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Approaching Union Square

An Ibid Filmworks production. Produced by Jody Girgenti, Marc Meyers.

Directed, written by Marc Meyers.

With: Katie Kreisler, Darren Pettie, Jennifer Miranda Holmes, Bobby Pataki, Victoria Haas, Brent Crawford, Peter McCain, Christine Elise McCarthy, Beth Manspeizer, Michael Goldstrom, Patricia Randell.

By [EDDIE COCKRELL](#)

Eleven anguished New Yorkers share a bus, their stories and an unexpected fate in uneven yet thought-provoking drama "Approaching Union Square." Now touring regional American fests, this serious-minded collection of monologues, adapted by tyro feature helmer Marc Meyers from his stage work "Love & Sex: Tales From the Trenches," reps a fine calling card for a clear, even voice in urban angst.

As the pic opens, an agitated woman named Dyanne (Katie Kreisler), delivers an extended monologue to her psychologist about the possibility she's psychic. Subsequently climbing on a New York City bus, she's surrounded by an average -- well, all-white -- group of mostly thirtysomethings who clearly don't know one another.

Pic then apparently backtracks to specific, seemingly mundane events in each traveler's life: creepy Nathan (Darren Pettie) attends a seminar for sex addicts; giddy Stefanie (Jennifer Miranda Holmes) discusses a new boy with her pals; self-important Silvio (Bobby Pataki) gives a print interview. And so on.

Finally, back on the bus, Dyanne collapses of what appears to be a panic attack. Final development, which affects all the riders, reps a perfectly gauged emotional cipher open to multiple interpretations.

Helmer checks Akira Kurosawa's "Dreams" and Jim Jarmusch's "Night on Earth" as influences, but in truth, Meyers' goals are much more modest. The strength of "Approaching Union Square" lies in the natural, unaffected delivery of each speech by a cast of confident, generally unmannered unknowns. Too neutral in its approach to be mistaken for a docu hybrid along the lines of Nicholas Barker's "Unmade Beds," pic may be too elliptical for some tastes but touches with skilled insight on subjects revolving around human interaction in the big city.

Most vignettes work fine. Brent Crawford's rueful remembrance of a now-ill ex-girlfriend has resonance, while Michael Goldstrom's simultaneous declaration of separation and love to an unfortunate g.f. is as close to humor as story strays.

Conversely, Pataki's bit suffers from an ill-advised accent, while an energetic Patricia Randell does what she can with an abstract seg revolving around pet fears.

Though lensed with uncluttered simplicity on digital vid, pic doesn't feel small or cheap. Closing credit crawl bestows each vignette with a title, most of which are faintly ironic.

Camera (color, DV), Isaac Mathes; editor, Gordon Grinberg; sound, Anthony Viera. Reviewed on DVD at Montreal World Film Festival (Focus on World Cinema), Sept. 3, 2006. Running time: 81 MIN.

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