

Friday, March 23, 2012

Family drama leads Atlanta Film Festival

Solid portrayal of loss and love between father, son

By [Howard Pousner](#)
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"Sweet Old World" details the lives of Brian Hinkle and his teenage son Ethan which were shattered eight years ago when Ethan's ten-year-old brother Michael was tragically killed while playing with a friend on railroad tracks.

Displaced Films

The death of a child casts a long shadow, as former Atlanta filmmaker David Zeiger can attest.

Zeiger's 1998 documentary "The Band" chronicled the life of his son Danny during his junior year as a Decatur High School marching band musician, the story of a boy becoming his own young man. But it was also an essay of David's own free fall after he lost older son Michael in a 1986 accident, the breach it caused in his family and professional lives, and his gradual reconnection with Danny.

Now, Zeiger returns to the difficult theme in his first drama, "Sweet Old World," showing at 6:45 p.m. Sunday at Landmark's Midtown Art Cinema. It's one of the highlights of the 2012 Atlanta Film Festival that kicks off Friday and presents screenings of 125 independently made narrative films, documentaries and shorts (many followed by Q&As with the filmmakers, including Zeiger) through April 1.

Though the story is far more fiction than fact, it's set in motion by the shocking loss of a young one that, seven years later, haunts and separates divorced photographer dad Brian (John Nielsen) and teenage son Ethan (Jacques Colimon), a marching band ace who hopes to attend the Juilliard School.

Then, unexpectedly, into their gulf dives the returning Jimmie (Eric Peter-Kaiser), who had abandoned their loved one, stuck on railroad tracks, as a freight train approached. Moving back from Arizona, Jimmie seems like bad news from the moment he transfers into Ethan's California school. Yet Ethan, grappling with loss but in a less overt way than his hollow-eyed dad, is intrigued, and, too soon, is aiding Jimmie in a series of increasingly dangerous crimes.

Zeiger blends his fictional characters into the real-life, multicultural South Pasadena High School Marching Band, which in places lends the film a greater sense of realism than more glossy Hollywood productions about teens deliver.

But the film is not without flaws, with some awkward plotting, uneven acting and key characters that are either incompletely developed (Jimmie clearly has always been trouble, but why?) or oddly drawn (one of Ethan's teachers accepts Brian's awkward advances after only the mildest protest that she doesn't date parents, shortly blurting out that she wants kids).

What the drama has going for it is the unblinking way it conveys familial loss and a renewed love between father and son that holds a ray of promise for their futures. "Sweet Old World" shows a talented filmmaker thick in the middle of a brave period of transition.

Other weekend highlights (at Landmark's Midtown, unless noted)...

"Life Happens": The festival's opening night selection aims to be a sisters-are-doing-it-for-themselves-with-a-little-help-from-their-friends dramedy, and with the expressive Krysten Ritter at the forefront, there is appeal. But the movie too often falls into sitcommy clichés. Ritter plays newly single mom Kim, who counts on roommates Deena (Kate Bosworth) and Laura (Rachel Bilson) to baby-sit as she returns to the dating world. Complications ensue. 7 p.m. Friday. MELISSA RUGGIERI

"Not Yet Begun to Fight," world premiere of a documentary about five traumatized combat veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan who find solace while fly-fishing in Montana with a retired Vietnam-era Marine colonel. 7 p.m. Saturday.

"Pig": Often compared to "Memento" as it's traveled the film festival circuit, this sufficiently different drama delivers some of the same edgy, tingling sensation to viewers of trying to piece together fractured clues as did Christopher Nolan's 2000 hit. Here, an unnamed amnesiac (Rudolf Martin) wakes up alone in the middle of the desert with a black hood over his head, his hands tied, and a mysterious name scribbled on a paper scrap in his pocket. It's so cool charging down blind alleys with the intense Martin

that you can't help but be a bit disappointed when "Pig" reaches a pat resolution. 8:30 p.m. Saturday.

"All Me: The Life and Times of Winfred Rembert": Rembert, who grew up picking cotton in Cuthbert in southwest Georgia, overcame an early life of prejudice and injustice to prevail as a self-taught artist who processes his pain into powerful memory paintings. Now in his mid-60s and living in New Haven, Conn., he does not dwell on how he was wronged, nor does this documentary. Instead, it follows him on a trip back South for an exhibit at the Albany Civil Rights Institute, where he effervescently proclaims at the opening, "You know what, y'all? I'm back home and I'm somebody." 4:30 p.m. Sunday.

"AKA Blondie," an intimate portrait of the infamous exotic dancer at Atlanta's Clermont Lounge. 9 p.m. Sunday, Plaza Theatre.

MOVIE PREVIEW

Atlanta Film Festival

March 23-April 1 at Landmark's Midtown Art Cinema and other sites. 404-352-4225, www.atlantafilmfestival.com.

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