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STEPHANIE'S IMAGE

Method Fest Independent Film Festival, March 2009

Reviewed by Eric Sean McGiven

When a documentary filmmaker investigates the apparent murder of a former model she finds that there are numerous questions surrounding her death. Interviews with her friends and business associates provide only a mosaic-like picture of her life and her relationships. The film stars Oscar nominated actress Melissa Leo (Frozen River) in the title role as the nebulous entity everyone is attempting to identify. The narrative/documentary style lends well to depicting this crime mystery, who was Stephanie and why had she been murdered. The police called it a murder suicide with boyfriend (Chris Butler) pulling the trigger before turning the gun on himself.

Janis DeLucia Allen plays the role of the narrator and also directs this feature. From behind the camera she probes those who knew Stephanie with questions that reveal more about themselves than Stephanie. Photos, some erotic, some with friends, add to the mystery, and slowly we find that Stephanie was obsessed with finding the perfect picture that reflects who she was as a person. JP Allen's script deals with this image obsession and the dichotomy between one's inner and outer image, the true and profound sides of one's life. We slowly discover that Stephanie was a troubled woman, troubled not so much by her fading beauty but by her deteriorating self-image.

While some interviews lingered, the structure of the story held me till the end when Melissa Leo's tour de force monologue reveals the solution to this mystery and her untimely death. Video, taped days before her death from a vantage point overlooking the city, delivers the raw emotions of the person wanting to explain yet still seeking answers. It was well worth the journey for this subtle and unconventional drama delivers a thought provoking ending that is certain to stir discussions among filmgoers. And yes, she found the perfect photograph.

The film stars Melissa Leo, Janis DeLucia Allen, Mara Luthane, JP Allen, Darren Bridgett, Chris Butler, Sally Clawson, Richard Conti, Yvonne Fisher, Leontyne Mbele-Mbong, Chris Pflueger, Douglas Rowe and Warren Keith as Detective McCaffrey. Written by JP Allen; Directed and Edited by Janis DeLucia Allen; Director of Photography, K.C. Smith; Studio Photography of Melissa Leo by Jan Stürmann; Music by Michael Slattery and Shoulders; Additional Scoring by John Dole. Produced by Coffee & Language Productions. 71 Minutes Long.