NYC Fire Department slaloming with a fire hose, a scene that had us laughing so hard tears were running down our faces. We could have happily skipped the section on Extreme Urban Skipping — this is a good time to take a break since you won't miss anything. But we loved the section on Arctic Man, a competition up in "Nowhere Alaska" which combines snowmobiling and downhill racing with skiers often reaching speeds as high as 85 mph. It's intense and one of the most visually fun sections of the film. And watching Dave Barlia barely miss some rocky peaks as he plummets from the summit of Mount Blanc in a wingsuit is enough to get your heart pounding.

Interspersed with the stunts and antics is some really amazing footage with lots of big names. Peter and Michael Olenick, Dave Downing, Marja Persson, Jeremy Nobis. Chelone Miller, Brent Abrams, and of course Glen Plake, all make an appearance. Some day Miller will figure out that girls can tear it up too. Until then, we'll have to suffer through his patronizing comments, REPEATED from last year's *Impact*, and make due with Ingrid Blackstrom and Sarah Burke ripping through the deep canyons and ice pillars in Blue River, B.C.

If you want to leave the theater awestruck with your eyes bulging and your heart pounding, you should have made it to Banff's Radical Reels a few weeks back. But if you want to get amped for the season, get loads of swag, and see some amazing lines and funny antics, don't miss *Higher Ground* showing 6 and 9 pm, Oct. 26 at the McDonald Theatre. Buy tickets at Berg's Ski and Snowboard Shop, TicketsWest or at the McDonald Theatre box office on the night of the show. \$16.50.

EW



Chelone Miller.

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-Rob Widmer



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Other hefes out there? Also accented. Sometimes in an accent we can't understand.

-Kurt Widmer

