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MOVIES

'Slam Dance' emphasizes style; ignores details, plot development

By Nathan Deer
Emerald Contributor

"Slam Dance" has nothing to do with punk dancing rituals or music or anything else like that. The problem with "Slam Dance," however, is deciding what it is about.

"Slam Dance" is supposed to be a murder mystery. At least, a woman is killed under mysterious circumstances. But instead of focusing on the things we care about in a murder mystery — namely the plot, the details, the clues of the case — the focus in "Slam Dance" is on style.

And "Slam Dance" is stylish.

The director of the film, Wayne Wang ("Chan is Missing"), creates several visually arresting scenes. The only problem is that style in itself doesn't go a long way, especially in the mystery genre. Wayne

Review

★ 1/2

opts for style over substance and the result is a frustrating, boring film.

"Slam Dance" has an interesting premise, however. Drood (Tom Hulse), a cartoonist, is a man undergoing

family and marital problems who has an affair with an enigmatic woman named Yolanda (Virginia Madsen). After apparently breaking off the affair, Drood enters his apartment only to be brutalized and kidnapped by a couple of villains. Drood escapes the villains by jumping out of the car. He goes to the police. They tell him the woman he has been seeing, Yolanda, is dead. Drood is a suspect in her murder.

Drood, after being terrorized by one of the villains again, decides to investigate Yolanda's death himself. He even uses his artistic ability to draw a photograph from memory, a clue that is helpful in revealing the powerful man responsible for Yolanda's death.

Although the premise for "Slam Dance" sounds interesting, the execution of the premise is handled so slackly and indifferently that it becomes dull. The film has a desultory, aimless quality to it. It intends to be an offbeat, new-wave murder mystery — or perhaps a minimalist murder mystery — judging from the emphasis on style and the lack of narrative and characterization. But the film is too self-conscious to be particularly clever, and Hulse lacks the necessary charisma to justify the film's close focus on his character.

"Slam Dance" features a good cast, but doesn't utilize them. Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, as Drood's wife, and Harry Dean Stanton, as the detective investigating the crime, are virtually wasted. When they do appear in the film they haven't much to do or say.

"Slam Dance" is an especially frustrating film because of the talent involved in its making. Wang has demonstrated that he is a capable director, and the cast certainly has talent. But "Slam Dance" is a film bloated by its own pretensions.

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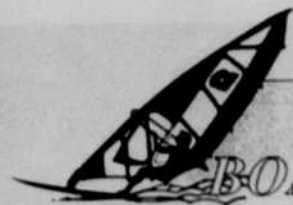
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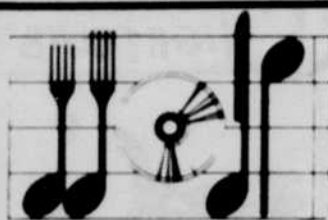
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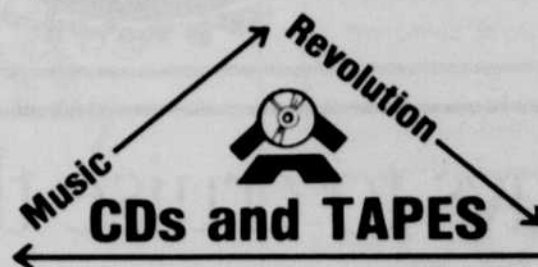
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