



Casting About 2007, Movie, NR, 86 mins

Casting About: Review



★★★★

Filmmaker Barry Hershey's impressionistic documentary about the casting process is the antidote to years of comic "audition montages," those guaranteed laugh-getting freak-show parades of no-talents mangling monologues and pulling nutty stunts in hopes of standing out from the crowd.

In 2000, while developing a WWII-era drama with three major female roles, Hershey got the idea to somehow include pieces of audition footage in the

finished product. So when he and his producer began seeing actresses, they hired a cinematographer to shoot the hundreds of candidates in Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, London and Berlin who read for the parts of an artist's model, a dancer and a German nun. Though the feature, "Moving Still," remains unproduced, Hershey realized there was a whole film in the audition footage. The hopefuls are all nervous, betrayed by restlessness, fingers fussing with clothing or a slightly too-bright greeting; this is, after all, a job interview. They're unknowns, beginners with a handful of minor credits and the occasional familiar name, tall, short, blonde, brunette and redheaded — only a handful aren't white. Some are stunningly beautiful, others pretty, cute, offbeat or plain. They talk little about themselves, mostly chitchatting and recapping their professional experience, though one young woman reveals that she's come straight from reading a victim's impact statement at the sentencing of a man who, three years earlier, kidnapped, raped and strangled her, leaving her for dead by a roadside. They do prepared monologues or scenes from Hershey's screenplay, and he occasionally juxtaposes two women performing the same material to strikingly different effect. They dance and sing at Hershey's off-screen request; they put on and turn off accents, cry and giggle and pose. They all say pretty much the same thing when Hershey asks about nudity — they're willing under the right circumstances — but body language speaks louder than words: Some are clearly uncomfortable while others couldn't care less. None are untalented, though some are more accomplished than others and a few are breathtakingly good. You have to wonder why, if a talent pool like this can be assembled for a low-profile project like Hershey's, you ever see a subpar performance in a major motion picture or TV show.

There's something slightly voyeuristic about watching so many women pursuing three roles (Hershey includes footage from 184 auditions), but the tone couldn't be further from reality-TV meanness. Hershey seems genuinely in awe of what they can do; he has the upper hand every step of the way and never uses it to humiliate or poke fun. So much time has now passed that if "Moving Still" ever gets on track, Hershey will have to do the whole thing again. But this film stands as a tribute to the actresses who put their hearts on the line this time. --*Maitland McDonagh*

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