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***Woodpecker* at the 2008 Wisconsin Film Festival**

Linda Falkenstein on Sunday 04/06/2008 7:00 pm , (3) Recommendations

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Finally the time had come for me to take in a film that was not a documentary, but a narrative feature. (Fiction! Acting!) And lo and behold, what is *Woodpecker*? A spoof of a documentary! My 2008 film fest experience has developed a definite theme.

Woodpecker is arranged around the 2004 sightings of the thought-to-be-extinct Ivory Billed Woodpecker in the swamps of Arkansas. The film comes off as a sober-faced documentary at first, featuring interviews with the mayor, townsfolk, and birding experts. Then the film settles on two bird watchers -- one, a silent doofus; the other a nutty poet/stalker -- who've come to spot the elusive bird.

The point? "Much like the bird itself," the filmmakers write on the film's website, "*Woodpecker* explores the intersection of fact and fiction, manipulating our notions of documentary and narrative techniques within a tragic comedy about hope, perception, and some very very strange birds."

Yes, the film will have you wondering what's real and what's a hoax -- though I would have found it more compelling if the two birdwatchers hadn't been *such* nitwits. *Woodpecker* was enjoyable and funny, but even at 87 minutes, it dragged a bit. I felt like something over and above "is this for real?" needed to be going on.

The birds themselves are incredibly beautiful; their extinction appalling. Learn more about the actual search for the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker from a research project by Cornell University.

I was shocked that the Monona Terrace theater -- not a huge venue -- was barely half full for its Saturday night showing.

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