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## Here and There

**A quietly devastating exploration of the cruel paradox that, in order to feed their loved ones, emigrants have to leave them behind.**

By JONATHAN HOLLAND

**A migrant worker returns to his native Mexico from the U.S. in "Here and There," a quietly devastating exploration of the cruel paradox that, in order to feed their loved ones, emigrants have to leave them behind. Combining moments of lyricism with a documentary-like feel for truth, Antonio Mendez Esparza's debut feature is far from hard-hitting, aestheticizing its tale with artful ellipses and juxtapositions. But its delicate portrayal of the emotional effects of immigration nonetheless amounts to a punchy social critique. Pic's canny blend of artistry and politics should win it fest admirers.**

By Jonathan Holland

Pedro (Pedro de los Santos) returns home to his mountain village in the Mexican province of Guerrero after years of working odd jobs in the U.S., the "there" of the title that is never actually shown. Pedro wants to reclaim his place in society, but things have changed. He's welcomed back by his stoical wife, Teresa (Teresa Ramirez Aguirre), old beyond her 30 years, who is convinced he's had affairs and is thus initially reluctant to sleep with him. Then there are his daughters Heidi (Heidi Laura Solano Espinoza) and Lorena (Lorena Guadalupe Pantaleon Vazquez), whose moody rebelliousness is a result of her father's absence.

Pursuing his own version of the American Dream, Pedro forms a band, the Copa Kings; the only real happiness the family feels is when he's strumming his guitar for them. But things start to go wrong, and Pedro's dream of being a musician founders. The newly pregnant Teresa falls ill, and the ensuing medical issues force Pedro to take on manual labor in Mexico. In a sad parallel to Pedro's backstory, school dropout Nestor (Nestor Tepetate Medina) dreams of becoming a break-dancer and escaping to America.

As the downtrodden Pedro, de los Santos is superbly impassive. His perf suggests that experience has drained his capacity for spontaneous joy, and that the slow collapse of his world is pretty much what he expected, anyway.

The script is beautifully observant of the stresses immigration places on family and self. But in some scenes, the use of non-pros ironically results in a less-than-authentic feel to some of the dialogue, especially as delivered by a couple of the minor characters.

Camera movement is mostly limited to observing the people as they converse, their lengthy silences suggesting their inability to make full sense of the distant forces governing their lives. Interiors are often beautifully framed and richly colored in a stylistic nod to Carlos Reygadas, of

whom Esparza is clearly a fan. The beauty of the mountain region in which the characters live is beautifully rendered by d.p. Barbu Balasoiu, as is the contrasting chaos on the streets of the nearby town of Tlapa.

Song lyrics are partly composed by de los Santos, and supply an ironical running commentary.

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