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Movie News

East of Sunset

Contributed by Brent Simon

Wednesday, 09 November 2005



Method Fest is a film festival ostensibly built around performances derived from or driven by an adherence to the classically trained “method” (or “system,” if you prefer) of acting. While this is in reality nothing more than a winking excuse to have a catch-all festival and throw it under the banner of something noble and artistic, it does suit the purposes of a movie like *East of Sunset* just fine, and highlights one jointly immutable and disheartening truth: There is a lot of undiscovered talent out there.

An angst-ridden tale set in the trendy Silverlake region of Los Angeles, *East of Sunset* centers around Carley (Emily Stiles), a girl who trips through life in a blur of despair and self-negating behavior. Pills, dive bars, uncommitted sexual encounters — they’re all there, and then some. When Carley hooks up with Jim (Jimmy Wayne Farley), however, an artist with recreational heroin issues, she’s finally forced to face down her avoidance of intimacy and own drug use. It’s only through glimpsing and realizing a worse pattern of behavior in someone else up close and personal that Carley is able to start to recognize the dysfunction of her own life.

While the film’s narrative proper reeks of a too-familiar stretch for too much indie cred (the script, by Heather Miller, also struggles with convincing dialogue), *East of Sunset* does feature solid acting, and nonetheless achieves a success courtesy of its solid execution. It picked up the Maverick Award for Best Feature Under \$500,000 at this year’s Method Fest, and scored Stiles, not undeservingly, a Best Actress prize as well. While given free reign here, Stiles still exhibits considerable chops, and, watching her, you wish even more nuanced material to come her way; she deserves a better fate than guest starring stints on television procedurals like *CSI: Miami* and *Law & Order*, which is frequently where indies like *East of Sunset* land

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actors.

Nicely shot by Chris Squires and rooted in a real sense of place by a fantastic, melancholy soundtrack that's centered around covers of Tom Waits tunes, the film benefits from director Brian McNelis' keen ability to convey both the ambivalent allure and inner anguish of barfly, come-what-may life. The music, again, helps give the movie a shifty, despondent vibe and energy, perfect for such a downbeat narrative.

Supplemental material on this release, anchored by a 5.1 surround audio mix, includes an audio commentary track with McNelis (a producer on the well regarded *Better Living Through Circuitry*), a music video and a special bonus CD soundtrack that allows viewers to better get to know Frente, Lydia Lunch, Drugstore, Botanica and [the] Caseworker — the unusually named latter an intriguing "slow-core" band from the San Francisco Bay. B- (Movie) C+ (Disc)

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