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Dirty Pictures

Kevin Smith gets sweet, stays filthy

Seth Rogen and Elizabeth Banks in *Zack and Miri Make A Porno*

ZACK AND MIRI MAKE A PORNO:

Written, directed and edited by Kevin Smith. Cinematography, Dave Klein. Starring Seth Rogen, Elizabeth Banks, Traci Lords, Jason Mewes, Craig Robinson and Jeff Anderson. The Weinstein Company, 2008. 101 minutes. R. ★★☆☆

two (chiefly Craig Robinson, though Gerry Bednob also appears as Zack's boss). The Judd Apatow regulars' presence doubtless has something to do with *Zack and Miri's* stars, but they also serve to nudge the audience a little: This isn't the last Kevin Smith film, the bro-tastic and tiresome *Clerks II*; this is a sweet, unsurprising romantic comedy. Like some of that other guy's movies. Sorta.

Since Kevin Smith's first movie, music has played a considerable role in the New Jersey filmmaker's storytelling. From the absurd recitation of "Berserker" in *Clerks* ("Would you like some making fuck?") to the mid-'90s college/indie/alterna-rock snapshot that is the *Mallrats* soundtrack to the Jackson 5 moment in *Clerks II*, the songs that turn up in Smith's productions are memorable and keenly in tune with the spirit of the film. Smith's latest, *Zack and Miri Make a Porno*, opens on a cold Pittsburgh night — to the tune of Primus' ridiculous "Wynona's Big Brown Beaver." Later, as our budding porn maestros begin their first production, *Star Whores*, their initial photo shoot is set to MC Chris' "Fett's Vette." The spoofy feel of both tunes is deliciously appropriate for the newbie filmmakers, who are well aware of that tenet of porno titles: There is humor of a kind to be had in sexed-up plays on actual film titles (and plots). *Pulp Friction*, for example. Or *Shagnet*.

When Zack (Seth Rogen) and Miri (Elizabeth Banks) are shooting, of course, the soundtrack changes to inane porno-flick music, which sounds like a perverse offshoot of elevator music. But it sounds just right against the old friends' no-budget set (the coffeeshop where Zack works) and their ragtag band of actors and crew, which includes Smith standbys (Jason Mewes, Jeff Anderson), adult film stars (Traci Lords, Katie Morgan) and an Apatow player or

Despite its title, the main thrust of *Zack and Miri* isn't the porno, but the relationship of lifetime friends and broke-ass roommates Zack and Miri. The porno is supposed to just be a way to make some quick dough, possibly off their former classmates (at their 10-year reunion, a classmate's actor boyfriend provides the inspiration). But while for Bubbles (Lords) and Barry (Ricky Mabe), or Stacy (Morgan) and Lester (Mewes), the sex is just sex, it turns out to be something else for Zack and Miri. Filming porno? That they can do. Starring in porno? Not so much.

If this sounds a little slight, it is; it's a light film, but it's also funny (provided you appreciate Smith's particular brand of often juvenile humor), dirty and endearingly easygoing. Banks and Rogen nail the friends-with-undercurrents chemistry, all bickering affection and sweeping familiarity, and their semi-slacker existence is entirely believable. They aren't just making porn on a lark; they're making it to pay the hot water and power bills in their unremarkable apartment. Their dead-end jobs don't pay enough. They drink cheap beer in dank bars and make fun of each other. In short, they're completely ordinary. Except that they make porn. You could say the same thing of *Zack and Miri*, which, like its characters, underachieves with a fair amount of dirty charm. **EW**

Dots, Lines and Equanimity

Honestly? For those whose drug of choice arrives in espresso cups or soda bottles, the multitudinous *Punto y Raya* shorts might be a challenge. Certain other substances — the ones that slow you down, make you notice Every Amazing Detail Of The World or make you, shall we say, ecstatic — might enhance the trip-hoppy experience of watching dancing lines and dots and colors. Especially the dancing lines and dots and colors set to the "non-narrative music" required by the organizers in Madrid.

The actual *Punto y Raya* festival, a 2007 event/competition in Madrid, included workshops; DJ sessions in which people spun music and made movies; and historical works like Norman McLaren's 1971 "Synchrony," an oddly fascinating morph of the game Frogger, TV test patterns, Ghanaian kente cloth and Mondrian paintings. The full DVD hadn't made it from Barcelona before press time, but what I saw in the preview included short bits of competition winners. They look both more gorgeous than the older pieces, with lovely references to Abstract Expressionists like Clyfford Still, and more experimental: random light beam patterns, ink spots on toilet paper, wind making patterns on film. I look forward to the entire experience, coming Eugene's way at 1 pm Sunday, Nov. 16, at DIVA, 110 W. Broadway. \$5-\$8. — Suzi Steffen



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