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(SPAIN)

A DeAPlaneta release of an A+, Lateco, DeAPlaneta production. (International sales: DeAPlaneta, Madrid.) Executive producers, Esperanza Ribera, Adolfo Blanco.

Directed, written by Xavier Ribera Perpina. Camera (color, DV-to-35mm), Julio Ribeyro; editor, Ribera Perpina, Patrick Bosset; music, Javier Navines, Jordi Grau, Andreas Frey; art director, Albert Martí (Sets Magnifics); sound (Dolby Digital), Agost Alustiza, Pau Tolosa. Reviewed at Cines Acteon, Madrid, May 28, 2004. Running time: **99 MIN.**

With: Eloy Azorin, Elvira Herreria, Jose Coronado, Misia, Ricardo Moya, Fernando Ramallo, Eloi Yebra, Carlos Fuentes, Najwa Nimri.

By JONATHAN HOLLAND

A distinctive, willfully edgy low-budgeter, with three interlocking narratives centered on journeys to a pop-music fest, "A+" gets top marks for style but B- for substance. Eye-catching sophomore outing by writer-director Xavier Ribera Perpina is pulled together by its determination to experiment with visuals and by sterling performances from its vigorous young cast. Fest sidebars with an eye on the unorthodox are a possibility.

Maladjusted adolescent Luna (debutante Misia) never speaks to anyone, least of all her father (Ricardo Moya). Preferring technology to people, she carries her laptop and DV recorder around, keeping a video diary with a self-regarding voiceover. Dad tries to improve their relationship by taking her to the music fest to meet people, but she drifts around aimlessly. This is pic's least controlled story, as few of Luna's reflections ("I'd like to be an angel") have any value.

In the busier second tale, Ace (Eloy Azorin) and g.f. Mar (photogenic newbie Elvira Herreria, a face to watch) get involved in a drug deal that goes badly after they're betrayed by Dam (Najwa Nimri). Pursued by the henchmen of Leo (Jose Coronado), they try to sell the stash they've been left with. Shot with a sense of urgency which neatly reflects the characters' increasing desperation, some sequences are beautifully edited and paced, with the grainy, handheld DV footage in perfect accord with the mood.

Over-earnest tone of pic so far is counterbalanced by the comic third story, about the doomed attempts of Pau (Fernando Ramallo) and Gus (Eloi Yebra) to get a ride to the music fest in the sidecar of the brutish Ton (an energetic Carlos Fuentes, delivering a career-best perf). In this sometimes-hilarious seg, script comes closest to delivering characters with some complexity.

Pic is heavy with digital manipulation, particularly in the Luna sections, as helmer's advertising video background shows through.

Music, which never lets up, dictates much of the mood, ranging from ethereal house music to '80s rock. For reasons best known to the director, the title credits appear 25 minutes into the film, briefly destroying the illusion he has worked so hard to create.