

MIDWEST VALUES MAKE *DISTANCE* STAND OUT AMONG INDIES

When filmmaker Stu Pollard visited Fort Wayne in support of his first film *Nice Guys Sleep Alone*, audiences responded with enthusiasm. *Nice Guys Sleep Alone* is a very funny film about the perils of dating, and it plays especially well in the Midwest because it is set in a community a lot like ours. The pitfalls of finding Mr. or Ms. Right in a place like Fort Wayne are a lot more like *Nice Guys Sleep Alone* than “Sex in the City,” and that ring of truth connects with audiences.

Stu Pollard’s new film, *Keep Your Distance*, which premieres this week at Cinema Center Tech, touches some of the same chords. Pollard will be at the Friday night shows, introducing his film and answering questions. Stu is a true independent filmmaker. Not only did he write and direct *Keep Your Distance*, he produced the film, raising the funds to make it himself. And, he is the distributor for his films. He has skill sets that have skill sets, to use a little business jargon.

Unlike some filmmakers who think “indie” means lots of shaky cam and shadows and stories about characters who revel in their grunginess, Stu’s work is very professionally produced, and he creates characters that are recognizable and genuinely struggling with themselves. *Keep Your Distance* looks and sounds great, and the polished production supports a plot that keeps you guessing.

Keep Your Distance is a thriller, set in Louisville, Kentucky, Pollard’s hometown, and like *Nice Guys Sleep Alone* projects a very strong and welcome bedrock-of-America vibe. While it includes the suspense and intrigue a thriller needs, *Keep Your Distance* doesn’t go off on some overwrought tangent in the last reel, the way so many Hollywood thrillers do, leaving audiences to make excuses. It doesn’t descend into mindless violence.

Keep Your Distance stays grounded in Louisville. It stays grounded in the kinds of issues that, unfortunately, real people face too often. That doesn’t mean that *Keep Your Distance* doesn’t get increasingly steamy, dark and nerve-wracking as things heat up; things do get complicated and threatening. But the foundation of *Keep Your Distance* is about trust and betrayal and the delicate, fragile nature of human relationships.

In some ways *Keep Your Distance* picks up in the relationship continuum years down the road from *Nice Guys*. As Pollard says, “We get married because we finally find what we’ve been search-

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ing for, yet for nearly 60 percent of us, shortly after we find it, we start to take it for granted.”

Keep Your Distance stars Gil Bellow (best known as Billy from “Ally McBeal”) as David Dailey, a very popular radio talk show host in Louisville. He and his wife Susan (Kim Raver of “Third Watch” and “24”) are a couple who seem to have it all – each other, fame and fortune, and plenty of admiration and respect from nearly everyone in the community. But beneath the happy face they present to the community, they are having troubles.

David is receiving very strange anonymous notes that are either odd threats, the strange seduction attempts of some overly aggressive fan or a teasing attempt by Susan to get his attention and spice up their lives. Like any successful person, David is hounded by all sorts of people – politicians who want his endorsement, colleagues who know just what he should do next with his career – and nearly every encounter brings some sort of request or complaint. David’s celebrity status isn’t much fun anymore; it’s just an endless chain of obligations. Everyone wants a piece of him, including Whit (Jamie Harrold, the water board clerk dazzled by Julia Roberts in *Erin Brockovich*) who wants David’s help to get a radio show of his own, though he doesn’t quite have the right stuff.

One day David runs into Melody (Jennifer Westfeldt, the star and co-writer and producer of *Kissing Jessica Stein*), almost literally. Melody is a pharmaceutical saleswoman, a job she really doesn’t like. In all the ways David is grounded in his community, Melody is at loose ends. She lives in hotel rooms. She divorced her husband. Her life is a mess, not at all what she dreamed and hoped it would be.

Melody is being pursued very aggressively by Sean, a very handsome aspiring singer. Sean is also very wealthy. He seems like the kind of guy every woman would want, but to Melody he seems a little too good to be true. He’s more than a little clingy. She just doesn’t quite trust him. Sean’s father, Brooks (Stacey

Keach) doesn’t trust anyone, especially any woman his son finds so fascinating. Brooks dispatches his assistant Michaela (Elizabeth Pena, *Lone Star*, *Tortilla Soup*) to keep an eye on Melody.

David and Melody, despite being nearly strangers, hit it off and have the kind of instant chemistry and trust that neither can claim among people who do know them better. Both David and Melody have the uneasy feeling they are being watched, and they are, but they don’t suspect each other. David’s life and career could be ruined by all the troubles swirling around him, but as Melody says, she doesn’t know him well enough to betray him.

Their chemistry and budding friendship offers David and Melody comfort, and unlike a typical movie, this quick affinity doesn’t mean they head off to the bedroom. Each of them has to solve their problems themselves. Of course, this being a movie, those problems intertwine. And some things get a little out of hand.

Keep Your Distance possesses what sounds like a very unglamorous movie trait: values. It isn’t that everyone is a saint or that all the behavior is nice. But the people we like in this movie take themselves seriously, but not too seriously. They struggle, and then they make choices. How do we live? What do we really want?

And it is a special pleasure to watch characters try to answer these questions in a setting that is distinctly middle America. I enjoy films that see the beauty of real places. It isn’t that everything looks so special in *Keep Your Distance*, but Louisville looks like a place that has the lovely and the mundane, just like all real places. The soundtrack features music that complements the scenery and has a regional flavor.

Does anyone doubt that lots of people we see every day have some really juicy secrets lurking behind their public personas? *Keep Your Distance* makes you keenly aware that a sunny public persona might be hiding a much more complicated life.