Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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More than anything, BEYOND THE BLACK RAINBOW (in theaters today from Magnet Releasing) makes me lament that the general population of U.S. moviegoers isn’t more adventurous. Not that BLACK RAINBOW is such an important, transcendent work, mind you (though it is often stunning and transportive), but it would be wonderful to see mass audiences subjected to a weird, sensory experience of this sort. It is, as parents would say, a trip.

The film’s introduction comes in the form of an introduction—a bit of ’80s cultish New Age mantra designed to help you expand your mind, relax and stay awhile. And it would behoove you to do so, as Panos Cosmatos’ debut feature doesn’t make any great haste in getting to the point—narratively, that is. The overall point is the sum of its influences: the future of the ’80s, neon, psychedelia, Jodorowsky, mind-bending sci-fi, etc.

There is a plot: journeys. That of scientist Barry Nyle (an intense, captivating Michael Rogers, without whom the film wouldn’t work) as he seemingly experiments on and grooms the telepathic Elena (Evan Allan) in a strange scientific lab. And that of Elena herself, as she quietly attempts to free herself from the confines in which she is kept. Along the way, BLACK RAINBOW is bursting with absolutely stellar, mind-blowing visuals. Its “trip” sequences are truly sights to behold, leaving viewers anchored to their seats, lost in the meditative, neon, supernatural spectacle.

Where the film stumbles is in not leaving said viewers with enough to meditate on. BLACK RAINBOW is often needlessly ambiguous, pushing its audience to paint a picture rather than connect the dots. A shame, since those who will embrace the movie would probably take care to ruminate if they were given just a hair more to work with. Still, BLACK RAINBOW is a delightful, bizarre, singular experience, and one very much worth welcoming in, opening up to and exiting with a transformed mindset—even if only for a few minutes afterward.