

DAILY VARIETY

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FILM

Tribeca 2006

Mini's First Time

By JOHN ANDERSON



Alec Baldwin plays the shady stepfather of precocious teen temptress Nikki Reed in 'Mini's First Time,' a Tribeca Fest Discovery selection.

A First Independent and HBO video release of a Bold Films presentation of a Trigger Street production. Produced by Kevin Spacey, Dana Brunetti, Evan Astrowsky, Edward Bass. Executive producers, Michel Litvak, Gary Michael Walters, Dan Grodnik. Co-producer, Athena Stensland. Directed, written by Nick Guthe.

Mini - Nikki Reed

Martin - Alec Baldwin

Diane - Carrie-Anne Moss

John Garson - Luke Wilson

Mike - Jeff Goldblum

A venomous bonbon filled with black-hearted satire, "Mini's First Time" is a comedy about cynical opportunism, self-interest and how to be a successful sociopath. Appeal should be across the board, but especially among auds with a taste for the sardonic.

There's very little here in the way of redemptive morality; the downward trajectory of the ensemble resembles the choreography of a parachute team. Part of "Mini's" charm, in fact, may be in its single-minded devotion to the utterly depraved and comically debauched.

Mixing elements of "Gaslight," "Double Indemnity" and "Clueless," writer-director Nick Guthe's first feature offers a heroine of very dubious appeal: Mini (Nikki Reed), a high school sex-bomb whose passion is doing things she's never done before -- in other words, having "firsts." When she decides to try prostitution, one of her first clients turns out to be her stepfather, Martin (Alec Baldwin).

One thing leads to another, and the two are soon plotting to drive Mini's mother, Diane (a terrific Carrie-Anne Moss), crazy, have her committed and avoid the repercussions that would be brought on by Martin and Diane's prenuptial agreement. But things, as they will, get out of hand.

The performances lift "Mini" out of the gutter of utter cynicism and into the realm of the complex. Reed's antiheroine is pure opportunist, but Baldwin's Martin is a half sophisticate/half patsy who watches himself being led down the garden path as if he were having an out-of-body experience.

Moss, playing the ungratifying role of Mini's angry, drink-addled mother, manages to wring enough sympathy out of the character to keep her from becoming a suburban cartoon.

Production values are first-rate, notably Linda Burton's production design and Dan Stoloff's camera work. Composer Cato's music is solid, too, though it occasionally borrows from the Thomas Newman/"American Beauty" sense of the ethereal.

Luke Wilson and Jeff Goldblum, playing a detective and leering neighbor, respectively, are here to play Luke Wilson and Jeff Goldblum.

Camera (color) Daniel Stoloff; editors, Michael Ruscio, Alan Cody; music, Cato; production designer, Linda Burton; set decorator, Ellen Brill; costume designer, Johanna Argan; supervising sound editor (Dolby Digital), Christopher Sheldon; special effects supervisor, Kelly Kerby; associate producer, Robert Glaser; casting, Rick Montgomery, Chadwick Struck. Reviewed on DVD, Los Angeles, May 9, 2006. (In Tribeca Film Festival --Discovery.) Running time: 91 MIN.

