



## Montana landscape gorgeous in Made in Montana movie

By **BRENT NORTHUP**, Film Review | Posted: Thursday, May 13, 2010 12:00 am

“A Fork in the Road” is an enjoyable but formulaic action comedy, but the Montana scenery was gorgeous.

That’s the short verdict on this breezy Made in Montana movie that premiered at the Myrna Loy last Thursday. “Fork” has already been released on DVD. A theatrical run is possible, but unlikely, say the filmmakers.

The VIP showing at

6 p.m. was followed by a free public showing at 8:15 p.m. More than 130 people scooped up free tickets for the free screening.

Gov. Brian Schweitzer introduced the film, which had been encouraged and supported by the Montana Film Office.

Writer/director Jim Kouf then thanked everyone for the opportunity to make a film here.

“It was a pleasure to work in Montana,” he said. “We plan to do more, if we can. Even if you don’t like the story, we know you’ll like the scenery.”

“Fork in the Road” was directed by Jim Kouf, a major Hollywood writer/director (“Rush Hour,” “National Treasure”) who owns a ranch in Darby. Kouf’s cousin, Bart Bartkowski, served as executive producer. Lynn Bigelow, who is married to Jim, also served as a producer. Al DiFiore was a co-writer.

All four — Jim, Lynn, Bart and Al — were present at the Myrna Thursday to say hello and thank you to the appreciative local audience.

The film was shot entirely in Montana, primarily in Bozeman, Laurel and Paradise Valley.

Produced for \$1.4 million, “A Fork in the Road” looks like a mature Hollywood production. Kouf and cinematographer Claudio Rocha stretched their tiny budget so that the production looks big, effectively camouflaging its small cost. Dennis Virkler, a twice-Oscar-nominated editor, cut the film for the screen.

The Yellowstone River and the mountains near Paradise Valley are attractive co-stars.

The story finds a convict escaping from custody and setting off on foot to hide in Paradise Valley. He teams up with a lady who just might have killed somebody, and the two of them try to keep one step ahead of the cops.

The story is played for broad laughs, more than for drama. A two-timing husband and a sleazy businessman provide many chuckles — as does the odd-couple relationship between Will and April.

Jaime King delivers a memorable performance as April, an unhappy wife with an abusive husband. King provides the pathos that keeps us caring about the tale.

Josh Cooke plays Will mostly for light laughs, looking bewildered by his fate most of the time. King, in contrast, shows a wider range of emotion.

Kouf has said, “They don’t make films like this anymore” and, for the most part, he’s right. This is a very basic action comedy, which is simple, clean and funny. It’s designed to entertain a general audience without special effects, bad language or bedroom romps.

The only semi “racy” scene finds April in underwear that’s less revealing than most bikinis.

The crowd enjoyed the show and applauded when the credits mentioned the Montana links to the production. Clearly people were present to celebrate a movie being made in the state as much as to enjoy the show.

The script would have profited from fewer laughs and slightly less familiar villains. The Will/April romance doesn't quite have enough depth. We just don't get to know either character as deeply as we might have.

But the biggest missing ingredient in this Made in Montana movie was a rooted-in-Montana story. The story was somewhat generic — two people on the run.

I hope that Kouf considers adapting stories about Montana's rich heritage.

Perhaps he could bring works by Wallace Stegner, Norman Maclean, Ivan Doig or James Welch to the screen. There have been some such movies about our heritage, "A River Runs Through It," comes to mind, but there are more great books about Montana than great movies about Montana.

We'd all love to see Kouf close that gap.

Rural Montana — the ranches, the mines, the farms, the small towns, the reservations — all provide fertile ground for authentic tales of life in Montana.

Thursday night was a joyful night for all involved.

Helena National Guard officer Capt. Tony Lecce was there to see the show — because he was cast in the role of a highway patrolman in the film. His family accompanied him to the show. His young son was clearly very proud of dad.

"That was fun," said the boy. "And I found a quarter!"

Yes, it was fun. The Helena and Montana community all thanks Jim and Bart for the movie and for the premiere.

And we hope to see you again.