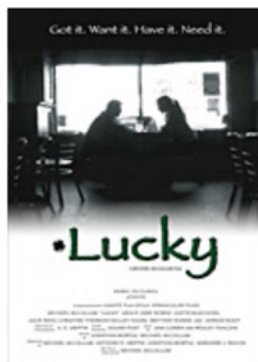


Rogue Cinema

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Lucky (2011) – By Cary Conley



What will Michael McCallum come up with next? His debut feature was a powerful, black-and-white dramatic film entitled Fairview St., followed by a rousingly funny slapstick comedy called Handlebar. So when a screener of his new feature, Lucky, arrived, I couldn't wait to pop it in the DVD to see what McCallum's mind had created.

Best described as a comedy-drama—perhaps leaning a little more towards the dramatic end—Lucky is quite different, at least cinematically, than McCallum's first two features. Lucky follows the lives of the main protagonist, Henry (McCallum) and his two best friends Nick and Ricky, as they blaze a path

through singles bars, leaving a wake of broken relationships and destruction behind them. The film opens with Henry coming home after a night of drinking and breaking up with his current girlfriend. Thus begins Henry's journey through coffee shops, bars and diners as he searches for the one girl that will complete his life. His two best friends closely mirror Henry's life as they, too, continuously break up with girlfriends they are tired of so they can start over again, only to complete the cycle in a few short months.

The viewer is never sure why Henry is so afraid of commitment, but it seems like every time he finds himself in a good relationship, he always finds a way to sabotage that relationship. He even tries his hand at dating his buddies' cast-offs, but those don't work out either. Finally, he seems to have found "the one." They seem to get along well and he even takes the huge step of telling her, "I like you...I really like you." For Henry, who is more likely to leave the wreckage of his latest relationship standing on a street corner than to admit his feelings for a girl, this is the equivalent of admitting love. But she betrays him by meeting an ex-lover (one of Henry's good friends), and although she claims it was to ensure some closure in that relationship, will Henry be able to regain his trust, or will this spell the beginning of the end of what was potentially his first long-term relationship as an adult?

One thing about McCallum's writing is that it comes across as truly authentic. The conversations have a ring of authenticity to them and I always find myself thinking, "That is exactly the way it would happen," or "That is exactly what that character would say." McCallum himself is an excellent dramatic actor and surrounds himself with other quality actors. When you have strong writing and equally strong acting, the result is usually a high-quality film, which is exactly what we have in Lucky.

For example, there is a scene early on in the film where Henry is lying in bed with his present girlfriend, Elizabeth (Brittany Risner). Even though we've just met Elizabeth, we immediately understand she is clingy. She brings up meeting Henry's parents, mentioning that she's discussed Henry with her parents. She also brings up children. It's clear that Henry is uncomfortable. It's also clear that the relationship is now doomed. Henry just isn't ready to settle down. The scene unfolds exactly as we expect it to. Anyone

Monthly

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who has ever been in this particular position understands Henry's discomfort. It's almost palpable. In another scene, Henry has made the mistake of bringing Elizabeth to an all-night poker game. Again, she is clingy, standing behind Henry and latching onto his neck, sitting on his lap as he tries to see his hand, and at one point even chastising him for drinking too much, a definite relationship-killer when done in front of "the guys." Elizabeth even asks, "How long does this game last?" The reply: "Until one man is left...or until we get bored and decide to go to a titty bar." Henry then has to backpeddle and smooth things over quickly, lest Elizabeth becomes too pouty and embarrasses him further. Again, I imagine this scene played out a thousand times across the U.S. in exactly this same way. Risner's acting is pitch-perfect as the clingy, possessive girlfriend.

One of the most striking differences between Lucky and McCallum's previous films is the cinematography. Instead of the standard cinematography that most directors would use for a dramatic film, I got the distinct feel of a documentary. Instead of smooth dolly shots and cuts to close-ups, A.E. Griffin's cinematography is much more creative, with zooms during dialogue scenes and slightly shaky, handheld shots. There are also continuous shots that slowly move around a group of characters, ignoring the fact that the viewer is seeing the back of a character's head instead of the standard cuts to the dialogue. And the dialogue itself is sometimes messy, with characters interrupting each other, stopping and starting again, as people do when they argue. These artistic choices in cinematography and writing mirror the sometimes messy relationships of Henry and his friends and lend the film a certain amount of realism, with the end result being a film that almost feels documentary-like instead of the standard Hollywood fare. I also enjoyed Stuart Poltrock's sound design. One example is during scenes that would typically be loud and hard for people to hear each other—for instance, in a bar—Poltrock doesn't use the standard filtered sound; rather, the viewer strains to hear what the characters are saying due to the rise and fall of the typical background noise you would get in that situation. Simply put, the film seems absolutely real—in writing, characterization, sound design and filming. And, as always, Jonathan Worful's and McCallum's editing is excellent.

One of McCallum's strong suits has always been music. He has a genuine knack for picking out songs—often local or regional talent—that perfectly capture the mood of a character or scene. The only other modern director I've seen with this kind of talent is Quentin Tarantino. Both directors have an uncanny ability to use quirky songs that just seem to fit in their films, and McCallum has crafted a beautiful soundtrack for Lucky. As you may be able to tell, McCallum is multitalented. He has written, directed, and starred in all three of his full-length features. One would think at some point, the quality might suffer due to juggling so many roles, but I have found that to be untrue. McCallum has been very consistent in making high-quality independent features, due partly to his vast talent and partly to the extremely talented people he surrounds himself with.

Lucky is enjoying its premiere at the Detroit Independent Film Festival on March 11 and again on March 13 at Celebration Cinema Lansing. The picture has been nominated for Best Feature, Best Director, Best Actor (McCallum), Best Supporting Actress (Grace Anne Rowan), Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, and Best Editing at DIFF. While the film is just beginning to play the festival circuit, it will be available to purchase in the coming months, and it comes highly recommended. Hop on over to Rebel Pictures at www.rebelpictures.net for more information about Lucky, and while you're at it order copies of Fairview St. and Handlebar. Or you can check it out at www.oneluckymovie.com. After you've seen McCallum's films, you too, will be asking, "What will McCallum come up with next?"

By Duane • Film Reviews •

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