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## Marin Blue

Howard Feinstein in Berlin

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THIS WEEK'S ISSUE



Dir: Matthew Hysell. US. 2009. 77mins.

Gorgeous but overly self-conscious visuals dominate a thin narrative thread in LA-based Matthew Hysell's debut feature, presented in a blend of black-and-white and colour. The resulting film moves at a snail's pace, as if to give us time to admire his eye (and that of cinematographer George Su), which is partial to abstraction, shadows and angles. But despite all this aesthetic prowess (and an excellent soundtrack), the weak screenplay diminishes *Marin Blue's* commercial potential. It might possibly have a short life on the minor festival circuit.

The plot is, paradoxically, both skimpy and convoluted. Jim (Knauf), whose mental problems include memory lapses, escapes from the institution where he has been committed, and where he has been touched by the disembodied singing voice of the title character (Townsend) over the sound system. Precipitating his sudden departure is a visit from two young men claiming to be his brothers (Ehlers, Cobb), whom we understand from the ominous chords accompanying their encounter to be nasty. *Marin* has not seen Jim either, but takes an interest in him as a result of information gleaned from a phone call about his case from the facility's director.

*Marin*, who suffers from narcolepsy and imbibes a mystery medication that gives her a high, eventually finds Jim, who is squatting in an abandoned—but fully functioning?—coffee shop. Then she disappears and he searches for her. They team up; they share the euphoria-inducing substance. It seems that they knew each other back in high school. In the meantime the two "brothers" search desperately for Jim, though we never understand why. That all three male leads are pretty boys reflects a weakness in casting.

Hysell writes about his interest in empty architectural spaces in the festival catalogue and it is much in evidence on the screen. (He also knows how to film landscapes). But the spaces are so foregrounded and accentuated that it feels like the interaction of the characters is a confusing afterthought.

More successful is the film's music. It ranges from Bjorkish to Simon and Garfunkel-like to rock, but the combination embellishes in a positive way. Hysell shows promise, even if *Marin Blue* has a student-cum-Sundance quality. With a good script and a more relaxed formal style, he could develop into a first-rate film-maker.

Production company  
**Marin** Blue

International sales  
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Producer/editor  
 Erin O'Hara

Screenplay/music  
 Matthew Hysell

Cinematography  
 George Su

Production design  
 Matthew Hysell  
 Erin O'Hara

Main cast  
 Cory Knauf

## Screen

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