

Alan Cumming Shines in Heartbreaking ‘Any Day Now’

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Travis Fine's “Any Day Now” is an old-fashioned social problem film painted in the broadest of strokes. Fairly early on, the audience is faced with two choices: either resist the film's assuredly tear-jerking formula or submit to it. Though some critics will always opt for the first choice, regardless of a film's merits, I'm willing to praise a formula as long as it's well-executed.

At its best, Fine's film appropriately evokes civil rights melodramas of the '60s, such as Guy Green's wrenching “A Patch of Blue,” with a dash of Robert Benton's 1979 masterpiece, “Kramer vs. Kramer.” Fueling the fractured heart of “Any Day Now” is the love that two would-be parents feel for a young boy in desperate need of a family. The fact that the two “parents” are a gay couple unable to marry in America circa 1979 places a seemingly impenetrable wall between them and the child.

The story is simple enough, and the outcome is more or less inevitable. Yet what ultimately caused me to cave in emotionally (and what most likely inspired moviegoers at the Chicago International Film Festival to give Fine's film the Audience Choice Award) is its riveting lead performance by Alan Cumming as a man whose impassioned rage is so volatile that it threatens to burst forth at the most inopportune moments. It's the showcase that Cumming's entire career has been leading toward, and it offers undeniable proof that he has the magnetism to anchor a picture himself, rather than remain confined to the ensemble. His inherently engaging screen persona enables his character, a vivacious drag performer named Rudy, to convincingly connect with Marco (Isaac Leyva), a young neglected child with Down Syndrome who lives in the apartment across the hall. Once the drug habits of Marco's wretched mother (Jamie Anne Allman) land her in jail, Rudy sees this as an opportunity to care for the kid himself. This presents an obvious problem for Rudy's closeted lover, Paul (Garret Dillahunt), whose desire for a job promotion conflicts with his increasing need to be open about his identity. There are echoes of Joe Pitt, the closeted attorney from “Angels in America,” in the character of Paul, while Rudy has all the show-stopping presence of Prior Walter.



Garret Dillahunt and Alan Cumming star in Travis Fine's *Any Day Now*.

Photo credit: Music Box Films

Alas, the script co-authored by Fine and George Arthur Bloom, lacks the subtlety and sublime eloquence of “Angels” scribe Tony Kushner, yet there are precious few writers in show business today who come close to matching him. The vast majority of people that Rudy encounters are hostile, small-minded caricatures who pride themselves on their hatred of homosexuals. Even the Family Services representative who swoops in to retrieve Marco has all the icy indifference of Tilda Swinton’s hilariously authoritarian “Social Services” in “Moonrise Kingdom.” This would’ve been a bigger flaw if Cumming hadn’t been so effective in portraying Rudy’s confrontational demeanor and (occasionally) misdirected tirades. He has too large a personality to be imprisoned in the shadows, and his flamboyance spells certain doom for Paul’s reputation in the eyes of his boss, DA Wilson (Chris Mulkey), a mustache twirly villain whose uber-masculine machismo is laid on a trifle too thick.

Yet the strongest scenes in the film turn out to be the ones that could’ve easily drowned in schmaltz. Every time Fine centers his lens on the budding friendship between Marco and his two “fathers,” the film achieves a tangible poignance. Cumming’s eyes radiate with a paternal devotion that is bound to resonate with viewers regardless of their religious or ideological beliefs. He also brings visceral power to the maddening courtroom scenes presided over by a hard-nosed judge (Frances Fisher at her most tyrannical). When a blatantly prejudiced prosecutor fudges the facts in order to convince the judge that Rudy and Paul’s orientation has had a damaging affect on Marco, Rudy’s time bomb finally explodes, and the dramatic fireworks that follow are quite potent. Cumming channels that same combustible fury into his unforgettable delivery of the title tune, which ranks right alongside Anne Hathaway’s already infamous interpretation of “I Dreamed a Dream” in “Les Misérables” as the most galvanizing musical number of 2012.



Garret Dillahunt, Isaac Leyva and Alan Cumming star in Travis Fine's Any Day Now.

Photo credit: Music Box Films

Could “Any Day Now” have been improved by less clichéd storytelling? Perhaps, but the broad strokes that Fine utilizes may very well increase his film’s accessibility with audiences who normally wouldn’t be caught dead in an art house. Rudy and Paul are emblematic of the countless gay parents in America who remain largely ostracized over three decades after this film’s fact-based tale took place. When Paul says that gay rights have no relation to Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of equality, Rudy insists that it does, and Fine clearly shares his sentiment. This is a cinematic call for change propelled by the immediacy of its message and epitomized by the singularly heartbreaking image of young Marco wandering through a dark and unforgiving world that his oversized lenses can’t quite bring into focus.

‘Any Day Now’ stars Alan Cumming, Garret Dillahunt, Isaac Leyva, Frances Fisher, Gregg Henry, Jamie Ann Allman, Chris Mulkey, Don Franklin and Kelli Williams. It was written by Travis Fine and George Arthur Bloom and directed by Travis Fine. It was released January 4th at the Music Box Theatre. It is rated R.



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