



<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117934090?refcatid=31>

To print this page, select "PRINT" from the File Menu of your browser.

Posted: Thu. Jul. 5. 2007. 12:59pm PT

Remember the Daze

"Remember the Daze" demonstrates considerable promise on the part of its director.

By PETER DEBRUGE

In high school, every night can feel like the most important night of your life. The luster still remains eight years later in NYU grad Jess Manafort's debut feature, which follows nearly 20 teens on the last day of senior year, 1999. As high school zeitgeist stories go, "Remember the Daze" holds no great secrets or revelations, no iconic characters or "American Pie"-style set pieces, but it demonstrates considerable promise on the part of its director and her up-and-coming cast. These are talents to watch; as soon as one breaks out, pic could become a hot commodity.

From "American Graffiti" to "Dazed and Confused," every generation has its signature "school's out for summer" movie, and pic would probably do the trick for the Y2K crowd if 1998's "Can't Hardly Wait" hadn't already staked out the territory a decade earlier. Manafort herself graduated from high school in 2000 and conveys from personal experience how it felt to party like it's 1999, but times haven't changed enough to qualify her semi-personal entry as a period piece. Whereas most debut features tend to be too earnest, "Remember the Daze" suffers from the opposite problem: It's not really *about* anything -- except perhaps how a bunch of beautiful, popular East Coast teens resort to breaking the rules to stave off boredom.

Rather than providing a central character or romance to root for, Manafort aims to be as all-inclusive as possible, implying that sexual desire and drugs go a long way toward melting the boundaries between separatist cliques seen in pics like "Mean Girls." Here, the head cheerleader (Marnette Patterson) isn't above dating a total geek, and a giddy freshman-to-be (Alexa Vega) stands a real chance at hooking up with an older emo guitarist ("Elephant's" John Robinson).

Some of the teens are college-bound, while others are too busy living the dream to think that far ahead, but they all get along just fine. (Only the jocks, who crash a keg party late in the game, are unwelcome.) While their kids are busy getting into trouble, the adults aren't so much absentee as oblivious (typified by concerned parents David Temple and Moira Kelly). When one mother frets that NYU will introduce her innocent little girl to sex and drugs, the daughter is tempted to reply, "I'm not a virgin, I already have a tattoo and I do a ton of drugs here."

But Manafort is no moralist; nor is she interested in Larry Clark-style sensationalism (though she

does employ his gifted cinematographer, Steve Gainer, to im-pressive effect). Parents may be alarmed by the underage characters' constant, always-casual use of pot, alcohol and shrooms, but younger auds will surely recognize a certain truthfulness in the depiction -- particularly if they happen to be from affluent, all-white neighborhoods.

A lone Asian guy (Charles Chen) floats through the movie taking snapshots of all the revelry, which pays off in pic's most elaborate camera move: a crane shot that drifts up to a second-story window, then pans across the photos drying on a clothesline inside. Cinematography (pic was shot on 35mm and digitally projected for L.A. fest screening) is exceptional throughout, made all the more mesmerizing by Manafort's choice in music, a blend of late-'90s alt rock and original score from Sofia Coppola collaborator Dustin O'Halloran. Her dynamic, engaging style swoops from room to room, passing fluidly between one group of characters and the next, finding humor at every turn.

It's no easy task to wrangle an ensemble of this size, and even though numerous characters seem interchangeable at first, Manafort somehow manages to elicit distinctive personalities and performances from her entire cast. They may be shallow and superficial personalities, but it's still refreshing to spend this much time with a bunch of attractive teens and not have to worry about a serial killer picking them off one by one.

Just as "Can't Hardly Wait" helped launch the careers of half a dozen young stars, "Remember the Daze" boasts a full lineup of talented teens, including Brie Larson (a scene-stealer as one delinquent senior's bossy younger sister), "Big Love's" Douglas Smith (who demonstrates an unforgettable party trick) and comedy natural Chris Marquette. And with the right material to engage her, Manafort is no less likely to succeed on her side of the camera.

Pic was reviewed at the Los Angeles Film Fest under the title "The Beautiful Ordinary."

Contact Peter Debruge at peter.debruge@variety.com

Read the full article at:

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117934090?refcatid=31>

Like this article? Variety.com has over 150,000 articles, 40,000 reviews and 10,000 pages of charts.

Subscribe today!

<http://www.variety.com/subscribe> or call

(866) MY-VARIETY.

© 2010 Reed Business Information

Use of this Website is subject to Terms of Use. Privacy Policy