

An Experimental Experience in Non-Biopic 'Jimi: All is By My Side'

Submitted by [NickHC](#) [1] on September 26, 2014 - 4:01pm

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Jimi: All Is by My Side” shows the Jimi Hendrix experience without having the rights to the Jimi Hendrix Experience. It’s an unofficial rumination that doesn’t have any Hendrix songs, and it focuses on a more day-in-the-life perspective of the rock star, albeit in a career period that would be scooted over through montage in any other film. The endeavor is ambitious in its desires, and stands out most of all for its experimental nature than it does for trying to achieve a truth higher than fact.

The time is between 1966 and 1967, before Hendrix stormed Monterey Pop Festival, and the place is London. Jimi (played by André Benjamin, known as André 3000 in Outkast) has been discovered by a girlfriend of Keith Richards named Linda Keith (Imogen Poots), who sees the potential in a guitarist one night that is only adding color to a soul band. She is able to get a departing bassist from The Animals to manage him, and in time, Jimi arrives in London. While trying to make a name for himself in the same pool as Eric Clapton and a “Sgt. Pepper”-era Beatles, he meets a new girlfriend, Kathy (Haley Atwell) of which he has a destructive relationship with, and interacts with different individuals outside of the industry who want Jimi to influence the world with his music in different ways.



André Benjamin in 'Jimi: All is By My Side'
Photo credit: Darko Entertainment

Because this is a film that distinctly uses the Hendrix name but can’t even evoke an original song he wrote, debut writer/director John Ridley’s film breaks the rules of the usual biopic and gives his take on this Hendrix chapter its own context. “Jimi: All Is by My Side” doesn’t function literally within the history of Hendrix, so much as reflect upon attitudes and episodes that aren’t worthing fact-checking. It’s best to take the character as a separate being, as if this were the Hendrix of a different dimension, created by a fan geeking out over the real thing.

This idea creates an intrigue that carries through its wafer nature, especially for how it manages the idea of the biopic, and shows that making a story about a non-fictional being's life is most interesting with artistic license. For example, "I'm Not There" is more interesting than a regular Bob Dylan biopic because it dares to engage Dylan's craft with equal poetry.



'Jimi: All is By My Side'

Photo credit: Darko Entertainment

However, "Jimi: All Is by My Side" shows that it is indeed worse to not have the biopic character's actual music, as the lack of familiar material makes half of the film an assembly of random guitar solos, with no sense of progression, difference, style, etc. The traits that made Hendrix stand out as a performer can really only be found in guitar tone (as recorded with fire by credited guitarist Waddy Wachtel and mimicked futilely in the film by Benjamin). In the same way, Hendrix's monologues, delivered by Benjamin with a smoothness that punctuates with ellipses not periods, have the same aloof jazziness. Intended profundities are blank with contextual monotony, but one remark or solo by a non-licensed Hendrix as airy as the next.

Ridley takes on his interesting self-challenge (a "biopic" as debut feature, and nonetheless after stunning the world with his Oscar-winning "12 Years a Slave" screenplay) by providing the story with a distinct style, a cover of sorts of groovy 60s movies that are edited psychedelically. Performances are raw, sound is often used with many layers, and some scenes of simple conversations can carry on past their usual length or intent. The aesthetics rarely hit to a core of truth of their content, but they do place the movie within its period and its focal character's being, as if "Jimi: All Is by My Side" is the low-key cinema-verité doc that Hendrix didn't make.

"Jimi: All is By My Side" continues its release at Chicago's Music Box Theater on September 26th. Featuring André Benjamin, Imogen Poots and Hayley Atwell. Written and directed by John Ridley. Rated "R"



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