

DVD REVIEWS

title: **Chance**
studio: Benson Entertainment
MPAA rating: Unrated
starring: Amber Benson, James Marsters, Christine Ebersole, Andy Hallett
release year: 2003
film rating: Three-and-a-Half Stars
sound/picture: Three-and-a-Half Stars
reviewed by: Abbie Bernstein



Among the dirty little secrets of the independent film world, the dirtiest may be this – if the movie is available to the general public on home video, much less theatrically, it probably is not completely independent. Somewhere, usually way back in development before pre-production even starts, the entity holding the purse strings has forceful opinions about the filmmaker’s creative vision. Usually, there are a whole bunch of entities, all with opinions that must be addressed before anything can be shot, enforcing their homogenizing views right through the editing and distribution stages.

Now, often this is a good thing. Most filmmakers can use guidance from somebody, and while it’s not an absolute rule of thumb, it’s at least possible that if somebody is in a position to shell out the cash it takes to make a movie, they have perhaps made some other, earlier movies that audiences liked enough to generate profits. On the flip side, though, all of this accountability to outside parties tends to cut down on genuinely idiosyncratic filmmaking.

“Chance” is therefore a rarity – a true indie made on a shoestring budget that is nevertheless seeing the light of home video accessibility. Making it still more noticeable is that the people involved actually know what they’re doing on the acting, directing and technical fronts. The movie has a professional sheen that never gets in the way of its you-don’t-see-this-every-day structure and style.

Written and directed by Amber Benson, “Chance” is a comedy that turns out to be romantic (as opposed to a romantic comedy), examining the mindset of the title character, a young woman (Benson) who is trying to toughen herself up to life’s perils – especially the emotional ones – by developing a thick armor of cynicism. She shares her observations with us in voiceover and direct address to the camera, but what she says and what she shows us are often two different things. At one point, even Chance acknowledges that she doesn’t have a handle on her situation: “Ignore me, I’m full of shit,” she instructs us.

To be fair to Chance, she’s got an awful lot going on. There’s a dead body (Tressa DiFiglia) in her bed, best friend Simon (James Marsters) living on her couch for the past year, an ex-boyfriend (Rayder Woods) who won’t go away, a voyeuristic neighbor (Nate Barlow) hanging around the apartment windows and two spacey, self-involved parents (Christine Estabrook and Jeff Ricketts)

who are currently separated. Chance, for all her talk of not wanting involvement, has developed an instantaneous crush on a shy folk singer (Andy Hallett), but he's distracted by his own concerns, while Chance remains oblivious to Simon's crush on her (possibly because he does unromantic things like beg for \$200 to pay his parking tickets). Through it all, a strolling troubador (Grant Langston) pops up, musically commenting on Chance's thoughts.

The songs, mostly written by Langston, are a particular pleasure, musically lovely (think Jackson Browne in the '70s doing a solo acoustic set) and verbally trenchant. They sound terrific in the 5.1 surround mix, which is evenly balanced across the soundstage – there's no attempt at discrete effects here, but with one or two exceptions when a loud word causes a spike, the dialogue is clear and mixed cleanly with the ambient effects and music.

Performances are all strong, with Benson having a firm handle on Chance, who is articulate, diffident and defensive all at once – she keeps herself company with her interior monologue because she's too afraid to let anyone else in. Marsters has an appealing mixture of tenderness and goofiness, convincing us Simon is slacker enough to indeed be a couch dweller, yet warm enough for us to understand why Chance wants him around. Hallett gives his folkie the sympathetic, bemused quality of someone who is never sure whether he should advance or retreat. Estabrook manages the tricky feat of making Chance's mother somewhat flighty yet sufficiently grounded to plausibly indulge her daughter when Chance plays an elaborate practical joke. She and Ricketts have a mutual high point when their characters begin quoting Shakespeare as though it's the only logical thing to say in the circumstances.

Visually, "Chance" has strongly saturated colors and virtually none of the optical delays that characterize most video productions. A flashback/possible fantasy in Chapter 4 even successfully desaturates colors for a muted, not quite black-and-white look, while elsewhere, cinematographer Patrice Cochet's work blends you-are-there imagery with filmlike depth and hues. There are also some grace notes in the editing, such as a song under the opening titles that visually jumps Langston's strolling guitarist along the suburban streets without ever skipping a note.

"Chance" has a dreamy quality that has partly to do with its playful structure and partly to do with the fact that it compares most closely to films made 20 and 30 years ago, so far back that – unless one has a collection that allows for recent viewings – memories of them feel rather like dreams. Once upon a time, independence in filmmaking promised resourcefulness and originality, something not delivered by the majors and mini-majors that was nevertheless worth having. "Chance" provides laughs, charm, proficiency – and proof that 20th-century indie movie spirit is still alive in the 21st century if you know where to look.

more details

sound format:	English Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround
aspect ratio(s):	1.33:1
special features:	Chaptering
comments:	email us here...
order today:	www.chancemovie.com