

BERLINALE REVIEWS: 'DISCREET', CONSERVATIVE QUEER ODYSSEY

by admin



THE CAMERA ZOOMS IN ON A HUSHED CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE THAT MANAGES TO BLOSSOM UNDER A SHROUD OF SECRECY. THIS IS *DISCREET*, A BITTERSWEET BALLAD TO GAY TEXANS.

There's a man, and he's driving. In a car, on a road; between some place and another place. He has a destination, but he won't get there. Instead he'll be stopping soon in a wayside motel to meet another man, perhaps two – all prearranged – with lube and a blindfold. Perhaps two.

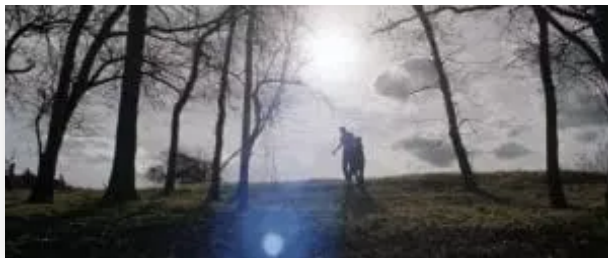
Discreet isn't about the journey, or about the people. It's mostly about that first man, and about one particular stop-off (keep reading). Which is just as well, because its

maker **Travis Mathews** apparently shot it all in two weeks, on not much of a budget. That's relative, of course: this isn't a cheap film. All the same, (Lack of) money is not an object; the execution of the production lacks nothing.

Another overnight stay: the middle of nowhere, an old, grimy little house. Inside is an old man, unkempt with a long white beard. This man has Parkinson's disease and doesn't speak at all.

These two men have a history together. At first it just seems uncanny. Why is he here? Where is 'here'? It's a nightmarish place, where time has been ajar since 1975, and where a rarely-disturbed rotary phone is the only connection to the outside world. Outside is a closet locked under heavy chains; inside the closet is a mattress and a collection of jars, each filled with piss.

It feels like a breeding ground for evil, and the horror-esque soundtrack enhances that suggestion. Ghosts of the past linger, sexual trauma and decades-old, unhealed wounds. A lot is left to audience guesswork. The two men used to be neighbours.



True to its word, 'Discreet' is subtle. The dull Texan winter is quietly bursting with secrets. Occasionally, we see snapshots of a

marriage between an absent woman, and a man who we've already seen with another man. The tinny rage of right-wing radio presenters against "the homosexuals" that echoes off the murky walls here, could well be the soundtrack to another *menage à trois*, in the middle of nowhere, elsewhere.

This is a film that hurts you, just by turning inside out the dull countryside and the rural Texan mindset.
