

## **FILM REVIEWS**

### **AMERICAN ASTRONAUT - Cory McAbee (2000)**

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*by Cormac Donnelly*

With trailers for Spider Man and Episode 2 searing our retina and the promise of the new Matrix picture and the 10th instalment of the Star Trek franchise later in the year, odds are most people will see at least one science-fiction themed film this year. Unfortunately most people won't get a chance to see The American Astronaut and that's just a crying shame!

Samuel Curtis (Cory McAbee) is the American Astronaut, an interplanetary trader plying the space-lanes delivering cats and winning dance competitions. On accepting a particularly shady contract Curtis finds himself embarking on what could be loosely termed an 'adventure' with an old friend, Prof. Hess, hot on his heels with murder in mind.

Science fiction has long been hailed as a genre embracing experimentation and originality and this film would seem to prove that this is indeed the case. The American Astronaut is both irreverent and emotive; at once laugh-out-loud funny and also quietly disturbing. Sprinkled with catchy rock tunes and musical set pieces, the film often seems to have more in common with a western musical than modern science fiction. Filmed in black & white the use of shadow and contrast is similar to the quality achieved by Roger Deakins for the Coen brothers on The Man Who Wasn't There (2001) and he was nominated for an Oscar.

Cory McAbee (writer/director/composer and star) comes across like an exaggerated version of Hugh Jackman, all side-burns and gravely 40-a-day voice. His performance is surprisingly assured, surprising that is until you realise that McAbee is a veteran live performer (his band The Billy Nayer Show writing and performing all the films music). A multitasking chap McAbee also produced a number of paintings which are used in the film to depict the spaceships exterior, a stone-age but effective approach to budget special effects.

On reflection The American Astronaut often resembles a collection of set pieces, like individually filmed pages from the diary of Samuel Curtis, and this can cause the film to stutter. The cast though are beyond reproach with old hand Rocco Sisto as Prof. Hess and Gregory Russell Cook as the aptly named 'Boy who actually saw a woman's breast'. Part Western, part musical, part Keaton era Flash Gordon, this is not something you're likely to come across any time soon in your local multiplex. But, if you get the chance, if my hopelessly inadequate description has piqued your interest, it's definitely worth a look.

8.5/10