



Full Review - Room 314

Actor-turned-filmmaker Michael Knowles' first feature, based on his own stage play, follows five couples, sequential inhabitants of the same anonymous hotel room, as they hash out their relationship woes.

Strangers Nick (Matthew Del Negro), who's about to get married, and Stacey (Joelle Carter) wake up together in Room 314; Stacey doesn't remember a thing about last night until Nick fills her in. She made a spectacle of herself at the bar where they met, their friends Cathy and Joe left together, they didn't have sex last night but they did have one hell of a marathon conversation, which they pick up in the sobering light of day. Married couple Harry (Michael Laurence), a recovering alcoholic, and Gretchen (Sarah Jenkins) are on the rocks. She thinks he's having an affair, but he's actually fallen off the wagon and into a suicidal depression. Gretchen follows him to the hotel where he's been holing up with his dark thoughts and demands that he talk to her about their problems. Coworkers Jack (Knowles) and Kathy (Robyn Myhr) are also married, but not to each other; they meet at the hotel for a quick roll in the hay, but too much pre-sex talk forces them to consider their motives. Matt (Todd Swenson) and Tracey (Monique Vukovic) are also looking for some illicit thrills, but between the time Tracey orders drinks from room service and the time they arrive, the couple's awkward, slightly hostile flirtation has taken a turn for the ugly. Finally, Caly (Jennifer Marlowe) and David (Michael Mosley) check in. Their relationship has already gone down in flames, but she's agreed to accompany him to his younger brother's wedding. Proximity reignites their passion, but also opens a Pandora's box of neuroses that may sabotage their efforts to negotiate a new, better relationship.

Kudos to writer/director/producer/cinematographer/editor Knowles for aspiring to make an adult film about the complicated landscape of contemporary relationships, and for assiduously avoiding the formulaic cliches of mainstream romantic comedies and sentimental melodramas. Unfortunately, his five thematically connected vignettes (one of which, "Nick and Stacey," was originally made as a stand-alone short) never cohere into anything greater than the component parts. All play like acting-class improvisations, and the dialogue is inflected with therapy-speak is clotted with tedious repetitions and awkward pauses. While the cast is uniformly committed, some are able to make more of the material than others. --Maitland McDonagh