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2001 Sundance Film Festival

January 18 - 28, 2001
Park City, Utah

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Sundance Film Festival

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THE AMERICAN ASTRONAUT

91 min, 2001, United States

Synopsis

The American Astronaut is a semi-autobiographical musical space western that was masterfully created by the tonsils, fingertips, eyes, and acute mental abilities of auteur Cory McAbee. If you want a conventional flick, stay away from this one. However, if you seek something truly new, this film is for you.

Director

Each year filmmakers send the Sundance Screenwriting Lab thousands of scripts in hope that they will be one of the few selected for the Lab workshop; Cory McAbee was one of those lucky few. *The American Astronaut* is his first feature.

Review

Remember when you were a kid and you thought how one day we might all be living on the moon? Well, someone has taken that childhood dream one step farther. Imagine a solar system where Jupiter is a planet populated by



FILM CREDITS

Director	Cory McAbee
Screenplay	Cory McAbee
Photo	W. Mott Hupfel
Editing	Tete Beaudreau
Setting	

burly miners; Venus is the home to only beautiful women, one can stop on an asteroid for a drink at a bar, and interplanetary travel is as easy as getting in your flying mobile home/locomotive train and taking off. This is the setting for the new film *The American Astronaut* by Cory McAbee. As the director/writer/star, McAbee was obliged to offer the introduction to his film at this year's Sundance Film Festival, at which he called his film "a semi-autobiographical musical space western."

This campy Ed Wood-ish style musical follows the loner hero Samuel Curtis (Cory McAbee), an independent shipping contractor from Nevada, U.S.A., Earth, as he is pursued through the rustic solar system which is re-created with the help of some low-tech, but dazzling animation mixed in with some still photography. His pursuer? Professor Hess, a complex man with an unnatural fixation to kill without reason. Oh yeah, and did I mention it is the professor's birthday? Well, don't worry he never lets us forget this fact. As Curtis attempts to complete his job, his old friend the Professor inches closer and closer to catching up with him by discarding all in his path with a gun that disintegrates people into a pile

The beautiful black and white film stock mixed with an abundance of flawless cinematography and lighting gave *The American Astronaut* a period glow akin to the films of Jim Jarmusch. The art direction is an "eclectic mix of futuristic and retro" that truly gives the film a feel of being no longer in Kansas or anywhere even close. All of the film's players are no-name actors, yet each of them deserves a round of applause for the performances they put into their outrageous roles. Most noteworthy is the turn Rocco Sisto puts in as the unreasonable villain Professor Hess. Just as standout are the musical pieces in the film which are performed by McAbee's band "The Billy Nayer Show," which has thrived the last dozen years on the fringe of the mainstream with sounds very similar to Frank Zappa

Each year filmmakers send the Sundance Screenwriting Lab thousands of scripts in hope that they will be one of the few selected for the Lab workshop. McAbee got to be one of those lucky few and it is no wonder since he wrote an immensely visceral and poetic script. There is no contesting the wonderful career that lies ahead for McAbee. His breadth of talent is amazingly expansive, be it with his music, his acting, his writing, or his filmmaking.

Jeremy Platt

Costume	
Music	
Cast	Tom Aldredge Bill Buell Greg Russell Cook Rocco Sisto Ned Sublette
Production	Michael Krantz BNS PRODUCTIONS
Agent/Distributor	