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FILM REVIEWS

Film Review: Marin Blue

By Neil Young, February 07, 2009 02:25 ET



Bottom Line: Laughably overcooked tale of directionless, insecure twentysomethings in Los Angeles.

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BERLIN -- Clearly intended as a moody anthem for damaged youth, "Marin Blue" instead plumbs the murkiest depths of mannered, overwrought pretentiousness. Only good for the odd -- wholly unintentional -- chuckle, this po-faced,

opportunistic muddle of mental illness, narcolepsy and post-teen anomie will struggle to make waves beyond the festival circuit's most indulgent harbors.

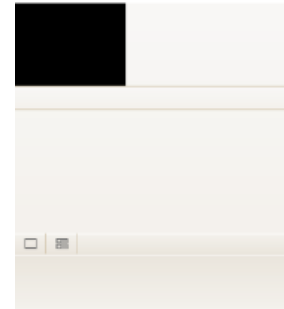
Feature debutant Matthew Hysell certainly can't be accused of taking things easy: The 34-year-old CalArts grad's name is scattered all over the credits, proving the old dictum about Jacks of all trades being master of none. Just as his screenplay feels like a rough first draft, he obtains such variable performances from his actors -- a good-looking but, for the most part, fatally uncharismatic bunch -- that there's likewise a distinct first-take feel about too many scenes.

The focus is on tousled-blond Jim (Corey Knauf), who's been institutionalized in a Los Angeles mental hospital for unspecified reasons. This mumbling milquetoast inexplicably attracts the attention of Marin (Najarra Townsend), a raven-haired narcoleptic whose function at the hospital seems to consist of warbling wafty tunes over the PA system. When Jim impulsively vaults the fence, a smitten Marin tracks him down to a scruffily picturesque L.A. 'burb. Their slow-budding relationship is imperiled by the attentions of two photogenic louts (Elliott Ehlers and Josh Cobb) who violently insist they're Jim's brothers -- but our hero strikes lucky when stumbling across an empty but fully stocked '50s diner. This is just one among numerous implausible developments which seemingly hint at a last-reel revelation that everything we've been watching has been a hallucination within Jim (or possibly Marin's) fevered mind.

When this doesn't occur, we've no option but to take the manifold absurdities of "Marin Blue" at face value. On the plus side, there are some well-chosen indie cuts on the soundtrack and Townsend shows some flashes of presence and promise. She certainly deserves better material than this vapid, cliché-ridden exercise in ostentatiously doomy, underlit stylistics -- even outdoor daytime sequences have a conspicuously shadowy look. Yet again, an inexperienced filmmaker tries desperately to stand out from the pack only to expose his lack of imagination and flair. The oft-risible dialogue, for example, is peppered with supposedly naturalistic pregnant pauses -- which invariably yield cheesy-smelling trapped wind.

Production: Erin O'Hara (Los Angeles)
Cast: Corey Knauf, Najarra Townsend, Elliott Ehlers, Josh Cobb, Trista Robinson
Writer-Director: Matthew Hysell
Producer: Erin O'Hara
Director of photography: George Su
Production designer: Matthew Hysell
Music: Matthew Hysell
Costume designer: Matthew Hysell
Editor: Erin O'Hara, Matthew Hysell
Sales: Erin O'Hara
No rating, 77 minutes

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