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Review by [Tyler Foster](#) | posted June 5, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

There's nothing wrong with quirk. Life is full of quirks, and the movies reflect life. Still, before the year 2000, quirk wasn't much of a presence in mainstream cinema, unless you count being extra down-home Southern as a quirk. Then, all of a sudden, as if all the misfits and oddballs of the world were summoned at once, a tidal wave of quirk broke over Hollywood, bringing films like *Little Miss Sunshine* and *Juno* to surprising peaks of box office success. Since then, however, quirk has been pissing in Hollywood's gene pool, turning every other movie into a freak flag-waving display of detached irony. Now when I hear about films that include whimsical flights of outside fantasy, I get a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach. I guess that means it's a good thing that nobody tried to describe *Anywhere USA* to me before I watched it.

Split into three segments (Penance, Loss, and Ignorance), *Anywhere USA* is a truly unique bit of filmmaking that's very hard to sum up in a simple way (the fact that I've been sitting here, trying to write this review for at least 24 hours is a testament to that fact). Directed, co-written, and edited by a man named Chusy, each of the three chunks focuses on a different set of characters, linked only by a fleeting recurring face there, a specific phrase or action there, and Chusy's overall tone, which is both light and deadpan. Chusy also experiments with voice-over, text on the screen, and unexpected censorship (the name of the town these events take place in is bleeped, and an address on a package is blurred out).

The difference between *Anywhere USA* and a crowd of *Napoleon Dynamite* knock-offs is that all of these elements feel deeply and wholeheartedly authentic. Starring an entire roster of first-time performers, the laughs generated by these people and their unusual personalities has less to do with directorial flair and contrived writing and more to do with the combination of the movie's anonymously midwestern setting and Chusy's love for each one of them. The first segment, about a break-up, seems to understand both parties equally, and there's an air of empathy when the jilted man (Mike Ellis) nervously starts an argument over whether his ex (Mary Griffin) has been using wet or dry Swiffers on the linoleum. At the same time, this is a segment of the film that eventually finds Ellis and his little person friend (Brian Fox) trying to foil a terrorist plot, in a series of absurd yet entertaining twists.

Later, the viewer is introduced to a struggling uncle (Jeremiah Brennan) trying to preserve the innocence of his niece Pearl (Perla Haney-Jardine). Already struggling with the loss of her parents, things take a turn for the worse when Pearl makes an unexpected discovery. Of everything in the movie, the true and absolute highlight is Haney-Jardine (Chusy's daughter), whose performance is absolutely perfect. She and Brennan form a believable, endearing rhythm with each other in scenes both comic and dramatic, and Haney-Jardine even holds her own during silent, solo moments, always expressing the emotional rollercoaster going on inside her head through questioning eyes. It's a funny, sweet segment filled both with painful truths and moments that will make your heart sing.

The least of the three segments is the last one, about a man (Ralph Brierley) who realizes out of the blue that he doesn't know any black people, and seeks (much

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to the chagrin of his wife and son) to rectify the situation. There are interesting ideas here, ranging from beards as a metaphor for deeply-held personal secrets to a number of thoughts on racism and class, but it lacks the spark of the first two even while containing some insightful, amusing moments.

It's hard sometimes to take a real cinematic leap of faith, jumping into a film without a single standby trait that one can hold onto like a safety net, but *Anywhere USA* is worth the blind faith. At a moment when both the independent film and "oddball" markets are flooded with repetitive, lackluster, uninspired product, the movie is a true diamond in the rough, filled with scenes and characters you aren't already familiar with before the movie starts playing. It's refreshing, funny, and quirky...in the best sense of the word.

The DVD

I was poking around in the DVDTalk Screener Pool, looking for something to review, and I have to say, the somewhat meaningless but inescapably intriguing image of a little person holding a revolver, standing behind a recliner, glaring at some unseen target, was enough to convince me to give it a shot. From a design standpoint, the art is overly font-happy and a bit sparse, but it's sort of charming in a home-made way. The disc comes in a white Amaray case, and no insert is included.

The Video and Audio

Shot on digital video, *Anywhere USA* is surprisingly free of the interlacing that plagues most low-budget productions, but a constant sheet of noise is present during the entire film, accompanied by heavy black crush, and on-screen text that betrays its computerized origins. I also spotted posterization at least once, but I'll concede that it might've been intentional. As an indie, it looks fine, but these issues are still certainly present. Audio is a Dolby Digital 2.0 track that adequately handles the on-set dialogue and a whole collection of pleasant indie music with ease. Although the packaging lists French and Spanish subtitles, none appeared to be present on my copy.

The Extras

A **making-of** (24:13) is fittingly different, as far as behind-the-scenes featurettes go. The extra starts out as a dry interview with Chusy, with a plan to cover the questions people ask him at film festivals, but Chusy starts to move around. Detours include: the appearance of film's gun expert, who drives up on a motorcycle; cutting to a commercial he shot in his home with his daughter when she was very young; and Chusy making and eating dinner while he continues to answer the questions. Most of the questions are accompanied by silent clips from the film with text over them, which is a surprisingly effective tactic. Some of the answers, particularly near the end, are surprisingly candid.

Next, Chusy sits down for a feature-length **audio commentary**. The track covers some of the same ground as the featurette, but when it does, Chusy usually tells the story with more or different details, so it's not entirely repetitive. That said, he's pretty soft-spoken and there are a fair amount of gaps. If you really liked the film, it's a pleasant chat, but I imagine most people will be satisfied with the featurette, which provides many of the same details (or even better ones), and is a bit more lively.

Extras are rounded out by a short, jokey **introduction** (1:04) recorded for the film's premiere in Jacksonville, and a **slideshow** (1:49). Three **original theatrical trailers** for *Anywhere USA* are also included.

Conclusion

At the very least, *Anywhere USA* is a memorable, enjoyable detour from the usual cinematic routes; at best, perhaps you'll like it as much as I did. **Highly recommended.**

Please check out my other DVDTalk DVD and theatrical reviews [here](#) and my film blog The Following Preview [here](#).

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