

**From:** Mary Cusack  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 26, 2017 11:16 PM  
**To:** Confidence Of a Tall Man Showing!  
**Subject:** [Confidence Of a Tall Man Showing!] Confidence of a Tall Man



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**Mary Cusack**

July 26 at 11:14pm

Confidence of a Tall Man

In advance of its first Lansing-area screening this Sunday (Tavern and Tap, 101 E. Washington Ave. Lansing, 8:00 PM), I had the privilege of getting a sneak peek at the latest release from Rebel Pictures, "Confidence of a Tall Man." Directed by Michael McCallum and written by frequent McCallum co-conspirator Justin Muschong, "Confidence" fits well in the Rebel Pictures canon of rich, dark, moody, character-centric films.

The story is deceptively simple: on the 50th anniversary of the opening of their deceased father's bar, two brothers contemplate the freedom that will come if they can sell the bar. As screw-up Teddy (Ken Orlich) blathers at his bookie, letting his mouth write checks that his ass can't cash, Tommy (Johnny DeMarco) quietly shoulders the responsibility of running the bar.

While the brothers want nothing more than to be free of the boat anchor of a bar, viewers who are regulars at any similar establishment will see themselves reflected in its clientele, and feel the heartbreak of watching the slow death of a place that you love, a place where you fit in, where the faces behind the bar provide a comfortable routine. Tommy is constantly reminded that the bar is an "institution" by its patrons, and each time the line is uttered, the chains around his shoulders drag him down just a bit more. DeMarco has the perfect countenance for the role, with sad, soulful eyes and the defeated stance of a man who wakes up every day and stares into a fiscal abyss. I'll carefully avoid any spoilers, but will advise viewers to watch Tommy's posture throughout the film, keeping the title in mind.

This sort of attention to detail is what elevates Rebel Pictures films above many

independent films. McCallum and Director of Photography Scott Allman capitalize on the unique details at the real-world shooting locations. Shooting in a bar like Zoobie's Old Town Tavern presents challenges, but the filmmakers turn those challenges into cinematographic gold. Shelves of shiny liquor bottles backed by a mirror, a lighting and camera angle nightmare, are used to frame Tommy's face in a powerful moment of literal and figurative self-reflection. Such intentional, subtle and meaningful shots are used throughout, providing silent narrative that is more powerful than scripted exposition would be.

Another consistent mark of quality in Rebel Pictures films is the music. This is true for "Confidence," particularly the pieces by Michael Smalley, Gary Clavette and Geoff Lewis. Their jazz score sets the perfect tone for Tommy's soul-searching journey.

Fans of McCallum's work will recognize "Confidence" as the latest in a series of visual odes to Lansing. McCallum doesn't just use Lansing as his base of operations, but uses Lansing as the paper for his scripts and the canvas for his vision. A theme about the loss of independent businesses -particularly family-owned local institutions- is especially poignant as Tommy shuffles past the faded façade of the shuttered Emil's restaurant. McCallum captured what may be the last image of Emil's before it was razed, making this scene a haunting reminder that despite the connotations of the word, no "institution" is immune to economic cycles and shifts in consumer interests.

"Confidence of a Tall Man" packs a lot into 30 minutes. At its most basic core, the film is an investigation of the relationship between an individual and an institution. Who is Tommy without his old man's bar? In one frustrating, heartbreaking day, he is forced to find out.

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