

Trip to Katie Aselton's 'Black Rock' Lacks Purpose

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 16, 2013 - 12:34pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – I really admire the girl power approach to the thriller genre in Katie Aselton's surprising genre effort, "Black Rock," but the admirable effort doesn't change the fact that the movie just doesn't feel fully fleshed out nor does it play to the strengths of its filmmaker. The what-if scenario that incites the action of "Black Rock" is captivating but Aselton and co-writer/husband Mark Duplass don't build on that scenario enough to make the venture successful overall. I really wanted to like "Black Rock" given how much I truly think Aselton holds "The League" together and love Duplass but the script needed more work and the direction needed to be tighter. We need more directors as unpredictable as Aselton (after "The Freebie," NO ONE would have predicted her follow-up would look like this) but just being unpredictable isn't enough.

Sarah (Kate Bosworth) wants to spend a nice weekend with two of her best friends at an old camping site they used to haunt as younger women but the problems start before they even get on the boat to Black Rock. Sarah's friends, Lou (Lake Bell) and Abby (Katie Aselton), hate each other. Neither was expecting the other one to be there. And they have good reason. Abby slept with Lou's man. They reluctantly give in to Sarah's desire to be a threesome and head to Black Rock. It's not long after they arrive that the trio runs into three guys hunting (Will Bouvier, Jay Paulson, and Anselm Richardson). Abby pushes them to hang out with them around the bonfire. Drinks are imbibed, Abby flirts openly, and things get a little tense when she heads off into the woods with one of the gentleman. When the hunter gets too aggressive, Abby grabs a rock and acts in self-defense. Good luck telling the bloodied veteran's friends and former troop members who say he saved their lives that it was self-defense.



Black Rock

Photo credit: LD Entertainment

It's a great set-up. Abby is clearly acting in self-defense and yet her victim's friends would understandably be upset and want to act, perhaps even violently. The main problem with "Black Rock" is that Aselton and Duplass instantly turn the guys on Black Rock into totally maniacal villains and send everyone scattered around the island – hunters and hunted. Imagine the tension of the "what do we do" scenario that could have made up the second act of the film. We're stuck here with a dead body. One of these people killed him. Two of these people want revenge. Instead of the tension rout, Aselton and Duplass go for action and the film suffers because of it.

I will say that they admirably refuse to turn the trio at the film's core into the screaming, sniveling archetypes that we so often see in films like this. Abby, Lou, and Sarah are instantly thinking, planning, and moving. They have moments of fear and tears but they feel natural instead of the mere victimization that so often serves as foundation for films like "Black Rock." Aselton delivers most believably of the three, proving yet again that she should get more attention as an actress. Bell and Bosworth certainly aren't bad here but it's Aselton's film.



Black Rock

Photo credit: LD Entertainment

The problem is that Aselton also directs and writes. I would have LOVED to see what another director could have done with the same cast and a rewrite of Aselton & Duplass's script. To be blunt, it feels like a project that was conceived over a few bottles of wine one night, six pages were written, and they started shooting. I wanted the "Black Rock" that was fleshed out beyond that six-page outline and with a director who knew how to build tension and shoot action more deftly than Aselton. I hope she keeps taking risks like "Black Rock" but risks don't always pay off. I could easily see the mistakes made in the production of "Black Rock" leading Aselton to a truly great thriller down the road. She's surely got the talent. This just isn't the best display of it.

"Black Rock" stars Katie Aselton, Kate Bosworth, and Lake Bell. It was written by Mark Duplass & Aselton and directed by Aselton. It opens in some markets on May 17, 2013.



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