



Splendor

Gregg Araki

USA, 1999

93 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Desperate Pictures/Dragon Pictures**

Executive Producer: **Heidi Lester,**

William Tyrer, Chris Ball

Producer: **Damian Jones,**

Graham Broadbent, Gregg Araki

Screenplay: **Gregg Araki**

Cinematographer: **Jim Fealy**

Editor: **Gregg Araki, Tatiana S. Riegel**

Production Designer: **Patti Podesta**

Sound: **Mark Rozett**

Music: **Daniel Licht**

Principal Cast: **Kathleen Robertson,**

Johnathon Schaech, Matt Keeslar,

Kelly Macdonald, Eric Mabius

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An abrupt change of direction for Gregg Araki, one of America's most consistently challenging artists, *Splendor* is a blissfully romantic comedy featuring spectacular performances from a devastatingly attractive cast. Its consistently sunny and shimmering feel is a delight, especially when coloured and gently undercut by Araki's signature post-modern gestures. The film is probably best described as a very, very sexy reworking of *Jules et Jim*, Truffaut's seminal exploration of a ménage-à-trois. But this shorthand description fails to convey how much fun *Splendor* really is.

As the story begins, Veronica (the dynamic Kathleen Robertson) meets two men. Abel (Johnathon Schaech) is a rock critic; he is witty and charming and stimulates her mentally like no one before. Zed (Matt Keeslar, in a genius comedic turn) is a drummer in a punk band; he is sex itself. Both, of course, are gorgeous and completely in love with her. She cannot decide between them and, after a peculiar encounter at a techno-rave in the woods, they decide to move in together and see how it goes.

For about six months, things go great. But the guys are basically not that interested in working and Veronica, an aspiring actress, tires of supporting them. Ernest (Eric Mabius) is a successful director/producer in L.A.'s TV wasteland. Smitten by Veronica, he casts her in his latest trashy made-for-TV opus. As they begin to spend time together, she starts to question her life with the boys at home.

Although Araki broke onto the international film scene as a charter member of the Queer New Wave, he has never been a very good fit with that group of heavily aestheticized, coldly analytical historicists. Not only is he more interested in genre and far more romantic in vision, but he has easily been the most rigorously Godardian of any American indie director. So, of the many surprises *Splendor* has to offer, its debts to Truffaut and Sturges are probably the most intriguing. Whether this is an entirely new direction for Araki or just a happy detour, it is a palpable pleasure to witness the continuing evolution of this great American filmmaker.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Gregg Araki was born in Los Angeles. He received a BA in film studies, and did his MFA in film production at USC. Selected filmography: *Three Bewildered People in the Night* (87), *The Living End* (92), *The Doom Generation* (95), *Nowhere* (97) and *Splendor* (99).

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