

I Want to Believe

Sound of My Voice is this year's sleeper triumph

If it's true that nationalism and immigration are the most dangerous issues confronting the planet in this early 21st century, it's reasonable to suggest that, at the spiritual level, our soul's greatest peril now lies in the tension between belief and nothingness — a crisis of faith that finds the New Age con pitted against the death of God, where our need to believe is crucified by our suspicion that all our myths are shattered lies. It's the curse of the Enlightenment. Don't laugh: This existential dilemma has us all on the blocks, and we can no more hide from it than we can safeguard against the wandering lunatic with a loaded gun.

This looming cosmic crisis — our millennial reckoning with mortal belief, with meaning itself — is the subliminal subject of director Zal Batmanglij's haunting new film, *Sound of My Voice*, though it's hardly necessary to talk fancy about this as-yet-undiscovered masterpiece. Like the finest works of art, this movie — about a pair of lovers (Nicole Vicius and Christopher Denham) infiltrating an underground cult that may or may not be a suicidal scam hatched by a woman (Brit Marling) claiming to be a visitor from the year 2052 — finds an unimpeachable balance in all its constituent parts: The story,



co-written by Marling (who also wrote and starred in 2011's excellent *Another Earth*) is expertly paced and excruciatingly suspenseful, playing out with the brooding, reptilian intensity of film noir; the acting is unflashy and naturalistic, compelling a suspension of disbelief that feels like one long nightmare; and the seamless script, like such classics as *Chinatown* or *The Philadelphia Story*, presents a blueprint for deft storytelling, hiding its philosophical depth in the warp and woof of mesmerizing narrative.

Okay, enough, let's out with it: This movie kicked my ass. It's easily the best movie I've seen this year, and one of the best of the past decade. Hypnotizing. Horrifying. Unshakable. Brit Marling is a genius. And she's only just begun. **EW**

Sound of My Voice opens Friday, June 8, at the Bijou; bijou-cinemas.com

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