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Dances With Film

Posted: Fri., Aug. 4, 2006, 6:03pm PT

Eve of Understanding

An Open Plan Films presentation. Produced by Alyson Shelton, Jen Prince. Co-producers, Gordon Prince, Cody Shelton. Directed, written by Alyson Shelton.

With: Rebecca Lowman, Susan Roberts, Jennifer Harlow, Mark Reeb, Timothy Wrobel, Henry Kana, Tom Procida, Kit Gwin, Daniel Magill, Cynthia Brown, Bellamy Young, John Gremillion, Shaeri Richards.

By [ROBERT KOEHLER](#)

A dying mom's eccentric last wish to have her black sheep daughter deliver "presents" to the important people in her life sets "Eve of Understanding" on its course. Although the road from bitterness to reconciliation is much too foreseeable, writer-director Alyson Shelton subtly informs the journey with enough human details to keep her debut film emotionally engaging. Best hopes beyond the fest circuit would appear to be upscale cable.

Rather than start at the beginning of what alienated daughter Donna (Rebecca Lowman) terms "a reverse scavenger hunt," Shelton opens her tale at the mid-point in Donna's Texas-to-Arizona trip, when she visits Vera (Susan Roberts), a gal with a past. Pic rewinds to Donna's starting point, with her born-again sister Lisa (Jennifer Harlow) sending her on her way.

Donna has to fend off violence-prone b.f. Glenn (Mark Reeb) and then begin leaving items and notes from late mom Eve to loved ones and others, including Donna's old b.f. Travis (Timothy Wrobel), her drunk dad (Henry Kana), Vera, Donna's hyper-religious aunt Ruth (Kit Gwin), her loving brother Michael (Daniel Magill) and the mysterious Mary (Shaeri Richards), who holds a life-altering secret.

Donna seems quite vulnerable at first, but is actually full of vim and vinegar, a young woman who's clearly already had a rough life.

Pic falls snugly into the well-worn American genre of the troubled family, but finds a cinematic, occasionally interesting framework. Shelton spends too little time with each stop on Donna's picaresque route, but her filmmaking provides glimpses of a potentially sensitive observer of human foibles. Above all, she has a strong and intensely shaded perf by Lowman as a solid anchor. Production work is fine for an indie roadie on a budget.

Camera (color, DV), Elizabeth Santoro; editor, Cody Shelton; music, Peter Senchuk; production designer, Cody Shelton; costume designer, Brenda Hinesley; sound, Cody Shelton; supervising sound editor, Marcelo Teson; associate producers, Mark Reeb, Will Underwood; assistant director, Jen Prince. Reviewed on videodisc, Los Angeles, July 30, 2006. (In Dances With Films, Los Angeles.) Running time: 93 MIN.

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A LOOK AT THE EMMY NOMS: MINISERIES / MADE-FORS



BLEAK HOUSE
PBS

Why it may win: The "Masterpiece Theatre" pedigree is worth its weight in Emmys; PBS' doyenne of dramas copped the miniseries gong last year with "The Lost Prince." Gillian Anderson melts into the role of the secretive Lady Dedlock; Acad voters can puff out their chests at a wow perf by a Yank in Brit's clothing.



ELIZABETH I
HBO

Why it may win: Nobody knows how to shine up a quality mini like HBO; since capturing its first Emmy in the category for 1998's "From the Earth to the Moon," the network has won the prize in every even-numbered year. (Clue: This is 2006.) Mirren toplined the "Prime Suspect" juggernaut that minted miniseries Emmys in 1993, '94 and '97.



INTO THE WEST
TNT

Why it may win: Steven Spielberg-produced minis have taken home two of the last four top awards in the category - "Band of Brothers" in 2002 and "Steven Spielberg Presents Taken" in '03. There's also the p.c. factor: "Into the West" spends as much time with its wide range of Native American characters as it does with its extended family tree of white settlers.



SLEEPER CELL
Showtime

Why it may win: "Sleeper Cell" is the only nonperiod piece in this category and will have the backing of voters looking to put aside puffy shirts and huckskins. Showtime also plans to bring