



BIFF: The Collective

By J.B.

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A thriller that starts with a quotation from Reinhold Neibuhr deserves some kind of style points. In this case, it is a particularly apt quote: "Evil is not to be traced back to the individual but to the collective behavior of humanity," foreshadowing the sinister nature of the cult at the center of Judson Pearce Morgan and Kelly Overton's *The Collective*, and supplying its title. Screening at the Brooklyn International Film Festival, *The Collective* (trailer [here](#)) is a surprisingly effective thriller that really captures the feel of life in New York City.



Tyler Clarke has rushed to New York City to help her sister Jessica after receiving a disturbing late night phone call. A stranger to the City, Clarke finds her sister has quit her job and moved out of her apartment. Her only initial lead is the number of the cell phone her sister called from, which automatically goes to voice mail in a foreign language. Eventually, she meets some of Jessica's creepy new friends, who tell her Jessica is fine, but cannot see her right now, so please go home. For obvious reasons, she is not buying it.

Soon she discovers Jessica has fallen in with the Collective, a bizarre hipster cult based in a deconsecrated cathedral, inspired according to the filmmakers, by the notorious Limelight club. Informed by such City lore, *Collective* is a real New York film, with locations ranging from the immediately recognizable Times Square, to Chelsea, Gramercy Park, and Brooklyn. (Of course, it must have been happenstance that while shooting a film about an evil cult, the directors briefly caught some footage of the Scientology building.) While viewers will probably see at least one of the big plot twists coming down Park Avenue South, the film's great strength is capturing the sense of alienation felt when alone in New York—the menace beneath the bright lights.

Co-writer-co-producer-co-director Overton is also on-screen for at least ninety percent of the film as the responsible Clarke sister, and she carries the film well. Her Tyler is likable and believable, aside from occasionally not asking a few obvious questions. The supporting cast is also strong, particularly Laura Allen, as the Collective's ruthless Clare. Consisting of working New York actors largely known for television and theater work, the cast has been all over the *Law & Order* franchise. Overton also appeared in the Kathleen Turner production of *The Graduate* and Donnie Keshawarz, who was also appearing in Disney's *Tarzan* during filming, plays the evil cult master Rost.

While very New York savvy, *The Collective* says much about the importance of family during times of crisis, as well. The film is also notable for casting its villains as cafeteria New Agers, rather than fundamentalist Christians, making this a film that both evangelicals and downtown denizens could



probably enjoy. The HD cinematography actually looks great and it is briskly paced, but what really makes the film is its sense of the City. So far, it has been the surprise of the festival. It screens again at the Brooklyn Lyceum on Thursday. The co-producers also announced at the festival that they had reached a distribution deal, so those outside of New York may eventually have a chance to see it too.

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