

WORLDVEST HOUSTON

Crime caper makes a grand *Graduation*

■ Likable cast, filmmaker's light touch make film worth seeing

By JOEY GUERRA
FOR THE CHRONICLE

Graduation takes one of the most pivotal days in teenage life — high school commencement — and adds to the madness with a cleverly planned bank robbery. Far-fetched, sure, but filmmaker Michael Mayer pulls it off with a light, likable touch and a photogenic, young cast.

The quartet of childhood friends at the film's center doesn't resort to a life of crime for quick cash or for a last high school hurrah. One's mother has cancer, and her insurance company won't pay for costly medical care.

It's an easy tug of the heart-strings, but what Mayer does from that jumpoff point makes the film work. Instead of making just another teen throwaway



WORLDVEST 2007

QUICK HEIST: Childhood friends — played by, from left, Chris Marquette, Riley Smith, Chris Lowell and Shannon Lucio — plan a bank robbery in *Graduation*.

flick, he's infused *Graduation* with nicely realized characters and action that rarely lags. The crime caper that makes up the final third of the film sparkles with energy.

Much of the success comes in the casting. Huey Lewis and Adam Arkin provide firm foot-

ing as father figures, but the new faces are the draw.

As Carl (whose mother is ill), Chris Marquette looks like a young John Cusack and shows similar stoic charm. Marquette's Carl is *Graduation*'s emotional heart, but he never takes the character into gooey senti-

mentality.

Riley Smith does a nice job as Chauncey, the devil's advocate who initiates the film's tension, and Chris Lowell (*Veronica Mars*) smolders appropriately as Jackson. Expect to see more of him melting hearts in the near future.

TUESDAY SCHEDULE

■ **5 p.m.:** *Kokoda* (drama, Australia)

■ **5 p.m.:** *Children of the Moon* (drama, Germany)

■ **7:15 p.m.:** *Francesco Guillare di Dio* (drama, Italy)

■ **7:15 p.m.:** *The Bicycle Thief* (drama, Italy)

■ **7:15 p.m.:** *Einstein's Greatest Mistake* (drama, Croatia)

■ **9:30 p.m.:** *Aurore* (drama, Canada)

■ **9:30 p.m.:** *Amour-Legende* (drama, Taiwan)

■ **9:30 p.m.:** *Side / Effects* (comedy, India)

WorldFest runs through April 29. Full schedule and tickets available at worldfest.org.

Shannon Lucio (*The O.C.*) also does well as Polly, the brains of the operation, who's dealing with her own family troubles.

Mayer is also a rising star, though admittedly behind the camera.

Graduation is a fine, focused initiation into his burgeoning talent.

GRADUATION

■ **When:** 5 p.m. Tuesday

■ **Where:** AMC Studio 30, 2949 Dunvale