

Deep

Diep

(Netherlands)

A IJswater Films production in association with the Netherlands Film Fund, VPRO Television, CoBo Fund, STIFO Fund, ThuisKopie Fund. (International sales: Holland Film, Amsterdam.) Produced by Marc Bary. Directed by Simone van Dusseldorp. Screenplay, Tamara Bos, based on the novel "Life Does Not Exist" by Hendrickje Spoor.

With: Melody Klaver, Monic Hendriks, Bart Klever, Jorik Scholten, Stijn Koomen, Damien Hope.
(Dutch, English, French dialogue)

By RUSSELL EDWARDS

Blessed by astute helming and a strong central perf, sensitive Dutch coming-of-age "Deep" transcends its deliberate ordinariness to poetically depict adolescent angst. Mid-70s setting takes a back seat to a story that eschews sensationalism in favor of genuine emotion and teenage slice-of-life frustrations. Local release last November garnered respectable arthouse B.O. Pic deserves additional fest berths and niche release in Euro territories and beyond.

On the first night of a beachside family holiday, 14-year-old Dutch schoolgirl Heleen (Melody Klaver) overhears her parents noisily arguing about their mutual infidelity. As the split becomes formal, Heleen and her younger brother Emile (Jorik Scholten) stay with Mum (Monic Hendriks) who exposes them to a series of new lovers.

While Heleen is repulsed by her mother's activities, she herself is developing a keen eye for the male form. Unlike her somewhat unbridled mother however, the schoolgirl will not be hurried by her blossoming desire.

Biding her time and riding the wave of chaos that her parent's peccadilloes have swept into her life, Heleen gradually realizes that average boy Axel (Stijn Koomen) fancies her. Her eye however is focused on his punkish, leather-jacketed buddy Steve (Damien Hope), whose sheer presence promises danger along with sexual excitement.

Heleen's attempts to assert her independence from myriad disruptive forces takes up most of the script's episodic trajectory. The sheer blandness of Heleen's rebellions (she callously kills the family's new seahorses) and problems (Will she go out with the well-meaning nerd or his more dangerous friend?), could sound like inadvertent criticisms of Tamara Bos' script, but the yarn's gentle pace is a strong reminder that the average life is hard enough without the heightened dysfunctionality that pervades most teen angst films.

Perfs are solid across the board, but 16-year-old thesp Melody Klaver is exceptional as central protag Heleen. Often sullen and silent, Klaver exudes equal shares of intelligence, sexuality and rage, creating a readily identifiable and sympathetic character.

Bowing helmer Simone van Dusseldorp aids Klaver's perf by using distinctive angles which catch Heleen at her most reflective, as well multiple POV shots that guide identification with the schoolgirl. Heleen's first encounter with Steve is a case in point. Rather than reveal Steve's full face, the aud sees what hits Heleen visually: the joint Steve is smoking, the chain around his neck, a quadrant of his face and his provocative gaze.

In counterpoint to this technique, the helmer also frequently pulls back to create a

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voyeuristic atmosphere when the yarn requires emotional distance. The dovetailing of intimacy and detachment is executed with considerable finesse and provides the script with solid support. Grainy lensing (blown up from Super 16) enhances the fly-on-the-wall atmosphere. Other tech credits are strong.

Camera (color, Super 16-to-35mm), Ton Peters; editor, Peter Alderliesten; music, David van der Heijden; art director, Ben Zuydwijk; sound, (Dolby Digital), Peter Flamman. Reviewed at Edinburgh Film Festival, Aug. 23, 2006. Running time: 86 MIN.

Hans Schwarz

hans.schwarz@bnn.nl