

SciFi Shorts at Worldfest Houston 2014

Eclectic Review by Amy Sisson

Everybody's a Critic

This weekend I attended a very small sliver of the Worldfest-Houston Independent International Film Festival. I only became aware of this event late last week, so I didn't have time to plan much, but I was able to get to the Sunday matinee screening of five "sci-fi shorts." Mainly I wanted to see "I Remember the Future", a short film based on Michael Burstein's Nebula-nominated short story of the same title.

The session was introduced by one of the festival organizers, who said (if I recall correctly) that some 1400 films had been entered into the festival. There are so many that the festival cannot even screen all of the winners in the various categories.

I Remember the Future – Written by Zane Pyper, Klayton Stainer, Michael Burstein; directed by Klayton Stainer; 26:32 minutes.

I about fell over when I realized this movie was shot on location in Melbourne, Australia, because I would have thought it was shot in Brooklyn, and that the two main actors were American. I knew this was based on Michael Burstein's short story of the same title, and I vaguely remembered Michael saying online at some point that someone had approached him about turning the story into a short film, but I'd missed the fact that it was an Australian film student. I'm not sure which surprised me more: the "Australian" part or the "student" part, because I can definitely say that there was nothing "student" about this film.

The main character, Abe (Reg Gorman) is an old man looking backwards over a long career writing science fiction. Now, however, he's faced with the onset of dementia, just as his somewhat estranged daughter informs him she is moving to the other side of the country. His tense conversations with his daughter are interspersed with his trips down memory lane, as he envisions scenes and characters from the many worlds he created in his novels. I especially liked that the scenes looked the way he would

have imagined them when writing for the pulps, rather than the way a young writer might imagine them now. Abe tells his daughter that he'd always felt like he had a connection to the future, that his ideas weren't his own but that they were somehow real and he'd simply been able to tune into them. This angers his daughter, because she feels it's no excuse for having been an emotionally absent father.

I have to confess that I haven't read the original story, for which I'm glad in a way because I got to see the film completely fresh. The story itself is satisfying, especially to writerly types, and this film was made with skill and loving care. One sequence, showing two of Abe's space-suited characters exploring an ancient abandoned library with paper, is absolutely stunning. (In fact, my husband wondered in what library it was shot, while I said I assumed it was CGI....) The movie was well-acted, and I loved that Tiffany Lyndall-Knight, who played the daughter, had another role as well. (This actress also played the Hybrid in the new incarnation of Battlestar Galactica.) I did wish a little bit that the father-daughter relationship wasn't quite so strained, because it felt a bit like a statement that a writer couldn't create such rich fictional worlds without being emotionally absent to his or her family. I know better than to assume the author was actually making that statement; that's just how it came through my personal lens. While the conclusion was a little more sentimental than I would normally prefer, it felt right for this story and it resulted in a perfect last line, delivered perfectly.

I Remember the Future is the reason I became aware of the festival in the first place, and the reason I went. This one film was worth making the trip across town for just by itself; the fact that I got to see a couple of other really good short films too was icing on the cake.

Oh, and the closing credits were fabulous! They reminded me of the Robert Downey Jr. Sherlock Holmes movies.

- Amy Sisson

07 APR 2014

<http://amysreviews.blogspot.com.au/2014/04/sci-fi-shorts-at-worldfest-houston-2014.html>