

# Watching ‘Matty Christian’

## Follow Matty Christian as he learns to “navigate the world”



I wasn't expecting to like this film. The people involved I knew to be competent, consummate, creative professionals. But I don't like my heartstrings to be rigorously jerked. Maybe a little jerking, after a slow, gentle warm-up - but I've never responded well to films that go straight for tear-duct or coast on the natural human compassion that some predicaments inspire. When Sally Struthers used to bombard me with requests for my daily cup of coffee, I would turn off my compassion centers - perhaps in self-defense, perhaps because she was trying so very hard to trigger them.

So I was pretty surprised when, half an hour into this documentary, I found myself pleasantly engaged in the unusual story of a boy with almost no arms and legs, and the family that raised him. (The title works both literally and metaphorically).

The film is straightforward in its presentation, not really trying to wring hysterics or drama out of the story. We start with young Matty, and see him learn to navigate the world. As a baby. As a young man. In college. And as a young adult.

The pacing is solid, the people likable. The editing by filmmaker Christian DeRezendes (no relation) is comfortable and unobtrusive - perfect for a craft which, if you do it right, goes deliberately unnoticed by an audience too involved in the story to notice the technique. The film is also bolstered by an understated, sensitive score created by musician Eric Barao. Each is an established local professional who put years of effort on this project - and it shows.

The heart of it all, of course, is the young man at the center of the story. It's easy to wonder what he would have thought of all this. The film shys away from an in-depth look at drugs and alcohol in the lives of young people. But that's a good thing - we've had plenty of movies of the week about those topics. It does not try to idealize its main character, or flinch from how these factors were involved in his life. It's refreshingly matter-of-fact about this and other topics.

The film also manages to bring its story's humorous side to life. It's hard to describe what's funny about watching a young Matty Christian wrestle obstinately with a T-shirt that ends up wrapped around his

head, as he tries to finesse it into place with his dexterous but ultimately handless arms. It doesn't sound funny - but it brought the house down in a recent screening at the historic Columbus Theatre. The film finds similar moments in everything from his childhood exuberance to the many alcohol-related collegiate advantages wearing hollow legs can bring.

Overall, as someone who avoids tearjerkers and medical stories like the plague, I found this film extremely watchable, and full of scenes and moments that have really stuck with me.

Upcoming Screenings:

Real to Reel International Film Festival- July 12 at 7 PM

Woods Hole Film Festival- July 29, Tuesday at 7 PM