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Feeling Minnesota

A Fine Line release of a Jersey Films production. Produced by Danny DeVito, Michael Shamberg, Stacey Sher. Executive producer, Erwin Stoff. Co-producer, Eric McLeod. Directed, written by Steven Baigelman.

Jjakes - Keanu Reeves
Sam - Vincent D'Onofrio
Freddie - Cameron Diaz
Red - Delroy Lindo
Waitress - Courtney Love
Nora - Tuesday Weld
Ben - Dan Aykroyd
Bible Salesman - Levon Helm

By [EMANUEL LEVY](#)

Despite a few genuinely engaging moments, almost everything in and about "Feeling Minnesota," Steven Baigelman's disappointing directorial debut, is irritatingly derivative: the secondhand plot, the small-time characters and, above all, the limited, movie-ish vision. Meant to be an offbeat, darkly comic tale of a triangle of losers desperately clinging to their versions of the American dream, pic comes across as a charmless high-concept indie. It's doubtful that topline Keanu Reeves, whose alleged star power didn't do much for the B.O. of the recent thriller "Chain Reaction," can help an unappealing movie that seems bound to enjoy a better and longer life in video stores than in movie theaters.

"Feeling Minnesota" is yet another film that owes its existence to Quentin Tarantino and the recent cycle of indies about lowlifes, petty criminals and wannabes. Credit sequence, which is set 20 years ago and shows two young brothers forcefully fighting, establishes the tone for a story of a bloody sibling rivalry driven to the extreme by their love for the same sexy femme.

The film barely recovers from its first jarring, misogynistic sequence in which Freddie (Cameron Diaz), a beautiful woman in a white wedding gown, is chased, beaten up and thrown into a car by Red (Delroy Lindo), a local mobster who accuses her of stealing \$ 10,000 from him. Red has the word "slut" tattooed on Freddie's arm and, as further punishment, forces her to marry Sam (Vincent D'Onofrio), his dumb, brutish accountant.

As the wedding ceremony is about to begin with Sam's mother, Nora (Tuesday Weld), running around nervously Jjakes (Reeves), Sam's younger and more handsome brother, disembarks from a bus after spending time in prison. Split by divorced parents, the two brothers haven't seen each other for two decades, but their tense antagonism is still very much in evidence.

As soon as Freddie lays eyes on Jjakes, she realizes he's the one for her. In a matter of seconds, the two are making love on the bathroom floor, completely ignoring the wedding and guests. It doesn't take long for Freddie, a tough yet romantic woman, to persuade the none-too-bright Jjakes that they are meant for each other, and that stealing some money from Sam might prove helpful in starting a new life in Las Vegas. What ensues is yet another variation of love on the run, with the requisite twists and turns concerning the characters' true motivations.

Jjakes and Freddie, with a stolen dog as company, are followed by a vengeful Sam. Also involved are Ben (Dan Aykroyd), a corrupt cop with his own agenda, and Red, who's furious, having discovered that Sam's embezzled money from him. In a rather ludicrous sequence of events, Freddie is shot by one brother, mistaken to be dead and deserted by another, and saved by a motel owner. What is most baffling, however, is how tenaciously the movie insists on its Vegas-set (and Vegas-like) ending, which is more schematic than convincing and meant to make the audience feel better after witnessing an aggravating yarn.

A road movie with violence that is supposed to be both comic and dramatic, "Feeling Minnesota" bears superficial resemblance to the far superior "Something Wild," which also revolved around an eccentric trio and was set in sleazy motels and cheap diners. Like Jonathan Demme, Baigelman aims to spin a charming tale of oddballs and losers who still maintain a semblance of humanity, but in Baigelman's case,

what begins as a movie about dumb characters ends up feeling like a dumb movie. As writer and director, Baigelman crams his movie with interminable arguments, obnoxious fistfights and foul dialogue; almost every scene concludes with the characters screaming and yelling or slapping one another.

The real mystery is how Baigelman managed to get such lackluster acting from a cast of distinguished, reliable thespians. Sadly, with the notable exception of the attractive Diaz, who's well cast as the sexual aggressor and romantic manipulator, there are no exciting performances in the film.

As the naive Jjakes, Reeves is back to the amorphous style that marked his goofy, spacey portrayals in the '80s. The gifted D'Onofrio, stuck with a heavy role that has almost no redeeming qualities, renders a rare tedious performance in an otherwise brilliant career. Lindo and Aykroyd, whose strong presence and considerable skills have elevated many mediocre movies in the past, also register poorly.

Considering that the pic was specifically tailored for her talents, Weld's part is tiny and unrewarding; same goes for Levon Helm, who's wasted as a Bible salesman.

Shot on location, pic boasts proficient tech credits, particularly Walt Lloyd's sharp lensing of a gray Minnesota, which often evokes a mythical quality that's almost entirely missing from the narrative.

Camera (Deluxe color), Walt Lloyd; editor, Martin Walsh; music supervisor, Karyn Rachtman; production design, Naomi Shohan; costume design, Eugenie Bafaloukos; associate producer, Carla Santos Macy; casting, Francine Maisler. Reviewed at New Line screening room, L.A., Sept. 3, 1996. MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 95 min.

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