

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Overall Rating



The EFilmCritic Review

By Scott Weinberg

Kris Lefcoe's 'Public Domain' is a feisty little flick. It's an acerbic, acidic and altogether discontented rabble-rouser, and a movie that oozes its contempt for 'Reality TV' from every imaginable pore. So obviously I had a ball with it.

"Public Domain" is the sort of TV show that secretly hides little cameras inside your house and then broadcasts to the entire world as you pick your nose, lean & fart, touch yourself salaciously...and do other things that are *truly* unsavory.

If such a TV series did exist, you bet your sweet keester you'd watch it every week. But would you want to be one of the contestants?

Yes, it's the old "anything for fame" conceit, only this time we have a first-time filmmaker who has a taste for the dark, the droll and the unflinchingly satirical. **Public Domain** is a satire, only not the sort of broad slapstick "**Airplane!**" satire that works through sheer exuberance. Kris Lefcoe's movie is about digging down into Reality TV's 'worst case scenario' and then emerging with a scathing indictment...that doesn't seem all that unrealistic after all.

Though we're briefly introduced to a few disqualified contestants (one of whom is tossed from the show after she bravely decides to leave her horrifically abusive husband), the bulk of "Public Domain" consists of three specific losers: Bonnie, a nostalgia-addicted alcoholic who ignores her rebellious son in favor of another bottle of wine; Terry, a stunningly hateful and manipulative little coke fiend who whores out her schoolgirl friends in

an effort to pay off her drug debts; and Peter, a spineless and pathetic shut-in who spends his days annoying delivery men and staring off into space.

Along with our three spotlighted subjects, we're prone to frequent visits from two astoundingly smug (and therefore very amusing) hosts, a pair of sneering cigarette-smokers who mock the contestants with an attitude...not much different than what's found in your run-of-the-mill episode of *Survivor* or *Big Brother*.

How do the contestants "win" the big money prize? Simply by being the most miserable and worthless creatures on the planet! You can even call in and vote!

Though much of **Public Domain's** humor might sail right over the head of those already addicted to six straight hours of *The Bachelorette* (followed by an encore presentation of *Temptation Island!*), most who see through the chintzy facade of Reality TV will find much to chuckle about as **Public Domain** unfolds. Lefcoe has managed to wage a deconstruction of Reality TV while creating something considerably more entertaining at the same time.

Though obviously made with a limited budget, Lefcoe circumvents this potential problem by presenting her movie in "Reality TV" form. Most of what you see is presented through the lens of a hidden camera. It's this sort of *voyeur* vibe that touches upon one of Reality Television's most revered conventions...and Lefcoe seems more than willing to let things get nasty.

Aside from Canadian-indie-guy Don McKellar as one of the smarmy hosts, there aren't too many faces here you'd recognize, although there are a few truly excellent performances; Mike Beaver allows his grimy couch potato to somehow become a sympathetic character, while young Nadia Litz (as Terry) is an absolute powerhouse. Litz takes a tough part and delivers a performance that is staggeringly impressive.

As we see the depths to which Terry will sink to save her own ass, it's both salaciously entertaining and an effective indictment at the same time. If you take the Reality Show to its only logical conclusion, you're bound to come up with something as ugly as mean-spirited as "Public Domain". And that's meant as a compliment to the filmmakers.

That so many Americans see this sort of low-minded navel-gazing as some wonderful new revolution in television broadcasting is a sad state of affairs. That there are a few canny filmmakers out there just beginning to mock this new convention - as it so obviously deserves - gives us cause for hope.

OFFICIAL SELECTION: 2004 SXSW Film Festival.

OFFICIAL SELECTION: 2004 Mill Valley Film Festival.

HBS User Ratings:

Awesome	14.29%
Worth A Look	85.71%
Average	0%
Pretty Bad	0%
Total Crap	0%