

'The Vast of Night' has mood, atmosphere to spare

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time:
89 minutes

The following feature film debuted on Amazon Prime on May 29th.

With the release of so many studio movies in limbo, this has been a great time to discover and catch up on some smaller pictures. Independent efforts have been getting more attention lately than they would have otherwise. Here's another new title being released via Amazon Prime. *The Vast of Night* is an eerie little period effort.

Made in Texas, it details strange goings-on over the course of an evening in a small New Mexico town. The film doesn't have stars or large budget money behind it, but it manages to create a wonderful sense of mood and atmosphere. This is an excellent debut feature and one that shows great promise and potential for those involved.

Set in the 1950s, the story begins with almost an entire town heading to a local high school basketball game. Radio personality Everett (Jake Horowitz) arrives to set up a recording of the event for future broadcast before heading back to the station for his DJ shift. While there, teenager and local switchboard operator Fay (Sierra McCormick) shows him her new reel-to-reel tape recorder and asks for career advice. The friendly announcer coaches her as

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they wander back to their job posts and start their evening shifts.

Things get tense when a strange noise begins interrupting the radio broadcast signal and switchboard calls are cut off. As the two try to identify the source of the sound, a couple of callers (Bruce Davis and Gail Cronauer), begin sharing disturbing stories that might explain what is happening.

The story itself is quite simple and intimate, focused exclusively on the two leads and their reactions to some wild tales. It takes a highly unusual approach and focuses on the characters listening and taking in pieces of information, rather than showing things outright. The technique may have to do in part with having a limited budget, but it actually ends up serving the story. Long takes (with some digital augmentation to further extend visuals) are used extensively, either holding on the characters in conversation or hovering low over the pavement as the leads walk around the dark and empty town.

The nighttime photography is a little dark, but this actually adds a foreboding feel to the events and, as mentioned, allows the filmmakers to focus on characters. This understated approach adds a palpable sense of mystery.

And as a result of holding on the performers, the leads are better developed than in other genre flicks. Of course, the focus on Everett, Fay and the callers means that part of the success of the film depends on the performances. Thankfully, everyone featured is exceptional. The camera hangs still on their stories for minutes on end, and they manage to maintain attention throughout.

That’s a lot to ask of the actors and it’s all the more remarkable that the performers do it so well.

Viewers should know that the movie has a relaxed pace and takes a long time to set up the main thrust of its story. And at certain points, an old television monitor is integrated into the proceedings, suggesting we may all simply be watching a *Twilight Zone*-like program. I’m not entirely certain this aspect is an effective or necessary addition to the film. Additionally, the primary focus here isn’t on spectacle, but instead to create eerie mood and atmosphere.

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Yet, it's remarkable just how effective it all ends up being. *The Vast of Night* is an engaging, well-acted little film that feels akin to sitting at a campfire and listening to creepy tales about strange and mysterious figures lurking in the dark ... who may be waiting to take us or exert their sinister influence from beyond.

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