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## The American Astronaut

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Sometimes, something sublime comes along and it just needs to be celebrated. It doesn't have to be picked apart and over analyzed. It doesn't require some manner of in-depth discussion about themes or symbols, nor does it need a lot of critical support from some reviewer to certify how sensational it is. Examples such as *Satanic Yuppies* and *Cracker* are rare. The British television series *Cracker* for example is, without a doubt, the most powerful and well written crime drama ever created. From its amazing assortment of well defined characters to its clockwork plotting, the flawless facets of this fantastic show are just about endless. The same can be said for a movie like **3 Women**. Robert Altman took all the accolades and appreciations that he'd racked up over the previous few years – everything from **MASH** to **Nashville** – and parlayed them into a subversively surreal story about personality swapping ladies lost in the California desert. It is a languid, luxuriant masterpiece on so many levels that further description only dims its potency.

It is interesting to note that both of these examples came out of a more mainstream media ideal. Today, most examples of demonstrative excellence derive from the independent realm, where artists are allowed the freedom to probe and polish their own personal visions without some creativity-strangling suit staring over their shoulder. Yet even then, in order to get to the true core of originality, you have to dig deeper, way down into the underground arena, where virtual unknowns are pouring over their private pictograms for an audience mostly made up of friends and family. These are the rarest radicals of all, inventive instances when the lack of access to professional production only adds to the magnification of imagination. In music, there are eccentric entities like Fred Lane and the Shaggs; in film we have John Michael McCarthy's **Superstarlet A.D.** or Giuseppe Andrews' **Tr Town**.

It's time to add Cory McAbee to the list of unsung luminaries. A member of rock band The Billy Nayer Show and quite a skilled painter, McAbee has long made several shorts before fueling his most fervent dream with as many of his talents as he could. The result is one of the most novel, outrageous and magnificent independent films of the year. Though many will argue with its inclusion in the canon of timeless classics, **Astronaut** announces a filmmaker with a vision as valid as David Lynch, an approach ala the Coen Brothers, and a Terry Gilliam-esque way of making the futuristic soaked in grim and grit. Fans of cinema at its most pure and powerful will :

#### The DVD:

The offer from the Blueberry Pirate (notorious smuggler of fresh fruit across the globe) is enough. American astronaut Samuel Curtis is to deliver a suitcase containi

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least the genetically cloned DNA of a bar owner that will one day become a The planet is home to a massive factory and a race of men who worship a time in his life, actually saw a woman's breast. Sam will trade the bundle of lad, fly him to the all female planet of Venus, and drop him off for a lifetime return, our rocket jockey will pick up the previous femme fertilizer, the now return the corpse to his family on Earth, where a substantial reward awaits dead goods.

But there is a catch. Sam is being chased by the evil genius Professor Heiss: the interplanetary pilot. Heiss will not stop until he catches Sam and gets v forgiveness. See, Prof. Heiss cannot kill someone if he has a reason to do i the astronaut. But if Sam is merciful, the Professor will then be without any will have no reason to harm our hero. Thus, he can kill him in heartless col wants. Anyway, after leaving his pirate pal at a bar on an asteroid and mak Sam runs into a few problems. A barn in the middle of the universe holds a miners, who want their smelly, retarded son returned to their home planet behind him, in hot pursuit. It's a race to see who will get to Venus first, an of the high-strung honeys there. Will it be Heiss, or **The American Astror**

**The American Astronaut** is **Eraserhead** as envisioned by peyote smokin the naughty little secret that NASA keeps hidden from the perceptive public Moon missions, and the secret of Tang's success. It's a celebration of imag totally unique take on just about every filmmaking genre you can envision. checking sci-fi, westerns, crime dramas, noirish mysteries, costume period propaganda, the horror film and the musical – YES, the MUSICAL! - it is, p vision slathered on celluloid by a brave individual since a certain Mr. Lynch nightmares onto AFI purchased stock. This amazing bit of eccentricity as a defying description as it references almost ever aspect of campy pop cultur If you're locked in a Hollywood blockbuster mode, and can't appreciate son non-derivative, you will probably balk at this purposefully playful interstell an open mind to the possibility of film will see it for what it is – a magnum proportions.

This is more than just some high concept long form music video variable. S writer/director/star Cody McAbee with a jaded, jaundiced eye for wanting t vital visuals to his usual aural attributes. As a member of the notorious The McAbee makes music that is both experimental and expressive, harkening basis of rock and roll while injecting a stream of consciousness schizophre result is like listening to boogie-woogie for the brain damaged, as ideas an coalesce into a sonic sludge of deranged delights. Like carving open an old and scraping out the more manic bits inside, McAbee fashions tunes that ta listener. Just when you think you know where they are going, they switch t usually in audibly ambitious ways – a lot like the film in which these haunti **The American Astronaut** is an excursion into the dadaist and the demen: one kind of experience, only to reclaim and remaster the message into a di comedic configuration.

What **The American Astronaut** does so well is what so many other shitty miserably – it consistently stays true to the world it creates. There are eler and the fanciful here, as well as bows to hackneyed iconography and stran; McAbee and his cast want to achieve nothing short of a viable alternate rea where anything and everything seems perfectly plausible. And they achieve **The American Astronaut** is so simple and yet so complex, so fully fleshe empathize with that our consciousness seems to slip a few fractions and w into cinemania - awash in a trance of entertainment that you never want t

dropping so often and for so long that McAbee should offer TMJ insurance and the spectrum of sights is so revolutionary that you can actually hear them moviemaking rulebook as they cascade across the screen.

As a director, McAbee does indeed have a wonderful eye. His shot selection compositions and framing accentuate and amplify his ideas. There is barely along **The American Astronaut's** narrative path and it is the cold, considered McAbee that solidifies the success. Equally amazing are the performances of the unknown cast. Made up of friends and band mates, New York stage actors, each performer captures the tone and temperament of the film exquisitely. They get more than their fair share of screen time. Highlights include Rocco Professor Hess into the most marvelously misguided villain in the history of Joshua Taylor as the smoothest sounding, greatest dancing pirate in the era. Cook makes a very iconic Boy Who Saw a Woman's Breast (especially deck god Mercury by way of Buck Rodgers outfit) and Annie Golden is gloriously crackpot Queen of Venus. Everyone, in the main roles, including McAbee as completely in sync with the mantra of this movie.

Aside from the main characters, McAbee also populates his picture with an immediately threaten to steal the scenes they're in. A pair of burly bathroom the toilet a song and dance for the angry astronaut, and the bar band at the the void – asteroid that is – when they motor their way through a especially sequence thieves are human, actually. A strange mutant alien gold miner in the middle of the universe is viewed in such subtle, suggestive ways that the major impression without every being completely visible. And Sam's rocket fashioned steam engine, retrofitted into a cigar shape design and decked out apartment. Add in a menacing alarm clock that angrily intones, "What did you over and over again, and an unbelievably beautiful set of paintings substituted (instead of CGI or physical effects, McAbee applied his skills with a brush for flight 'footage') and you're standing in the shadow of giants.

McAbee's universe is indeed obtuse. It is peripatetic in its plotting and frigid. Films this fresh just don't arrive like balling infants from a creative cabbage and loved, fretted over by artisans convinced that, if they just got the character cotton to their incorruptible brilliance. In McAbee's case, we need no more fine film. **The American Astronaut** is unlike anything you've seen in the past, crafted solely out of an individual perception and filtered through an equally funny and sad, frightening and joyful. It buries itself in your brain and never your sensibilities as it simultaneously realigns your pleasure centers. As much as specific genres as it is an attempt to create one all its own, this is one reminder of the complete lack of derivativeness or absence of awfulness dissuade you from the psychedelic space jockey. You'll be more than glad that you did.

#### **The Video:**

**The American Astronaut** looks fan – friggin'- tastic on DVD: the monochromatic movie is pristinely preserved on the digital medium. Shot on 35 mm film and white transfer here, the 1.85:1 non-anamorphic image (what a pity) is certain times, the print resembles old crime scene photos from the 30s and the natural nuances of noir shatter us with their shadows and light loveline dirt specs during the opening credits, the rest of this optical offering is outstanding. You should be proud of this immaculate production.

#### **The Audio:**

There are three ways to enjoy the aural attributes of **The American Astronaut**.

to an adequate mono track that more or less captures the ambient extreme single speaker ease. Or, you could experience the Stereo setup, allowing you the moody mix. But the best bet by far is the fascination, ferocious 5.1 surround the music to soar and sizzle with all the wanton wildness McAbee and his band with some excellent immersion and a quality share of channel challenging, dynamics here are all superb. While the other sonic offerings are sufficient, theater experience.

#### The Extras:

McAbee opens up the process involved in making this movie via the context of this excellent DVD package. In the galleries section, we get images from the set which makes for a strange sight after witnessing everything and everyone well as storyboards created by the director himself. There is even a collection of McAbee fashioned to advertise the film. Done in monochrome, and almost in execution, these concrete canvases are amazing.

For the Behind the Scene segment of the disc, McAbee scuttles the old idea and turns his alternate narrative track discussion into a combination stand-up and art showcase. Appearing before a live audience in a Bronx bar, and talking to the crowd, he plays behind him, the auteur fields questions, admires his own work, and even reveals secrets used to realize his vision. There is an interactive element to the program where audience questions about the music and the actors - and even some facets of McAbee's life are discussed. We see McAbee's appearance, occasionally interrupted by clips from the movie (we usually switch to the film whenever the musical sequences start). The whole enterprise is fascinating. Coming across as part carnival barker and part comedian, McAbee makes this one of the better DVD discussions on the market.

#### Final Thoughts:

For a long time, David Lynch has had several personal pet projects that have names of such potential productions are as evocative as the rumored subjects around: *Ronnie Rocket* (about a three foot tall man cursed with electricity (through his body)), *One Saliva Bubble* (about a man with curative spit) and *Blue Velvet* (about a trio of men who used to be cows, trying to acclimate to their new world). **American Astronaut** feels like a misplaced screenplay that McAbee stunk through Big Dave's curbside garbage cans. On par with said genius's most works, this fantastic first film from a truly gifted moviemaker is a miracle and represents that rarity in the dominion of ingenuity, the convincingly immaculate experience. So suit up, strap in and get set for one of the most amazing spectacles. This **American Astronaut** guarantees a raucous ride you will never forget.

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