



"My parents just love to laugh, and my mum would laugh at ANYTHING, so I had the perfect audience." -Cameron Diaz

The World of Film in Australia - on the Internet

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BITTER & TWISTED

SYNOPSIS:

Three years after the premature death of young Liam (Jermei Brennan), the Lombard family in southern Sydney is still grieving: lonely mum Penelope (Noni Hazlehurst), tormented, failing car salesman dad Jordan (Steve Rodgers), lost-soul brother Ben (Christopher Weekes) and sister Lisa (Basia A'Hern), all find it difficult to communicate - not just their grief, but almost anything. Liam's girlfriend, their neighbour Indigo (Leeanna Walsman), is having an affair with the older - married - Greg (Gary Sweet) and wants to get away to Melbourne. Desperate for contact, Penelope goes to a singles bar; Jordan sinks into deep depression; Ben is confused by the advances of his bi-sexual friend Matt (Matthew Newton) and has a crush on Indigo, hoping to take Liam's place ... they're all adrift, slightly bitter and twisted.

Review by Andrew L. Urban:

Scenes of quiet desperation with minimal dialogue, lives shuttered down and pain barely blocked, all in the deceptively ordinary and sunny summer of suburban Sydney, are some of the elements of Christopher Weekes' impressive and moving debut.

The film, originally intended as a black comedy loosely inspired by memories of his own youth by Weekes, closed the 2nd Dungog Film Festival (May 29 - June 1, 2008) and was generally regarded as one of the highlights of the festival - but the comedy had seeped out of it. It is a well observed and layered film about a suburban Sydney family coping with grief with an emotionally raw, powerful screenplay.

Exceptional performances from the entire cast - and a giant one from Noni Hazlehurst - help make this a riveting film, as they conjure up real characters for us who act and feel in sometimes self-destructive ways - recognizably human, recognizably us. A visceral, haunting debut, filled with truths, Bitter & Twisted is one of the year's best little gems a work of lasting value in which all the cinematic elements fuse into a fully satisfying experience.

Review by Louise Keller:

A film fuelled by emotions, this impressive debut by Christopher Weeks canvasses the heartfelt, tender, angry, frustrated and confused feelings of a family reeling by the impact of loss. 'You're like a wall; I can't get through,' Noni Hazlehurst's Penelope pleads to her husband Jordan (Steve Rodgers), as he locks himself into an isolated vacuum of grief. Music plays a vital part as we get glimpses into each of the family member's lives. There are snippets of conversations, a snapshot of the daily routine and an only too real insight into the emotional heartache of the harsh reality. It's about love, loss, bitterness, angst, and finding a way to recognise what it is you want and doing something about it.

It's a film where less is more and Weeks directs his cast with instinctive sensitivity. A camera that circles around its characters compounds the confusion and the script keeps dialogue to a bare minimum, allowing our involvement to magnify by maintaining the tension and impetus of the emotional state of each character. Rodgers is especially impressive as the obese, failed car-salesman who is unable to control his life, while Hazlehurst delivers one of her best performances to date as the helpless wife who feels unattractive and unwanted. Weeks himself embodies all the characters' confusion as the sexually confused Ben who dallies with his dead brother's ex-girlfriend Indigo (Leeanna Walsman) and Matt Newton's taunting, wonderfully named Matt Salt. Gary Sweet nails the adulterous husband who has changed



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CRITICAL COUNT

Favourable: 2
Unfavourable: 0
Mixed: 0



BITTER & TWISTED (M)
(Aust, 2008)

CAST: Noni Hazlehurst, Steve Rodgers, Leeanna Walsman, Christopher Weekes, Rhys Muldoon, Matthew Newton, Gary Sweet, Basia A'Hern, Penne Hackforth-Jones, Jeremy Brennan

his mind and we love to hate Rhys Muldoon's car sales boss who states at one point to Jordan, 'Everybody feels like shit sometimes; it's not an excuse.'

There are uncomfortable silences, some unexpected tenderness and a surprising event that is the catalyst for all players to make some hard decisions and assessments. Bitter & Twisted is a film about people reacting to situations and to each other. And in the hands of Christopher Weekes, it's a film to savour.



PRODUCER: Briaget Callow
 DIRECTOR: Christopher Weekes
 SCRIPT: Christopher Weekes
 CINEMATOGRAPHER: Sam Collins
 EDITOR: Simon Wright
 MUSIC: Brian Cachia
 PRODUCTION DESIGN: Phil Shearer
 RUNNING TIME: 90 minutes
 AUSTRALIAN DISTRIBUTOR:
 Australian Film Syndicate
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FILM FESTIVAL

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