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MOVIE REVIEW: Crispin Glover Virtuoso in 'Little Noises'

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Crispin Glover, the star of Jane Spencer's "Little Noises" (Monica 4-Plex), is a virtuoso of verbal drags, hesitations and the strange half-spaces between dreams and double-talk. He's the most comically self-absorbed of actors, especially adept at portraying artistic poseurs, such as his talentless rich-kid "composer" in "Twister."

In "Little Noises," Glover has a part tailor-made for him and he's brilliant in it: a 30-year-old wannabe writer named Joey Kremple, who, to impress a woman, steals and passes off as his own the poetry of a local acquaintance. It's an ironic tragicomedy, and, as in Woody Allen's "Crimes and Misdemeanors," the tragic and comic parts are kept separate. The poetry conquers everyone, but the poet himself--the deaf boy Marty Slovack (played by hearing-impaired actor Matthew Hutton)--sinks into despair and homelessness. Kremple fills his spurious role of urbane New York author with little guilt, since the role and the life, not the work, was his primary goal.

Glover, in his cul-de-sac of self-delusion, is the center of "Little Noises." He's a halting, self-conscious, hilariously alienated center, a brain-sick ship on a dark and lonely sea. Whether wandering around dreamily with "Afternoon of a Faun" or "La Mer" on his Walkman, because he believes listening to Debussy all day will make him more artistic, or trying to swat out a novel at the rate of one letter a minute, he perfectly captures the desperation of an artistic fraud. Glover's Kremple can't write a lick, and he's incapable of expressing the stark, dark melancholy of a Marty Slovack, because the only longing inside him is to be taken for a writer.

Jane Spencer, "Little Noises" director and co-writer (with Jon Zeiderman), has a key perception: the relation between artistic acceptance and social class. The writer whom Kremple envies, Tate Donovan's Elliot Ardsley, is the son of a Hollywood producer; that's obviously how he got his "break." Slick, condescending, an Interview magazine pet, Ardsley is working on an all-purpose, socially conscious TV script, whose subject changes variously from the Vietnamese boat people to the homeless. (The real poor, or "losers," fill him with distaste.)

Spencer deftly catches the class-bred arrogance of both Ardsley and his hustling agent (Rik Mayall). She's also delightful with the two poseurs: Glover and Steven Schub's self-promoting dancer-mime-juggler. But she's less successful with the characters she likes: the women, like Tatum O'Neal's sturdy Stella, or the Slovack brothers, poet Marty and his protective drug dealer brother Stu (John McGinley).

Spencer doesn't get an intense poetic charge into her images, and though she keeps reaching for Fellini-esque effects, her staging is too obvious, her framing too bright and mundane. Still, despite

all its flaws, "Little Noises" (Times-rated Mature, for adult language and situations) is a promising debut film. It shows talent and feeling. And when Glover is on screen, he's able to waft the movie into realms of the psyche so humorously arcane, so loopy and lively, that they go far beyond cuteness or quirkiness. Glover's Krempel is Debussy's faun reincarnated as a nebbish, a nerd confusedly afloat in "La Mer," an artist without artistry in a world where art and love are always for sale.

'Little Noises'

Crispin Glover: Joey Krempel

Tatum O'Neal: Stella Winslow

Rik Mayall: Mathias Liechstenstein

Steven Schub: Timmy Smith

A Monument Pictures/Prism Entertainment presentation. Director Jane Spencer. Producers Michael Spielberg, Brad Spencer. Screenplay Jane Spencer, Jon Zeiderman. Cinematographer Makoto Watanabe. Editor Ernie Fritz. Costumes Taylor Cheek. Music Kurt Hoffman, Fritz Van Orden. Production design Charles Lagola. Art director Allison Cornyn. Set decorator Catie Dehaan. Running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes.

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