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WISCONSIN FILM FESTIVAL

***Ben X* at the 2008 Wisconsin Film Festival**

Story of bullied autistic student more gripping in theory than on celluloid

Emily Denaro on Saturday 04/05/2008 9:00 am , (4) Recommendations

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Backpackers on the trains in *Ben X* may be aliens to the title character’s home in Belgium, but Asperger’s syndrome makes him an alien to the world. So, Ben escapes to the digital realm of Archlord, where his sunken cheeks, blue pallor and etched appearance blend easily. The online role-playing game allows a connection to others without “real” social interaction, perfection for his condition.

The premise of *Ben X* is interesting, but the film’s rampant flaws overshadowed its promise.

Primarily, the writer and director Nic Balthazar seemed to have minimal grasp on the syndrome highlighted. Hallmarks of the condition were either absent, artificially induced, or irrationally challenged in Ben, who was portrayed by Greg Timmerman. For instance, Ben was basically mute even though rapid, loud, continuous speech is a common characteristic of the condition. Most glaringly, the end of the movie shows Ben making a socially motivated decision that, sadly, no Asperger’s sufferer could most likely understand the ramifications of.

Disruptive mini-interviews spliced into an otherwise linear story line also added to the haphazard feel of this film. These portions only made sense after they became too annoying to provide a satisfying, “Ah ha!”

Another irritant included the washed-out, occasionally illegible subtitles, but even a drop shadow wouldn’t have helped when the captions disappeared. For a few minutes, the projection dropped down so the top of the film hit the middle of the screen. Patrons ran to notify volunteers and the matter was resolved to cheers of thanks and jeers of “Rewind!”

This goof did, however, highlight Ben’s expressive eyes, perhaps the best part of the entire production.

We never did get a rewind. And honestly, I’m kinda glad.

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