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Film Reviews

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Tribeca

Any Day Now

By BOYD VAN HOEIJ

A PFM Pictures presentation and production. (International sales: Preferred Content, Los Angeles.) Produced by Travis Fine, Chip Hourihn, Liam Finn, Kristine Hostetter Fine. Executive producers, Maxine Makover, Anne O'Shea, Wayne Larue Smith, Dan Skahen. Co-producers, Alex Chorches, Steven Robert Kozlowski. Directed by Travis Fine. Screenplay, Fine, George Arthur Bloom.

With: Alan Cumming, Garrett Dillahunt, Isaac Leyva, Frances Fisher, Gregg Henry, Chris Mulkey, Don Franklin, Jamie Anne Allman, Kelli Williams, Alan Rachins, Mindy Sterling, Doug Sperman.

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A child with Down syndrome unexpectedly ends up in the lap of a flamboyant drag singer and his closeted district-attorney b.f. in "Any Day Now," the sensitive sophomore outing of helmer Travis Fine ("The Space Between"). This intimate character drama explores gay adoption rights, or rather the lack thereof, in 1970s Los Angeles without ever becoming preachy or pushing for contempo relevance. A stellar perf by Alan Cumming as the cross-dressing crooner-cum-caretaker is the pic's most marketable asset, while its recent Tribeca audience award win suggests "Day" has crossover potential that a smart distrib could tap into.

Watch It

Queue It

Rudy Donatello (Cumming) is the lead lip-syncher of drag act at an L.A. gay club. During a performance, he spots a handsome guy slouching at a bar. Before you can say sexual charge, Rudy is servicing the man, a district attorney named Paul (Garrett Dillahunt), in a car, followed by a short, funny scene involving the police that quickly establishes the men's main traits and complementary natures.

It could have been a one-night thing, but when Rudy finds Marco (Isaac Leyva), the Down-syndrome son of his drug-addict neighbor, Marianna (Jamie Anne Allman), abandoned at home at night, his first instinct is to take Marco to a man of the law: Paul. With Marianna arrested and Marco escaping from the care of social services to "go home," Rudy finds he feels the need to look after the child, despite the fact that the Queens-born singer doesn't know Marco very well and is broke.

Fine, reworking a screenplay written almost four decades ago by George Arthur Bloom, successfully combines character flourishes and narrative development in almost every scene, turning the pic into a forward-barreling story populated with fully rounded people. The two men decide to petition for temporary custody, and when the pragmatic Paul suggests they tell the judge that they live together (since Paul is financially more stable), the more impulsive Rudy immediately seizes the opportunity and says he'll move into Paul's place with Marco. The short scene highlights the deeper needs and desires of both; though their relationship started with a sexual spark, it's the shared care of their charge that brings them together.

The film's second half details the couple's battle for permanent custody after Marco's mother is released. Though Marianna's a convicted lawbreaker and drug fiend who abandoned her offspring, the judges have a hard time believing the child would be better off living with two homosexuals. Period setting is specific enough to see these problems in context, and Fine refrains from pushing analogies to the current gay adoption debate beyond what naturally arises from the material. Instead, the helmer successfully casts the couple's fight as a test of character, thus ensuring "Any Day Now" is primarily a

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story of people, not issues.

Acting from beneath the least flattering haircut this side of the Bee Gees, Cumming delivers what is possibly his best performance to date. That Rudy can sling hilarious zingers at anyone in the room without ever coming off as a snooty, acid-tongued diva is but the least of Cumming's accomplishments in a performance that also delivers the necessary warmth and combat-strength. Some well-performed songs, including an aching rendition of "Love Don't Live Here Anymore," add another layer of poignancy.

Opposite Cumming, Dillahunt ("Raising Hope," "Deadwood") is a more reserved but no less determined presence. As their adopted son of sorts, Leyva makes the most of the pic's least developed lead role, with some of the supporting thespians more memorable, including Don Franklin as a straight-talking lawyer, Kelli Williams as a sympathetic teacher and Frances Fisher as an unyielding judge.

Shot with modest means on the Red camera, with a postproduction finish that gives a look reminiscent of period-appropriate 16mm, the film is convincing as a period piece in an unfussy and slightly generic way. Song selections by music supervisor PJ Bloom ("Glee"), the son of the pic's original screenwriter, is aces, effortlessly evoking the era and what's at stake for the characters, without resorting to too-obvious clichés.

Camera (color, HD), Rachel Morrison; editor, Tom Cross; music, Joey Newman; music supervisor, PJ Bloom; production designer, Elizabeth Garner; costume designer, Samantha Kuester; sound, Scott Martin Gershin; associate producers, George Arthur Bloom, Sarah Trippe, Stephen Trippe; casting, Anya Collaf, Michael Nicolo. Reviewed at Tribeca Film Festival (Spotlight), April 27, 2012. Running time: 101 MIN.

Contact Boyd van Hoeij at news@variety.com

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