

FILM REVIEW: 'Morris from America' a Bittersweet Coming-of-Age Dramedy



Newcomer Markees Christmas plays Morris, a teenager trying to adjust to life in Germany.

By Kam Williams
For The Skanner News

It's hard being Morris Gentry (Markees Christmas) just now. The lonely 13-year-old is not only mourning the loss of his late mother, but is having a difficult

wants to fit in and even has a crush on a girl a couple years older.

Katrin (Lina Keller) can't help but notice and, flattered by the attention, she invites Morris to hang with her crowd, a rebellious lot that dabbles in drugs and

Markees Christmas' big screen debut opposite funnyman Craig Robinson in his first serious lead role.

The support cast also acquits itself quite admirably, the upshot amounting to a poignant coming-of-age tale which

“The character-driven dramedy revolves mostly around the very-convincing father-son relationship, featuring the talented Markees Christmas' big screen debut opposite funnyman Craig Robinson in his first serious lead role

time adjusting to life in Germany. He had to leave his hometown of Richmond and pals behind when his father (Craig Robinson) landed a job in Heidelberg as a professional soccer coach.

Now, the troubled youngster finds himself in the awkward position of being the only Black kid in a school where classmates have stereotypical expectations of him as an African American. For instance, they are surprised that he isn't any good at basketball or dancing.

At least he does consider himself an aspiring gangsta rapper, although the only person he can impress is his father, since he only performs in English. But even his translated words would probably sound out of place so far removed from the ghetto, given how he writes lyrics about, “[F-word]ing all the bitches two at a time. all you can take for \$10.99.”

Despite getting daily German lessons from a tutor (Carla Juri), Morris fails to make new friends, and stoically asserts that he doesn't need any in the same macho manner that he spits out his rhymes. Yet, under that tough facade, is a sensitive kid who

alcohol. He accepts the overture, though he initially doesn't know that the object of his affection already has a boyfriend. That means she's more likely to remain a frustrating fantasy than a conquest he could boast about in his next song.

Written and directed by Chad Hartigan (This Is Martin Bonner), “Morris from America” is a bittersweet bildungsroman which never hits a false note. The character-driven dramedy revolves mostly around the very-convincing father-son relationship, featuring the talented

resonates as realistic from its heartbreaking beginning clear through to a satisfying resolution.

Very Good ★★★

Rated R for sexuality, brief nudity, teen drug use and partying, and pervasive profanity

In English and German with subtitles

Running time: 91 min.

Studio: Beachside Films

Distributor: A24

To view the trailer for *Morris from America*, visit TheSkanner.com.

FILM REVIEW: 'Southside with You' Revisits Barack and Michelle First Date

By Kam Williams
For The Skanner News

Who would ever think of making a movie just about Barack (Parker Sawyers) and Michelle Obama's (Tika Sumpter) first date? Richard Tanne would, that's who, and he makes an impressive directorial debut with this inspirational biopic chronicling a very eventful day in the lives of the future President and First Lady.

The story unfolds in Chicago during the summer of 1989 when Michelle was already employed as an attorney and living back home with her parents (Vanessa Bell Calloway and Phillip Edwad Van Lear). Barack had just finished his first year at Harvard law school and had landed an internship as her assistant at her prestigious firm.

Apparently, he was so instantly smitten with Michelle that he could barely contain himself. When she refused to consider a romantic rendezvous, he pitched her on the idea of attending a business meeting with him.

Once Michelle grudgingly agrees, Barack arrives late, yet is too cocky to be embarrassed about either his tardiness or the gaping hole in the floor of his rusty jalopy. What the skeptical object of his affection doesn't know is that he has added a picnic, a museum and a movie to their planned itinerary.

Again, Michelle balks, but consents only after reminding her self-assured suitor that “This is not a date.” Nevertheless, the smooth-talking chain smoker presses on with his own agenda, with the Art Institute of Chicago being their first port-of-call.

The two continued to get to know each other over sandwiches in the park, with the discussion touching on everything from family to faith to blackness to the meaning of life. So, Michelle had a decent measure of the man by the time they headed to the South Side rec center where Barack had once worked as a community organizer.

The icing on the cake proves to be an inspirational speech that's nothing short of presidential which he delivers there to the discouraged denizens of the crumbling 'hood. Michelle's floodgates finally open, undoubtedly helped along by



'Southside with You' chronicles Barack and Michelle Obama's first date

one woman's (Deanna Reed Foster) approval of her as the first sister she's ever seen Barack with. Next thing you know, the two lovebirds head to the theater to see Spike Lee's “Do the Right Thing,” before capping off the evening with a little canoodling while sharing an ice cream cone.

“Southside with You” is a syrupy soap opera readily recommended for ardent Obama admirers. The predictable love story has a tendency to telegraph its punches, since its familiar plotline sticks to what's already public knowledge. Overall, this plausible account of the blossoming of love between Barack and Michelle serves up a pleasant, if sanitized version of their romantic launch en route to an historic rendezvous with destiny!

Very Good ★★★

Rated PG-13 for smoking, a violent image, brief profanity and a drug reference

To view the trailer for *Southside with You*, visit TheSkanner.com.

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ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS: THE MOVIE (R)
Fri-Tues: 12:10, 7:15

THE BFG (PG)
Fri-Thur: 11:30, 4:55

SWISS ARMY MAN (R)
Fri-Thur: 9:35

FINDING DORY (PG)
Fri-Thur: 12:00, 2:20, 6:50

TICKLED (R)
Fri-Thur: 2:10, 9:20

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE (PG-13)
Fri: 2:00

LOVE & FRIENDSHIP (PG)
Fri-Thur: 7:30

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR (PG-13)
Fri-Thur: 4:15

JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS (1963) (G)
Fri-Wed: 4:35, 9:05 / Thur: 4:35

\$4.00 adults, \$3.00 senior citizens (65+)

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Babysitting: Available for children 2 to 8 years old. Fri: shows after 3:30pm and before 8:00pm. Sat - Sun: all shows before 8:00pm. \$9.50 per child for the length of the movie. Call to reserve a spot, no drop ins.