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The American Astronaut

***1/2 (Audio: B, Video: B, Features: A)

Cory McAbee, Rocco Sisto, Gregory Russell Cook, Annie Golden, James Ransone. Directed by Cory McAbee. Written by Cory McAbee. Produced by William Perkins, Joshua Taylor, bobby Lurie. Released by Facets Video. 2004. 91 minutes. Not rated.

Dolby 5.1, storyboards, test footage, stills and drawings, director's commentary.

It's sad that some of the most interesting independent films which make it all the way to Sundance end up not getting the theatrical release they deserve. A case in point would be "The American Astronaut," a black-and-white dazzler which, like the similarly offbeat and dazzling black-and-white Sundance hit "Treasure Island," was apparently considered too much of a commercial risk (i.e. it was too original and creative) to get more than cursory attention from the gutless slobs who acquire most of this stuff.

Written by, directed by and starring the enormously daring Cory McAbee, "The American Astronaut" is a bizarre but bewitching fable of the futuristic imagination in which a rogue space trader (McAbee) attempts to reconcile the all-male race inhabiting a Saturnian moon with the Amazon culture of Venus. And that's just scratching the surface. It's all a bit like Buck Rogers had entered the subconscious of Edgar Rice Burroughs as interpreted by David Lynch after having seen "Rocky Horror Picture Show" one too many times. It's meant to feel a little like a western, and there are nods to John Ford throughout, but it really is a creature all its own, destined for a huge and enduring cult following as the Facets DVD finally penetrates the culture.

With a terrific score by the Billy Nayer Show and extensive extras, including a commentary by McAbee that is a must-listen for any aspiring independent filmmaker, "The American Astronaut" is arguably one of the most original American films of the past twenty



years. Had it been made in the era of "Eraserhead," it would have ended up playing midnight shows for an eternity. Today, it arrives on DVD without much fanfare... which leaves it up to fans and internet discussion groups to generate that fanfare themselves. -**T.C. Barner**

Collector Rating: STRICTLY FOR FANS

