

Crazy for 'Patsy Cline'

Chris Kennedy's intriguing Aussie film has a lot of quirk in the twang

Film

Review

Trust the Australians to make a winsome, witty comedy about the road to Nashville.

A crowd-pleaser at the recent Nortel Palm Springs International Film Festival and a major award-winner Down Under, "Doing Time for Patsy Cline" boasts oodles of dusty charm, bright, quirky performances and an intriguing construction to warrant a U.S. domestic distribution deal.

Aussie heartthrob Matt Day ("Kiss or Kill," "Muriel's Wedding") plays the wide-eyed time-doer in question — an aspiring country singer-songwriter who leaves his Outback life behind and hitches his hopes and dreams to a shot at the Grand Ole Opry.

Alas, young Ralph's have-guitar-will-travel game plan hits a bit of a detour when destiny arrives in the form of a stolen green Jaguar driven by a slick, somewhat manic drug-runner named Boyd (Richard Roxburgh), who's accompanied by his good-natured, red-haired, green-eyed girlfriend, Patsy (Miranda Otto). Not only was Patsy named after Patsy Cline, but she has a darn nice singing voice to boot.

But just as the dynamics of an inevitable triangle among the three passengers begin to take hold, the police catch up with the car. Patsy manages to escape, but Boyd and the unwitting Ralph are thrown in jail.

Along the way, writer-director Chris Kennedy intersperses the action with scenes in Nashville in which the trio apparently meet again. This time,

Ralph gets the girl, and they become a famous duo. Or do they? Kennedy's unusual screenplay construction keeps us uncertain until the last scene.

While the path may be a familiar one, Kennedy has thrown in enough unexpected potholes and sudden turns to keep it all fresh. There's a lot of quirk in the twang. That goes double for the performances of Day, Otto and particularly the conniving but lovable Roxburgh.

Wrapping it all up in a vivid package are Andrew Lesnie's vibrant camerawork and Roger Ford's dual production design (both worked on "Babe"). Meanwhile, the original song compositions by Pete Best (not the ex-Beatle) strike a convincing, vaguely familiar country chord. His "Dead Red Roses" (the picture's unofficial theme song) sounds like something that could have been an early '70s hit for Charlie Rich and Marie Osmond.

And in Kennedy's carefully crafted "Is it live or is it Memorex?" universe, maybe it was.

— Michael Rechtshaffen

DOING TIME FOR PATSY CLINE Southern Star Film Sales

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Credits: Director-screenwriter: Chris Kennedy; Producer: Chris Kennedy; Director of photography: Andrew Lesnie; Production designer: Roger Ford; Editor: Ken Sallows; Costume designer: Louise Wakefield; Music: Pete Best. **Cast:** Boyd: Richard Roxburgh; Patsy: Miranda Otto; Ralph: Matt Day; Dwayne: Tony Barry; Ken: Kiri Paramore; Alfie: Laurence Coy; Mum: Annie Byron; Dad: Roy Billing. **No MPAA rating.** Running time — 95 minutes. Color/stereo.