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## It's a Disaster: LAFF Review

3:05 PM PDT 6/25/2012 by Sheri Linden

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"It's a Disaster"

### The Bottom Line

*Doomsday delight.*

### Venue

*Los Angeles Film Festival*

### Director-writer

*Todd Berger*

### Cast

*Julia Stiles, David Cross, America Ferrera, Erinn Hayes, Jeff Grace, Rachel Boston, Kevin M. Brennan*

Todd Berger's comedy starring Julia Stiles, David Cross and America Ferrera follows the story of four couples who discover they are stuck in a house as the world may be about to end.

As a movie topic, the end of the world has enjoyed an upsurge in popularity in recent years, from art-house meditations to popcorn extravaganzas. Writer-director **Todd Berger** brings a fresh stamp to Armageddon with his sharply scripted comedy *It's a Disaster*, which is anything but.

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### PHOTOS: LAFF 2012: Canon Celebrates Cinematographers and THR Hosts a Reception

[www.hollywoodreporter.com/gallery/laff-2012-canon-celebrates-cinematographers-338840](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/gallery/laff-2012-canon-celebrates-cinematographers-338840)

... whose engaging murder mystery mashup *The Scenesters* ... style over substance, finds the perfect balance between genre nods and originality in his second feature. A world premiere presentation of the Los Angeles Film Festival, *Disaster* is one of the funniest films of recent vintage. The low-budget ... ion looks good on the big screen, and in the hands of the ... tributor could realize its strong potential as a theatrical ... fueled by critical response and word of mouth.

... a winning ensemble, led by **Julia Stiles** and **David Cross**, ... portray a group of friends in an unidentified U.S. city. Thirtysomethings of average self-involvement, they take a considerable while to figure out that they're in the midst of a cataclysmic event. The scenario injects a new-millennial dose of

upscale casual into the dinner-party scenario that Buñuel used, to unforgettable absurdist effect, in *Exterminating Angel* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. Friends gather for a Sunday brunch in one couple's house, and before long they're trapped there, to face the ultimate big picture.

The cast are paired off into various phases of coupledness, with Stiles' Tracy, a doctor, bringing promising third-date teacher Glen (Cross) to meet her friends. Hosts Emma (**Erinn Hayes**) and Pete (**Blaise Miller**) are facing trouble in their eight-year marriage, while up-for-anything sensualists Lexi (**Rachel Boston**) and Buck (**Kevin M. Brennan**) go with the flow, whatever it may be. Long-engaged Hedy (**America Ferrera**) and Shane (**Jeff Grace**, imbuing the role with Gene Wilder-esque neurosis) are at a crossroads, his deepest connection seeming to be with his smartphone, and the pop-culture artifacts it places just a bid away.

Shane's inability to get a signal is the first sign of trouble, beyond the immediate circle of familiar peccadilloes and annoyances. Still, the wail of sirens goes unnoticed over chitchat and squabbling. But when the malfunctioning of electronic devices spreads to cable and landline (the requisite landline jokes are well handled) and then to electricity, the inconvenience factor reaches a new level of urgency. About a third of the way in, Berger cameos as the neighbor who provides essential information on the calamity-in-progress. The movie's tone then clicks into a darker, and more deeply hilarious, tone, beginning with Tracy's merciless etiquette lesson to a couple of brunch latecomers.

Berger and his cast navigate the shift with confidence and finely drawn portrayals — the exception being Ferrara, who plays Hedy's freakout too broadly. The script excels at character-driven laughs, cerebral yet goofy, without resorting to sitcom stereotypes or genitalia-focused stupidity. Reactions to the partially explained toxic disaster range from oblivious to primed for the breakdown of civil society. But through it all the characters talk like real people, even — or especially — as they self-consciously channel disaster-movie clichés.

The bright and cheery production design is a fine counterpoint to the story's pivotal cloud of doom. **The movie makes the most of its single location, thanks to the fluent camerawork of accomplished cinematographer Nancy Schreiber.** Musical selections, from **Beethoven's** Moonlight Sonata to a glockenspiel-centric version of "House of the Rising Sun," are the perfect accompaniment to the characters' doomsday dilemma.

*Venue: Los Angeles Film Festival*

*A Vacationeer Prods. presentation*

*in association with Cactus Three, Gordon Bijelonic/Datari Turner Films and Tip-Top Prods.*

*Cast: Julia Stiles, David Cross, America Ferrera, Erinn Hayes, Jeff Grace, Rachel Boston, Kevin M. Brennan, Blaise Miller, Todd Berger, Laura Adkin, Rob McGillivray*

*Director-writer: Todd Berger*

*Producers: Kevin M. Brennan, Jeff Grace, Gordon Bijelonic, Datari Turner*

*Executive producers: Brett D. Thompson, Eric Sherman, Robert P. Gosling, Krysanne Katsoolis, Mark Korshak, Alison Lee, John Margetis, Rob McGillivray, Caroline Stevens*

*Director of photography: Nancy Schreiber*

*Production designer: Peter K. Benson*

*Co-producer: Matthew Kovner*

*Co-executive producer: Thoma Kikis*

*Costume designer: Karen Mann*

*Editor: Franklin Peterson*

*No MPAA rating, 88 minutes.*

## PHOTO GALLERY

