

Film Review: Direction Proves a Problem For Open Mic Drama 'Rudderless'

Submitted by [NickHC](#) [1] on October 20, 2014 - 9:37pm

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CHICAGO – Actor William H. Macy's directorial debut "Rudderless" is a film of open mic songwriting that tackles a recovery from grief with neat lyrics and easy metaphors. Instead of standing out, Macy has provided another sap's ballad that has the cuteness of "Kumbaya", one that aims to please the crowd without challenging emotions, only presenting them.



Rating: **2.0/5.0**

"Rudderless" is indeed the story of a man finding his direction, albeit through the music and lyrics of his late son Joshua (Miles Heizer). Two years after losing his son to a school shooting, disillusioned father and ex-husband Sam (Billy Crudup) lives alone on a boat that indeed does not have a rudder. He has abandoned his fancy corporate job to become a house painter. When his ex-wife Emily (Felicity Huffman) gives him the remaining items belonging to their son, Sam discovers a batch of demos made by Josh that no one has ever heard before. Finding comfort in hearing his son's music and learning it on his guitar, Sam decides to play one of Josh's songs at an open mic.

After his first performance, Sam catches the adoration of shy young musician Quentin (Anton Yelchin), who prods the reclusive man to start a band with him, using Sam's material. When Quentin shows him the effect that harmony has on a song (or, how human beings need others to be happy), Sam agrees, and they start a group with two others (including someone played by "Wasted and Ready" rocker Ben Kweller) called Rudderless. Sam's songs are elevated from brooding single-acoustic tracks to Kings of Leon-like anthems with galloping drums and multiple harmonies. In the process, Sam becomes more extroverted, and befriends people like music shop owner Del (Laurence Fishburne), while playing Saturday nights at a bar owned by Trill (director Macy, shown wearing a fedora after a scene in which Crudup tells Yelchin that "style builds confidence"). All the while, Sam withholds the truth of who wrote the songs they're performing, digging himself into a false image of getting away from his past.

The film drifts on a performance from Crudup that isn't so spectacular so much as the loudest instrument in the movie's atmosphere. Crudup certainly acts as to how Macy directs, in an obvious way on a simple background. Fittingly, Crudup's best moment is not anything during the movie when he is coming out of his shell, but his final performance towards the end of the film - a restrained moment that provides smoother catharsis and emotional recognition, without the obviousness.

"Rudderless" is now on VOD and in select theaters. Featuring Billy Crudup, Anton Yelchin, Felicity Huffman, Laurence Fishburne, Selena Gomez, and Miles Heizer. Written by Casey Twenter, Jeff Robison, and William H. Macy. Directed by William H. Macy. Rated "R"



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Billy Crudup and Anton Yelchin in "Rudderless"

Photo credit: Samuel Goldwyn Films

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