

Actors Awkwardly Impersonate Marilyn Monroe, Charlie Chaplin in ‘Mister Lonely’

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CHICAGO – The wonder of a filmmaker’s art and perspective is the ability to challenge and reflect the absurdity of our own nature back to us. Few filmmakers have done more to add provocation to that sensibility than Harmony Korine.



Samantha Morton as Marilyn Monroe in “Mister Lonely,” which is directed by
Harmony Korine.
Photo credit: O'South

In his first full-length feature film since “Julien Donkey-Boy,” Korine explores the hope of miracles and the sorrow of celebrity impersonation in “Mister Lonely”.

Diego Luna portrays Michael Jackson as an impersonator in Paris. While performing his act, he meets a Marilyn Monroe impersonator (Samantha Morton).

Monroe convinces Jackson to join her commune of other celebrity impersonators including the pope, Madonna, Queen Elizabeth, The Three Stooges, Sammy Davis Jr., Abraham Lincoln, James Dean and Charlie Chaplin (Monroe’s husband).

In a separate story, a priest is bringing food to nearby villagers via airplane. While tossing out rice bags, a nun accidentally falls out of the fuselage. She plummets several thousand feet to Earth and lands unscathed. This causes a stir in the nun’s order and soon her fellow sisters are free falling for the lord.



Diego Luna as Michael Jackson in “Mister Lonely,” which is directed by

Harmony Korine.
Photo credit: O'South


There are some fanatically extreme moments in the celebrity impersonation commune. Chaplin is portrayed as a megalomaniac monster, Lincoln an angry cusser and The Three Stooges are used for euthanizing some farm animals.

This is all done surrounding the events of what Chaplin calls “the greatest show on Earth” as the impersonators build a theater and prepare an act as their goal in life.


The film has a delicate and deliberate pace that’s counter measured by the cruelty displayed by Chaplin (especially toward Monroe). While all the characters could be assigned symbolic motivations (does Chaplin represent the Hollywood system that eventually killed Monroe?), most just seem like annoying and self-indulgent jokes within director Harmony Korine’s eccentric point of view.

The nun sequence (though not as prominent in the film) is more successful. The Korine stock actor Werner Herzog (also a director) does a very funny turn as a “sincerer than thou” jungle priest.

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His absolution of a pilot before the miracle flight is pure religious bunk and the length of the speech meanders into another level of farcical beauty.

The lingering shots of the nuns in flight have an appealing lyricism that’s also found in Michael “Mr. Lonely” Jackson riding a small motorcycle (complete with a monkey balloon) during the opening credits. These small moments seem much more successful in conveying emotion than the surreal and easy tease of the commune.

Because of the pacing, cruelty and self-indulgence, I can only make a bare recommendation for the film. If anyone is searching for counter programming to the summer blockbuster season, though, Harmony Korine will deliver unto you.

“Mister Lonely” opened on May 30, 2008. In Chicago, the film is playing at the Music Box Theatre.



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [19]
Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [18]

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