

Film Review: Pretentious ‘Blue Like Jazz’ Can’t Find the Right Groove

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 12, 2012 - 4:02pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Donald Miller’s “Blue Like Jazz” is a beloved book that spent 43 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list and sold over 1.5 million copies. I haven’t read it. But I have to believe that it worked on its fans in a way that Steve Taylor’s film simply cannot. This is clearly a personal story, one that touched people by relating to issues they’ve grappled with in their own lives. By taking Taylor’s memories and turning them into cinema, the ability to touch has been removed another degree of separation and the resulting film is a misstep, the kind of work that thinks it’s saying something important but feels more pretentious than precious.

Marshall Allman (“True Blood”) plays Don, the film’s central character and its biggest problem. Don is intended to be a young man on a journey of self-discovery but he becomes – through performance and screenwriting – nothing more than a device. He’s the window into the world of religion followed by one into the world of a liberal arts education and he never becomes real to us. Even worse, the reflections of “religion vs. education” have been boiled to their basic ingredients. It’s a film that keeps expressing its desire to shatter myths about stereotypes related to religious Texans and the heathens of the great Northwest through its mouthpieces and yet it fully embraces them at the same time through its storytelling. In the end, Taylor takes complex, daring themes and makes them feel safe and simple. It’s clearly something that worked better on the page.



[Read Brian Tallerico’s full review of “Blue Like Jazz” in our reviews section.](#) [14]

Don grew up a devout Southern Baptist in Texas but his world is shattered after he discovers that his mother has been sleeping with the married youth pastor. The idea that Don’s discovery that even pious people can commit sins would push him so far to the other side that he’s quickly drinking, pranking, and hiding his upbringing is one of the film’s greatest flaws. We never really see Don struggle with this decision in the way we need to for his journey to work. If Don’s journey feels forced by storytelling instead of character right from the beginning it never has a chance to work.



[Continue reading for Brian Tallerico’s full “Blue Like Jazz” review.](#) [14]

“Blue Like Jazz” stars Marshall Allman, Claire Holt, Tania Raymonde, Jason Marsden, Eric Lange, and Justin Welborn. It was written by Donald Miller, Ben Pearson, & Steve Taylor and directed by Taylor. It opens on April 13, 2012.



Blue Like Jazz

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

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