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## East Of Sunset

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Review by [Todd Douglass Jr.](#) | posted September 30, 2005 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

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### The Movie:

I have always appreciated indie films and try to give every one that I see a fair shake. Many of the most riveting and heartfelt tales come from movies without Hollywood size budgets. That's mostly due to the love of storytelling and moviemaking and is not really attributed with ambitions of financial success or commercial value. With that in mind I sat down to watch *East of Sunset* but I walk away from the picture with mixed feelings.

This angst-ridden tale about love, drug addiction and coping with loss is very heavy handed with a realistic feel to it. The story may be set in Los Angeles, but the movie itself is only shot in a handful of locations. This set of environments give the film a closed world feeling and comes off as an embodiment of the characters feelings about being trapped. It kind of makes you wonder if this was a deliberate attempt at setting the mood or due to budget constraints (or maybe a little of both).



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Another mood setter is the music written by Tom Waits which is used nearly as effectively as the scenery. At many moments in the film dialogue is kept to a minimum so that the soundtrack can convey the emotion of the scene. It's used very artistically and even though the style of music isn't really my taste, I found that it helped capture the feel of the film perfectly. It's very subdued and somber at most points and in its own right feels like part of the cast.

The characters are gritty and realistic though that doesn't necessarily mean that they are wholly likeable. The film centers on a young woman named Carley (Emily Stiles) who is reeling from the death of her father and slipping into a life of addiction and despair. She grows as a person throughout the movie and we get to learn more about her character but even so I never felt myself connecting with her or really liking her all that much. She constantly finds herself in a downward spiral and is defeated emotionally at every turn. This would make anyone cynical I suppose but it's interesting to see how someone who seemingly had a normal life falls to such a degree.

When she's not hanging out at dive bars, popping pills and having sex with random guys that she runs into, Carley is actually a teacher. She finds herself in one rocky relationship after another but one day while out for drinks with a friend she meets a scrawny bartender named Jim (Jimmy Wayne Farley). Despite the actors not having any real chemistry, the two characters hit it off and fall head over heels for each other. In usual Carley fare she jumps in headfirst and doesn't think about the consequences of her actions, this ultimately is going to lead to even more heartbreak.

Apart from the whole bartending gig, Jim is an artist who is struggling to find his muse. That is a void that Carley fills and he soon finds new inspiration for his creative side. He also slips back into his old heroin habit that he was trying to kick and winds up crashing even harder. To say that this is a depressing film with few uplifting moments would be an understatement. It's a very harsh look at the desperate lives of some wayward souls in L.A. and will be appreciated by anyone who went (or knows of someone who went) through a similar situation.

The acting isn't all that great in the movie and much of the dialogue comes across as stiff and unnatural. The story it tells isn't all that interesting and in the end *East of Sunset* is an artistic film that unfortunately does little to reel in the viewer. I never found myself connecting to (or liking) any of the characters or really getting into the movie. It's not that I think it's a bad picture, it just didn't do a lot to peak my interest or hold it.

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### The DVD:

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#### Video:

*East of Sunset* is presented with a non-anamorphic widescreen transfer and features some decent quality for a low-budget film. The image can be very sharp at times with some great definition with little edge enhancement. The video isn't completely clean though and at many times the picture is riddled with grain. It's possible that was an effect used to capture the grittiness of the story and world the characters live in. It may have been a product of my copy of the disc but I encountered several moments where the image would become distorted and extremely pixilated.

#### Audio:

The only audio option that is available on this disc is an English 5.1 mix. The sound is split between the channels fairly well though most everything comes from the front stage. There is a subdued amount of directionality to the dialogue and the rear speakers make good use of Waits musical scores. There are no subtitles available on the disc and I noticed that the vocal sync was a little off. It was an effect that I recreated on more than one DVD player and was pretty annoying.

#### Extras:

I was pretty impressed that an indie release such as this actually included some bonus material worth mentioning. One nice feature was the inclusion of the film's soundtrack as a bonus disc in the case. This style of music isn't my favorite but there are a couple of tunes that caught my attention and I'm sure fans of Tom Waits will be pleased.

As far as actual extras there is a music video for the song "Old Shoes" with clips from the movie. Apart from that the only other addition on the disc is a commentary with Director Brian McNelis and Executive Producer Evan Cohen. I found the commentary to be a little dry at times but it is very

informative regarding the choices made while filming the movie. They talk about several technical aspects and much of the decision process that went into the picture.

### Final Thoughts:

Don't get me wrong, I didn't hate *East of Sunset*. It's just that the film spends a lot of time focusing on atmosphere and mood instead of really developing the characters or story. I felt that the acting was a little stiff and even though the tale itself conveys a strong message, I just couldn't find myself connecting to any of the characters or caring what happened to them.

As far as the DVD is concerned the image contains quite a bit of grain and I encountered a few transitional flaws with a highly pixilated image. On multiple DVD players I also came across some annoying vocal sync issues. It was almost like the voices were half to a full second behind where they should have been. This could have been a problem that was attributed to my copy but since there is no second source to compare it to I'm going to reflect it into my review. **Skip It**

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