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Lotus Eaters: Film Review

5:59 PM 6/14/2011 by Jordan Mintzer

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The Bottom Line

Lifestyles of the rich, hip and bored.

Director

Alexandra McGuinness

Screenwriters

Alexandra McGuinness,
Brendan Grant

Cast

Antonia Campbell-
Hughes, Benn
Northover, Alex
Wyndham

This feature debut from Irish writer-director Alexandra McGuinness is less a succinct narrative than a meandering portrait of several ultra-rich, ultra-empty thirtysomethings who waste away their days with sex, drugs and ennui.

TAORMINA — An ex-model named Alice tumbles down the rabbit hole of London's posh hipster scene in *Lotus Eaters*, the feature debut from Irish writer-director **Alexandra McGuinness**. Less a succinct narrative than a meandering portrait of several ultra-rich, ultra-empty thirtysomethings who waste away their days with sex, drugs and *ennui*, the film offers a few decent performances captured with New Wave-style visuals, but is not quite the social exposé or melancholic drama it aims to be. Additional fests and minor arthouse action will follow Tribeca and Taormina berths.

Set in a series of designer homes, apartments and one immense country estate, *Lotus Eaters* tags along with an in-crowd of wealthy and beautiful (though not quite famous) friends as they go about the business of doing nothing productive, dwindling away their trust funds on champagne and clothes (except for one girl, who shoplifts for the hell of it). While most of them lack brains and heart, Alice (**Antonia Campbell-Hughes**), who hangs on the clique's periphery, thankfully has some of both, although what draws her to this unsavory bunch is one of several questions the film never really answers.

Recently separated from her heroin-addict BF, Charlie, (**Johnny Flynn**), Alice wants to break into acting, but spends most of her time trailing the gang from one jet-setter party to another, sharing confidences with her girlfriends, though they don't exactly return the favor. (One claims that "my ankles are the best things about me," and she seems to be right.) When Alice starts to drift into the arms of Alex (**Benn Northover**), a pampered heir with not much else going for him, other subplots and trysts rise to the surface, clashing together during one final and dangerous bash.

In an age where the antics of the shallow and affluent are broadcast daily, it's not exactly easy to recreate that world in a manner which feels credible and meaningful. (For proper examples, see Michelangelo Antonioni or, in a low-energy sort of way, Sofia Coppola.) And though McGuinness and co-writer Brendan Grant provide plenty of eye-catching ambiance, especially in the many five-star locations where the film was shot, there's still something forced and rather caricatured about the persons depicted.

As it's hard to invest in characters who invest precious little in their own lives, we're left with Alice, who's a tad above the rest, though her motivations remain vague at best. Thankfully, actress Campbell-Hughes (*Bright Star*) keeps things afloat with her longing eyes and sprightly presence, conveying sadness with only minimal dialogue. Playing the always high and darkly handsome Charlie, real-life folksinger Flynn has incredible charisma and presence. His unplugged performance provides the movie's one breakout moment.

Shot on black-and-white 16mm stock by talented photographer-cum-d.p. **Gareth Munden**, the film's handheld, floating look recalls the early work of Godard and Cassavettes, giving the decade an airy and energetic feel. Soundtrack is chock-full of Brit rock tunes, including tracks by **Anna Calvi** and **The National**.

Venue: Taormina Film Festival
 Production companies: McGuinnessLee, Fastnet Films
 Cast: Antonia Campbell-Hughes, Benn Northover, Alex Wyndham, Marsha Hunt, Cynthia Fortune Ryan, Daisy Lewis, Gina Bramhill, Johnny Flynn
 Director: Alexandra McGuinness
 Screenwriters: Alexandra McGuinness, Brendan Grant
 Producers: Mark Lee, Morgan Bushe, Kyle Blanshard
 Director of photography: Gareth Munden
 Production designer: Richard Hudson
 Music: Birger Clausen
 Costume designer: Ruth Higginbotham
 Editor: Bert Hunger, Emer Reynolds
 Sales Agent: Fastnet Films
 No rating, 76 minutes

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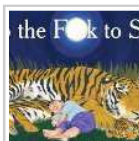
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