

JEFFIE WAS HERE review by Ray Schillaci

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FROM THE 2010 PHOENIX FILM FESTIVAL...Most independent brethren met with enthusiastic audiences and the hopes of getting seen in other markets. In my humble opinion; two stand outs delivered the goods with enjoyable performances and engaging stories that were executed in a very creative way. These films might not have won the accolades at the festival, but they certainly provided big laughs and a good time for all. Todd Berger's "The Scenesters" takes a comic jab at "reality" shoots that is usually reserved for horror and succeeds tremendously while the co-creative team of "Hoodwinked" presented their brand of off-the-wall humor and applied it to a very funny road trip with "Jeffie Was Here". Both films have the luck of an extremely talented cast and crew, but "Jeffie..." has a slight edge with a brilliantly comic timed performance by Peter Bedgood.

In "Jeffie Was Here" Bedgood plays Alan who has his hands full with a thankless low-paying professor job, an over-sexed teacher's assistant, a long-suffering girlfriend, unrelenting writer's block and a pending road trip that needs funding. Enter Jeffie, the last person one would ask to share the ride with. He's part wannabe musician, guru, tree-hugger and general pest. But Alan has his reasons for accepting his application and the results are priceless. Bedgood brings a fine mix of frustration/sorrow/regret and hilarity that has not been seen since the early days of Jack Lemmon. There have been comparisons to Tom Hanks, but I believe Peter Bedgood as Alan gives a far more sympathetic/pathetic performance than he's been credited for. Also, Bedgood's chemistry works amazingly well with the other performers. He could have been the center of attention, but instead he plays with his fellow thespians so well that nearly everyone's performance shines brighter.

Of course, the performances have to also be credited to the talents of director Todd Edwards who does double duty as Jeffie. Edwards's direction at times is ingeniously daffy. From Alan's living quarters to a tough man contest at a child's birthday party in the barrio, it's oddball humor that comes out of left field and hits a homerun with its audience. "Jeffie..." is not a throw-it-all-on-the-wall comedy and see what sticks. It's a well calculated mature piece that has some adults acting like the children they have inside of them. I also have to mention Edwards's very capable soundtrack that had me humming long after the movie was over.

Aside from Peter Bedgood other notables are Alexis Rabin as Amanda in a wonderful heartfelt performance and an all too brief comic burst from Vanessa Ragland. Ragland's eccentric Chastity (the teacher's assistant) reminds one of a young Shirley MacLaine with a touch of Sandra Bernhard. She manages to be abrasive and engaging all at once. Speaking of abrasive, Cristine Rose (NBC's Heroes) delivers a wonderful comic turn as Alan's mother.

Then there is the character of the title, Jeffie. Director, Todd Edwards plays him with glee; annoying, scheming with a dash of bizarre innocence that keeps us guessing what is next on his agenda or does he even have one. If I had one criticism it would be the lack of an edge on the character of Jeffie's part. If there was the slightest bit of danger that he exuded, the film could have set it itself up as a classic. After all, Jeffie holds all the cards. But perhaps the filmmakers did not want to take that chance with the possibility of alienating some of their audience. As it stands; "Jeffie..." has mass appeal.

"Jeffie Was Here" provides unusual situations with laughs and a thought-provoking, satisfying ending that harkens back to the comedies of the 70s and early 80s. At that time writers/directors like Paul Mazursky and Paul Bartel were not just looking for basic toilet humor, they demanded the audience to think as well as laugh. Writers Todd Edwards and Peter Bedgood accomplish that right mix of pathos and fun delivering a road trip that one looks forward to taking again.