



IndieFest: Road Trip, Growing Up, Coming Out, LSD

Author: Mark Rabine & Lydia Chavez

Feb. 12, 2012

FILM: "Mother Country" by Maria Breaux.

SYNOPSIS*: This uncommon road trip follows Dwight (Slamdance winner Thomas Galasso), who has committed a crime that has unintended consequences.

SHE SAYS: Finally, a day of films that explains why anyone bothers to go to film festivals. "Mother Country" has its share of problems, but the story line is focused and at times compelling.

The film opens in Austin with Dwight, a 26-year-old African American, pressed into joining some gang-banger friends for a drive-by shooting. They want revenge, and decide Dwight must be the one to fire into a party, hoping to hit their rivals. Instead, Dwight hits and kills a 17-year-old (yes, college-bound) girl.

It's clear in the car that Dwight doesn't want to shoot anyone, but he does it. Why? It's unclear, and that's part of the movie's problem. We never really find out, but we spend a lot of time with Dwight, who takes off to California to visit a former teacher.

He starts off walking and early on collapses in the parking lot of an apartment complex. He's rescued by a 30-something Christian who lets Dwight sleep in his bed and then buys him fresh clothes.

Problem 2: We believe that Dwight's a nice guy caught up in a bad scene until he and his good Samaritan get into an argument. Dwight swings at him, knocks him down and then takes off with his rescuer's wallet, keys and car.

While the car solves the problem of how Dwight's going to get to California, all of a sudden our main character seems like a psychopath. Is this a major plot turn?

No, it turns out that Dwight just ran into some bad luck. His punch killed the good Samaritan. Really? Then why aren't the police out looking for him?

<http://missionlocal.org/2012/02/indiefest-road-trip-growing-up-coming-out-isd/html>

When Dwight arrives in L.A., the former teacher's household turns out to be chaotic, but there's a lot of good acting going on.

The ending is predictable, but Breaux's first full-length feature shows promise.

Repeats Tuesday 2/21 at 7:15 p.m. at the Roxie.

FILM: "I Like You" by Jamie Heinrich.

SYNOPSIS: A coming-of-age tale that hits on the common themes of love, loss and high school drama.

SHE SAYS: There's lots of male energy here — fighting, horsing around, drinking, pushing, falling in love and some growing up. It opens with Avery (a very good Mike Benna, who is studying film at SF State) shaving off his hair.

We watch him transformed from sweet to sort of odd-looking. It doesn't matter — Benna gives the working-class Avery plenty of intelligent energy. Heinrich also gives the Reno kid good taste in music, an interesting connection with an uncle who lives in a single room occupancy hotel, and an appreciation for the country around Reno.

Naturally, Avery has his eye on Parker, the rich girl with the rich-looking boyfriend. Does he get her in the end? That's the central question, and all that happens until the end is worth watching.

Heinrich does a nice job of storytelling and capturing the raw, exuberant energy of young males. These kids are so much more textured than most of the adults we've watched the last two nights.

And watch out iPhone. Benna and his crowd make pay phones sexy and the really cool kids don't have electronics.

Repeats Tuesday 2/14 at 7:15 p.m. at the Roxie.

FILM: "No Look Pass," a documentary by Melissa Johnson.

SYNOPSIS: After living a double life at Harvard, Emily "Etay" Tay, a first-generation Burmese immigrant from LA's Chinatown, strives to play professional basketball in Germany while coming out as a lesbian.

HE SAYS: "No Look Pass" is something to see. The film chronicles a year or two in the life of Emily Tay, as magnetic on the screen as she is scintillating on a basketball court. Like the camera, you can't stop looking at her. And it's not that the film lacks other positive qualities.

<http://missionlocal.org/2012/02/indiefest-road-trip-growing-up-coming-out-isd/html>

More “Bend It Like Beckham” than “Hoop Dreams,” the film gives us a front-row seat to watch the queen of the no-look pass navigate some of her young life’s trickier passages, like coming out to her traditional Burmese parents. Fortunately for Emily, and the film, she is surrounded by an exceptional supporting cast and blessed with a smart director in Melissa Johnson.

Any down side? Her defense needs work.

Repeats Sunday 2/12 at 12:30 p.m. at the Roxie.

FILM: “The Substance: Albert Hofmann’s LSD,” a documentary by Martin Witz.

SYNOPSIS: In 1943, chemist Albert Hofmann accidentally came across a hitherto unknown substance in his research lab in Basel.

HE SAYS: When you stop to think about it, which of course is the point here, you can’t help but be impressed with LSD’s CV. A relatively young drug, its portfolio of influence in cultural, psychological and spiritual spheres has been remarkable. The film recounts the first 60 years, containing original material with Albert Hofman (the founder) at age 100, as well as archival footage of Timothy Leary at Millbrook and the Merry Pranksters on their legendary bus Furthur.

But do we need to OD on the Woodstock generation? And what about those light-show effects and the annoying structural fragmentation obviously intended to suggest the derangement of perception produced by the substance? A more sober assessment of what we’ve learned about the “miracle drug” might be more useful, especially since, as the film points out, LSD and its cousins have been found to be helpful to those living with the psychological effects of cancer.

If you miss the film, read Rimbaud or put on your earphones and listen to Pink Floyd. You’ll get the idea.

Repeats Sunday 2/19 at 2:45 p.m. at the Roxie.