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### **EAST OF SUNSET** directed by Brian McNelis; [Eclectic DVD](#), 2005

Within the first fifteen minutes of this independent feature, I was pretty sure I was going to hate it. It had in fact, right out of the gate, struck almost every grating chord I despise in low budget films. Shot on video, drab lighting, narcissistic hipster characters, wall-to-wall indy music, (Tom Waits covers no less), and themes involving vapid relationships and casual drug use. It just seemed so fucking typical, and I was absolutely sure I was going to hate it, and suffer through its running time.

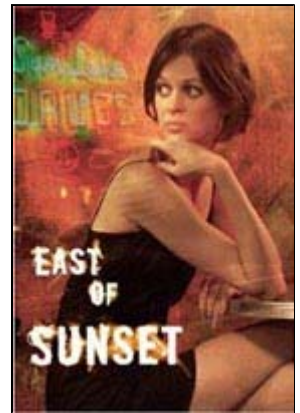
Then something happened and I became caught up. This to me is the true mark of a worthwhile story, be it on a shoestring budget, or hundreds of millions in scope. The characters began to come to life, the situations interwove with a reality and personal struggle that I actually cared about. The film concluded with overtones of an emotion that is disconcerting in the setting it depicts. Actually any emotion can be disturbing in this milieu.

Being a 20-something, sarcastic, nihilist in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Silver Lake, CA these days has to be tough, right? You can't let your guard down for a minute. You're sentenced to watch the same avant-garde musicians in the same bars night in/night out. You drink and use drugs because you're young and beautiful, you sleep around, and you pretend not to care a fuck about anything. As much as I hate these stereotypes, I realize they're out there. I actually know people like this... hell I'll admit it—I used to be one. The biggest problem for these urban slackers is getting enough energy to actually care about someone else...

That's where we find Carly, (Emily Stiles), a hip, boozy, Xanax-taking, loafer. Other people make her want to stick needles in her eyes. She's self absorbed, flippant, and can't resist going home with any guy that will give her the nod. Then she meets Jim, (Jimmy Wayne Farley), a good-natured artist/bartender who likes to use heroin every once in a while. He digs Carly, and is interested in a relationship. Yes, this is a relationship film fraught with modern day clichés.

Clichés do come from somewhere, and if a cliché riddled plot is handled with even a modicum of consideration, one can accept and get caught up in such a story. I felt the writer, (Heather Miller), and director, Brian McNelis, understood the material, and gave it life. I guess I have a few gripes with the movie: the soundtrack bugged me, the acting was sketchy at times, and the DVD is a non-anamorphic 16x9. Yet, despite some of the limitations of budget, acting abilities, and subjective musical taste, *East of Sunset*, is a solid little film.

-David Roth



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