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AFI FEST FILM REVIEW: Wander Darkly (Tara Miele, 2020)

Description



y Gleeson during the virtual 2020 AFI FEST presented by Audi.

Thriller/Drama *Wander Darkly*, a Lionsgate production, written and directed by Tara Miele, and starring Sienna Miller as Adrienne and Diego Luna as Matteo, is a surreal journey into conflict resolution between a young couple following a traumatic car accident. In a very non-linear approach, the couple relives the past through the duality of their shared moments including fond memories from the initial courtship through the truths of the present as they attempt to rediscover the love that binds them together as they face an uncertain future.

The film opens with solemn non-diegetic music as introductory titles roll. An aerial tracking â??god shotâ?• follows a car traveling down a nightscape city street that could pass for West Los Angeles. An interior shot of the moving vehicle reveals a young couple with a newborn in a heated exchange. Tension is in the air. Dominance and control. Neon lights flash giving an illusion of a video game. Mention of splitting up. Then a massive collision.

From here mise-en-scene and cinematography get very interesting as time becomes fluid with death and out-of-body astral planing. Carolina Costas creates this fluid time continuum effect through various camera angles, movements, and lens choices. Imagine Christopher Nolanâ??s *Inception* cinematography and mise-en-scene where up is down and down is up as our lead characters are passing in and out of linear time going forward and back revisiting critical moments in their relationship trying to explain to one another what each was experiencing in those moments. Iâ??m thinking *Ghost (1990)* meets *Before Sunrise.*

In the Q & A following the film led by AFI Programmer Claudia Puig, Miele revealed the impetus for the film came from her life experience of being in a traumatic car accident with her husband. The experience changed her perspective on mortality and the adrenaline-fueled lifestyle she led. Sienna Miller also participated and shared Adrienne was one of her most challenging roles as an actor due to numerous emotional arcs, beats, and emotional u-turns. Miller and Miele seemed to both agree on the success of the film hinged on how surreal her character could be. In addition, *Wander Darkly* was shot in Los Angeles and Miele really wanted the story to be an LA story about an interracial couple. Producer Monica Levinson brought some of her surreal magic to the production set with the inclusion of dolphins!

On its most basic level, *Wander Darkly* is a relationship film challenging boundaries while seeking the answer for continuity. Miller in a tour de force performance crushes it as Adrienne pulling out all the emotional stops exploring grief, joy, and love. Luna is no slouch as Matteo either. Steadfast and earnest as he explains his flighty behavior with axioms of â??for better or worse,â?• and â??you have to take the good with the bad.â?• As contentious as the relationship is/was, watching the two come to a resolution was emotionally moving and deeply satisfying to watch. The sound design by Frank Gates and the music by Alex Weston was more than complementary. They were an integral part of the filmâ??s narrative as were the dolphins.

Wander Darkly is as good a film as Iâ??ve seen this year and is scheduled to be in select theaters, on digital, and on-demand on December 11th. Check it out! Youâ??ll be glad you did!

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