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"Born & Raised"



Nick Loritsch wrote and stars in "Born & Raised"

There is no shortage of admirers or detractors when it comes to Florida's panhandle. From Pensacola to Apalachicola, the beloved vacation spot of millions is also known as the 'Redneck Riviera.' Well, yes, plenty of areas along Florida's gulf coast are home to a bevy of rambunctious antics, rowdy visitors and a crowd of undesirables. Eliminate your bias, however, and it won't take much investigation to see the quiet beauty and Spanish moss-draped charms of the area. "Born & Raised" was shot entirely in Panama City, with much of the cast and crew having once called the region home.

The clean titles and smooth camera work are an instant indicator of the careful editing that shows throughout the film. My favorite moments of the film mostly take place at the marina, with the blues and grays of the gulf coast shimmering lustrously. I've spent a lot of time vacationing a little to the east of Panama City and the film does a good job of transporting the audience there. This isn't the resort town you see in magazines and real estate guides, this is the real city. People live and work here; they don't just play. The main cast comes across very naturally. Dawntavia Bullard, Sandra Staggs, Keith Hudson and Alex Morris slide into their supporting roles with ease, while leads Nick Loritsch and Jackson Pyle carry the film very capably. Loritsch, who also wrote the screenplay, possesses the looks and incisiveness of a young Matt Damon. His heavy brow and crooked

grin stir up flashbacks of Damon's southern boy, Rudy Baylor, in "The Rainmaker." Oddly enough, these two films possess a few plot parallels.

The film suffers from too much expository dialogue. We hear a lot about the bad blood between our characters, but aren't invited to learn about it organically. While this makes a few scenes in the film's first act a bit clunkier than they could have been, it does at least allow the story to progress at a nice rate. The featured music is hit or miss; some songs fit their scene like a glove while others made me wonder if a simple score selection would've suited the mood better. The only character misfire is the attempted comic relief, Gary. His purpose is well-intentioned, but the time given him might have been worth more spent developing the characters we already liked.

The Jerry-Rigged Films trio of director/editor Joshua Dragge, writer/actor Nick Loritsch and producer Austin Eckstein is a good, balanced team, providing the film with a sparkling polish atop its natural grain. "Born & Raised" feels as local and personal as it possibly could. Despite a predictable mass tying of loose ends, you can't help but have a smile on your face by the time the credits roll.

"Born & Raised" plays at the Rome International Film Festival on Saturday, September 8th at 11pm at the Rome Area History Museum. As the last feature film to screen, the ninth annual RIFF will end on a high note.

Posted by Cameron McAllister at 2:39 PM