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# SUNDANCE REVIEW: 'Prairie Love' Teeters on Brink of Absurdity

9:37 PM 1/28/2011 by Justin Lowe

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### The Bottom Line

*A debut feature that rewardingly challenges conventions of character and narrative.*

### Venue:

*Sundance Film Festival, NEXT Competition*

### Cast:

*Jeremy Clark, Holly Lynn Ellis, Garth Blomberg, Bryant Mock*

### Director:

*Dusty Bias*

### Screenwriters:

*Dusty Bias, Ashley Martin Bias, Holly Lynn Ellis*

PARK CITY -- (NEXT) Constantly teetering on the brink of absurdity, *Prairie Love* is saved by a quirky sensibility, perceptive scripting and a painterly style. Savvy distributors will perceive the film's modest theatrical potential and could maximize returns with DVD and VOD.

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As a high plains drifter travels across the wintry North Dakota prairie, it's clear that first-time feature filmmaker **Dusty Bias** intends to leverage a checklist of genre tropes in this depiction of a contemporary anti-hero.

The Vagrant (**Jeremy Clark**) drives a beat-up, barely roadworthy old station wagon towing a trailer along nearly deserted rural byroads. Bundled against the freezing weather in an ankle-length fur coat and fur-lined hat, his features are barely visible.

Chancing upon an abandoned pickup truck, he finds the owner laying in the middle of the road unconscious. The Vagrant loads the nearly frozen man into the back of the wagon and drives on, listening to dating self-help cassettes on the car stereo and rifling through the guy's suitcase.

Once his rider defrosts and begins conversing, the Vagrant learns that NoDak (**Garth Blomberg**) is on his way to pick up his penpal girlfriend (**Holly Lynn Ellis**), who's about to be released from prison, even though the two have never met. As NoDak becomes increasingly nervous about the Vagrant's intentions, he flees the car and ends up frozen and unconscious again. This time the Vagrant doesn't try to revive him, dumping NoDak back at his truck and assuming his identity as he heads on to meet the girl at the prison.

Unaware that the Vagrant is impersonating NoDak, the girl embarks with him on a high plains

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odyssey, visiting abandoned farmsteads as they grow gradually more intimate. But minor lapses in the Vagrant's familiarity with NoDak and the girl's prison correspondence arouse her suspicions until a fateful development puts their relationship on the line.

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Referencing Westerns, crime dramas and fateful romances, Bias favors fixed shots of widescreen landscapes that are reminiscent of large-format paintings, alternating with close-ups on the features of the rather unlovely actors. The performances are as restrained as the rather nebulous storyline, leaving the audience to fill in details of plot and character.

Cryptic and darkly comical, *Prairie Love* makes for a prickly package that won't be embraced by every viewer, but those who open their arms to its allure will find the film a gratifying departure from overly predictable indie dramas.

The title refers to a (perhaps apocryphal) practice among single homesteaders migrating West to couple up when stranded on the open plains.

Venue: Sundance Film Festival, NEXT Competition  
Production company: A Left Turn Production  
Cast: Jeremy Clark, Holly Lynn Ellis, Garth Blomberg, Bryant Mock  
Director: Dusty Bias  
Screenwriters: Dusty Bias, Ashley Martin Bias, Holly Lynn Ellis  
Producers: Douglas Mueller, Holly Lynn Ellis, Bryant Mock, Brian Quist  
Executive producers: Dusty Bias, Ashley Martin Bias  
Director of photography: Lawrence Schweich  
Production designer: Douglas Mueller  
Music: Ted Speaker  
Editor: Dusty Bias  
Sales: Greenberg Traurig  
No rating, 80 minutes

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