



S.F. IndieFest

One Night

By DENNIS HARVEY

New York City ensembler "One Night" tracks 15 folk out on the town -- all converging on a club -- during an evening in which various relationships are commenced or shaken up. A step up from multihyphenate Michael Knowles' play-derived "Room 314" (duly plugged twice here), pic gleans decent perfs from a cast mixing up-and-comers and a couple notable vets (Melissa Leo, Bill Sage). Sum is diverting enough but treads highly familiar indie ground sans fresh insight or style, let alone good dialogue. Overemphasis on handheld closeups could hinder broadcast sales, though not modest DVD exposure.

Among Manhattanites partying this summer eve are Michelle (Paola Mendoza), who clicks with previously online-only flirtation Jack (Michael Muhney), unaware they're being stalked by an angry, pistol-packing ex (Billy Lush). Larry (Sage) is a record-label talent scout who's a bit of a jerk and knows it; he and his younger g.f. (Maria Zyrionova) are scouting an indie-rock band at the behest of the personal assistant (Holley Fain) he's boinking on the side. The band's frontpersons (Donnamarie Recco, Aaron Staton) have unresolved romantic issues.

Leo plays a middle-aged woman who drifts into the club on a whim, sparking first with a cute young bartender (Bill Dawes), then with an affable divorcee (Robert Clohessy). Said bartender's high-maintenance actress squeeze (Merissa Morin) shows up, demanding his attention while seemingly oblivious to the fact that her gal pal (Frankie Shaw) is in love with her.

More pairs than not end up happily in bed together, though an unhappy ending is made rather too inevitable by an opening scene in which the stalker pulls a gun on Michelle the next morning -- after which pic rewinds to "15 hours earlier." Minor irritants include pic's sole gay male character (Kevin Cahoon) being sidelined for most of the runtime, then sketched as lonely and pathetic, and the uninspired music played and heard throughout.

Biggest minus, however, is Knowles' dialogue. While the character dynamics hold

interest, nobody here can express him- or herself on anything but the most nondescript, cliched level. It would be one thing if their inarticulacy were the point, but instead, pic intends auds to take lines like "When it comes down to it, who cares?" as actual life wisdoms.

Unattractive lensing is another debit; this is one movie that won't lose much played on an iPhone. Cast is capable, however, and as editor, Knowles keeps things moving right along.

Camera (color, HD), Knowles; music supervisor, Janet Lopez; production designer, Jeff Young; costume designer, Mei-Lei Pecorari; sound, Knowles; assistant director, Jeremiah Kipp; casting, Matthew Messinger. Reviewed at San Francisco Independent Film Festival, Feb. 16, 2008. Running time: 97 MIN.