

THE LAST NEW YEAR



Written by Ashleigh Rajala



Film Review

Title: The Last New Year

Director: Garfield Lindsay Miller

Writer: Garfield Lindsay Miller, Casey Austin

Genre: Drama



Reviewed By: Ashleigh Rajala (Vancouver)

While there are lots of “good” movies, I classify “great” films as ones that I keep thinking about all the next day, and Garfield Lindsay Miller’s *The Last New Year* fits that bill. In exploring the theme of old friends in a new way, it follows the lead of those that came before, such as *The Big Chill*, but doesn’t follow their path exactly. The characters and plot are far more real than any traditional Hollywood fare, and, consequently, the film is richer and more rewarding.

Taking place within (mainly) one night, naturally, New Year’s Eve, a group of old friends, “The Fools

and Bastards Club,” gather together again—the result of a pact made in high school to reunite every year on December 31st. However, this year is different; one of the core members of the group, the mysterious, unseen Rich, has disappeared. As the group comes together some are ready to move past it, some are in denial, but all are clueless as to what really happened, except for two, Penny and William, who are keeping the secret that might tear the group apart.

Miller and co-writer/star, Casey Austin, have crafted a script full of predictable people with predictable stories, yet the manner in which the stories unfold is wholly unique, rendering it an intriguing angle on a usually formulaic story type. The film is at once both intimate and relatable, and exotic and mysterious. The characters, their lives and their back-stories are all recognizable in either your own life or other films you’ve seen.

Brilliant and in-depth, yet understated, performances from the entire cast allow the actors to transcend the types they’ve started as: the slut, the mother hen, her devoted partner, the free spirit, the asshole, the artist, the idealistic youth, the two leads, and the outsider (all brilliantly caricatured in their

characters' costumes for the evening). It is difficult to single out any particular character or actor; they exist as a group and that is how they must be seen. While there were so many little details that I loved, from Sebastian spouting Althusser to a school teacher to David, the fulltime Fool/Bastard, having the devil as his mask, it was really Miller's wonderful thematic explorations that caught me.

The manner in which the annual tradition of the club has been hardened into rule-guided ritual reflects the self-mythologizing that takes place amongst old friends—especially old friends with a long, complicated history. It was refreshing to see this mythology channelled into their ritual, as most ensemble emotional-baggage dramas usually slide into cliché.

Miller's use of the hand-held camera, close-ups and free-motion give the viewer the feeling of actually being at the party; of being a Fool and/or Bastard. Coupled with a fantastic use of light (sparingly), you get the feeling that you aren't always seeing the whole picture, that something is always obscuring your view. It plays well into the theme that those who we know so intimately we might not actually know at all. Drawing resonance with this theme are the masks that each of the characters don during their reunion. Not only do these masks function symbolically in this respect, but they also enhance the Masonic mystique of the evening, suggesting that perhaps some traditions outlive their relevance. With this being the eponymous last of their New Years, it eventually dawns that they're not only struggling to cope with the loss of Rich, but also with the loss of the people they used to be and the relationships they had with each other.

Upcoming Screenings:

Toronto, May 17-19

7 pm @ The Royal (608 College, at Clinton St.)

Tickets \$10

Vancouver, May 27

7 pm @ The Ridge (3131 Arbutus)

Tickets \$10

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