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Review | Leo's Room (El cuarto de Leo) (unrated)

Leo's slow awakening feels utterly fresh.



Leo's Room

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BY RENE RODRIGUEZ
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The scenario may sound familiar, but there's a lot more to *Leo's Room* (El cuarto de Leo) than just another angst-filled tale of a young gay man's process of self acceptance. In his filmmaking debut, Uruguayan writer-director Enrique Buchichio demonstrates a flair for crafting fully realized, memorable characters and complex emotional situations that operate on multiple levels. The characters in *Leo's Room* often surprise you, the way real people do.

As the movie opens, the 20-something Leo (Martin Rodriguez) is having girlfriend trouble. Everything in their relationship is swell except sex, in which Leo seems to have little interest. Like, zero. After his girlfriend's patience runs out, and she dumps him, Leo, hoping for a cure, goes to a psychiatrist (Arturo Goetz).

Except that Leo knows exactly what's going on: He just can't bring himself to admit it. Inside the room he rents from a pothead slacker (Rafael Soliwoda) who rarely leaves his couch, Leo surfs Internet chat rooms in which gay men troll for sex. At first he is so nervous he can barely type a few words before logging off. Gradually, though, he grows bolder and eventually sets up meetings with men he intends to bring back home.

The first hook-up doesn't go well. But the second -- an easygoing young man named Seba (Gerardo Begerez) -- is a perfect physical and emotional match. Seba is even willing to put up with Leo's furtiveness about the whole gay thing, although everyone has pretty much figured it out.

There's a subplot involving Leo's chance encounter with Caro, a former schoolmate and now a sullen, depressed young woman. Leo pursues a platonic relationship with her even while things with Seba continue to heat up, deluding himself into thinking he can have the best of both worlds.

Leo's Room is filled with wonderful little touches and character beats: the surprising observations of the drug-addled couch potato who turns out to be a lot sharper than he appears; the casual way in which Leo's mother lets him know she knows he's gay and that it's OK; the knowing, compassionate smile Seba gives Leo as he watches him try frantically to come up with a lie to hide his homosexuality from Caro. You've seen all these elements done before, but the modest, sharp *Leo's Room* feels utterly fresh.

Cast: Martin Rodriguez, Cecilia Cosero, Gerardo Begerez, Arturo Goetz, Rafael Soliwoda, Mirella Pascual.

Writer-director: Enrique Buchichio.

Producer: Natacha Lopez.

Running time: 92 minutes. Vulgar language, sexual situations, adult themes. In Spanish with English subtitles. Plays at 9:15 p.m. Monday and 9:30 p.m. Tuesday at Regal South Beach.



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