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Oldman, and proves to be a surprisingly good sport during elliptic sword fight with Chan. Christian Biddle's widescreen lens is strikingly handsome, while art tech credits—including Allan Cameron's evocative production design—also contribute to slickly impressive package.

BERLIN & BEYOND

JEANS

(GERMANY)

X Verleih presentation of an Excel production in association with Arri Das Werk, Cine Plus and Standard. Produced by Nicolette Krebitz. Executive producer, Krebitz. Directed by Nicolette Krebitz. Screen-improvised by cast. Camera (B&W HD-to-35mm), Bela Halben; editor, Schilde; original music, Petesch, Meis-Shapemod; sound, Martin Steyer; art, Conny Kotte; assistant director, Wolk. Reviewed at Berlin & Beyond Fest, San Francisco, Jan. 11, 2003. Running time: 83 MIN. Cast: Oskar Melzer, Marc Hosemann, Ojejec, Nicolette Krebitz, Jana Palz, Mavie Horbiger, Katja Weilandt, Jo Furrmann, Jasmin Tabatabai, Sonja Sena, Maren Marley, Tatjana Borizki, Boss, Rainald Goetz.

By DENNIS HARVEY

ny actor who "really wants to direct" should have to first answer, "Why?" Popular man thesp Nicolette Krebitz's directorial debut, "Jeans," starts out intriguingly offbeat, then rapidly becomes exasperating as one realizes there's not much here whatsoever—unless it counts empty hipster attitude, showoff stylistic japes or alighting numerous fellow actors to improvise scenes that wouldn't pass muster in improvisation 101. It might stir some curiosity on the turf, but this is a vanity production that flatters no one. Long, wordless B&W opener plays some portentous mystery as

BERLIN & BEYOND IN BRIEF

WESTEND

(GERMANY – B&W)

A Kai Kuennemann Filmproduktion production. Produced by Kai Kuennemann.

Directed by Markus Mischkowski, Kai Maria Steinkuehler. Screenplay, Mischkowski. Camera (B&W, Super 16mm-to-35mm), Klaus Peter Schmidt; editor, Christine Deriaz; music, Haifaboy; production designers, Anja Kuehnle, Ildiko Mohos. Reviewed at Berlin & Beyond Festival, San Francisco, Jan. 15, 2003. Running time: 89 MIN.

With: Markus Mischkowski, Kai Maria Steinkuehler, Jens Claussen, Katharina Schaltz, Ralf Richter, Katy Karrenbauer.

A likably shaggy comedy very much in the laconic Jim Jarmusch mode (complete with minimalist B&W lensing), "Westend" reps a promising feature debut for creative duo Markus Mischkowski and Kai Maria Steinkuehler. A bit slight to tempt offshore theatrical distrib, it could score some vid and TV sales in hipster-courting markets.

Mates Mike (Mischkowski) and Alfred (Steinkuehler) are listlessly unemployed and very much not in demand. Dangerously close to being out of beer money, they accept an iffy offer from acquaintance Rasto (Jens Claussen), a smooth-talking hustler whose oft-spoken mantra "Money is no object!" proves a very poor business plan indeed. The clueless duo rehabilitate a shack in the middle of nowhere for use as a roadside snack bar; and once Rasto has the idea of illegally diverting traffic to their door, cash does begin to flow. But Rasto has fecklessly gotten deep in debt with some thugs, while Alfred begins to resent being the only "delivery boy" under newly promoted "staff manager" Mike. Poker-faced perfs and deadpan humor can't entirely sustain Mischkowski's slender screenplay, but nice-looking pic is still a diverting throwaway. —Dennis Harvey

days, the evening's play time and rest again. There are occasional glibly ironic contrasts, but mostly "Symphony" observes neutrally, arriving at a mix equal parts urban travelogue and "Koyaanisqatsi"-type commentary. Its playful, tender and simply beautiful moments, however, are underscored by Helmut Oehring and Risto Schiphorst's original score—a rather old-school piece of dissonant and cacophonous symphonic modernism that too often suggests sarcasm or accusation.—Dennis Harvey

CRAZY ABOUT PARIS

(GERMANY)

A Geisberg Studios production in association with Radio Bremen, NDR and ARTE. Produced by Elke Besuden.

Directed, written by Pogo Balke, Elke Besuden. Camera (color), Piotr Lenar; editor, Margot Neubert-Maric music, Karsten Gundermann; production designer, Heike Lauer. Reviewed at Berlin & Beyond Festival, San Francisco, Jan. 11, 2003. Original title: *Versucht nach Paris*. Running time: 90 MIN.

With: Wolfgang Goetsch, Frank Grabski, Corinna Harfouch, Dominique Horwitz, Paula Kleine, Martin Leutge, Marion Mitterhammer, Doris Kunstmann.

An "experimental" idea that turns out quite conventional—and quite charming—in execution, "Crazy About Paris" stars mentally and physically handicapped thesp as runaway denizens of a German group home. After routinely handled start, pic grows sweet and enjoyable, pegging it as a likely fest-aud favorite in coming months. Select tube sales rep the best path to offshore exposure for this uncondescending, upbeat—if somewhat contrived—view of the disabled as very able beings indeed.

Motherly Hilde (Paula Kleine), her limbless—save one dexterous leg—"baby," Philip (Frank Grabski), and infectioniously horse-laughing Karl (Wolfgang Goetsch) have lived for years in a Bremen institution. But they've grown tired of longtime staff flunky Enno's (Dominique Horwitz) cynical condescension, deciding one day to bolt. Held responsible by a friend