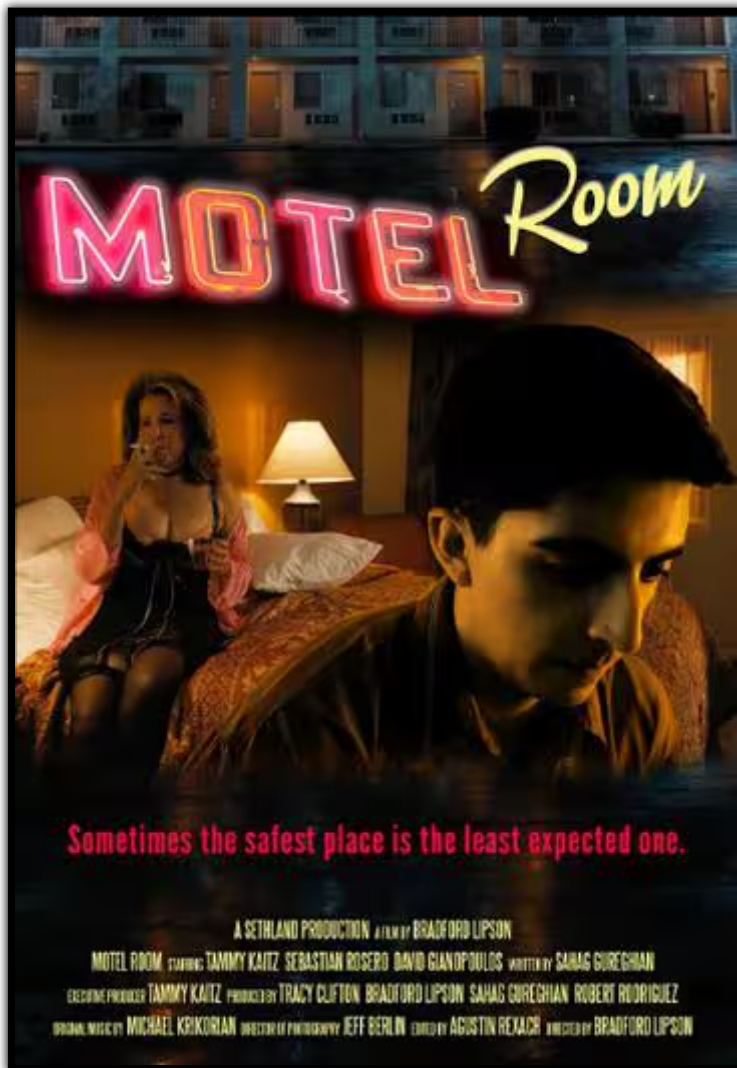




The Independent Critic

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Movie
Review:
Motel
Room



Room 229 feels like a hideaway place. It's where Megan (Tammy Kaitz) lives and breathes, experiences the world's events and hides away within the shadows a body that hasn't been called pretty for years yet still serves and functions and provides both pleasure and life lessons.

Into this room, essentially her home, a knock on the door reveals Massis (David Gianopoulos) and his son Sevag (Sebastian Rosero). From the few moments we see them, it's clear that this is a familiar place for Massis and a new experience for Sevag who has been brought here to lose the burden of his virginity. It's a rite of passage, one could say, and it's clear it's a rite that Massis has enjoyed, perhaps many times, and a rite that he has handed down through the family.

Yet, it is quickly apparent that Sevag is far different from his father. He's an introvert, softer and more shy. He's a nerd, it would seem, existing in a world where stereotyped masculinity is most prized. One gets the feeling he's never felt safe a moment in his life.

Until, perhaps, now.

Motel Room is a lovely film. Honest and true and warmly intimate, *Motel Room* explores the burgeoning friendship of sorts that arises from this woman who avoids anything resembling actual intimacy and this young teenager who craves it. They meet, somewhat awkwardly, in the middle and something beautiful is born if only for the few moments this Armenian teen will find himself in this room.

Directed by Bradford Lipson based on a true story written by Sahag Gureghian, *Motel Room* finds wonder within its whiskey-tinged cinematic breath and cigarette-stained motel walls. Sevag has been sent to Room 229 to become a man and one can't help but think that maybe that happens ... just not in the way that his father would expect, though in all likelihood that's a secret to be maintained between he and this delightful spirit who seldom ever gets the chance to be delightful.

Tammy Kaitz is simply extraordinary as Megan, hints of maternalism filling the room even as she sets boundaries around anything resembling human connection. She's pretty, it's undeniable, and one particular moment where she flippantly denies having called as much in years practically broke my heart and led to one of several tears I shed throughout this 20-minute short film.

Rosero is exceptional as well, a combination of aching vulnerability and charismatic wonder. He has no idea how exceptional a human being he is, though in her moments with him Megan draws him closer to it. Rosero's is a beautiful performance and you'll be rooting for him the entire way.

Lensing by Jeff Berlin immerses us in this motel room, a nondescript urban setting that serves as both home and workplace. It's lived in but seldom, if ever, loved in. Original music by Michael Krikorian complements the narrative sublimely and grounds us in the film's emotional rhythms. Danielle Launzel's costume design is equally precise in making sure we relate to each person here as more than a one-note caricature.

Motel Room has picked up 10 fest prizes thus far in its indie fest journey with notables being at Hollywood Florida Film Festival (Best Dramatic Short), Nashville Independent Filmmakers Festival (Best LGBTQ

Short), and Bright International Film Festival (Best Queer Narrative). It's difficult to imagine anyone not embracing this heartfelt, poignant film.

Offering a unique lens on a familiar story, *Motel Room* benefits from its small but strong ensemble and a story that unfolds with integrity and honesty. It's a little work of wonder that you should check out if you get the chance.

Written by Richard Propes
The Independent Critic

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