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FILM REVIEW / Greetings From the Shore is familiar but amusing

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For The Chronicle

If you simply can't wait until summer for a beachside holiday, you might enjoy spending a couple of hours with "Greetings From the Shore," an undemandingly pleasant coming-of-age comedy-drama that will be presented today at the 2008 WorldFest/Houston International Film Festival.

According to the film's production notes, Gabrielle Berberich - who co-wrote the script with director Greg Chwerchak, a former Rice University student - drew heavily from her own experiences while spinning a familiar scenario about a resourceful young woman who spends her last summer before college working at a swanky yacht club on the New Jersey shore. Whatever its real-life roots, however, Greetings From the Shore plays like standard-issue Hollywood fiction: Bits and pieces of the movie seem inspired by, if not recycled from, several previous movies covering similar ground.

Still, there's no denying the appeal of newcomer Kim Shaw as Jenny Chambers, the agreeably plucky college-bound lass who's bummed out by a recent tragedy - her father died a few months before the movie begins - but determined to fulfill dad's dream of her attending the expensive college where he could never afford to finish his studies.

Unfortunately, Jenny fears she won't be able to afford the tuition, either. Which is why, while she waits for word from the financial-aid office, she waits tables at the yacht club. She's also kept busy as an English tutor for busboys and waiters - most of them Russians and Eastern Europeans - whose legal status appears to be, at best, questionable.

It takes Jenny awhile to figure out that Commodore Callaghan (Jay O. Sanders), the sleazily cocky manager of the yacht club, is involved with a scam involving desperate workers and expensive work permits. But it doesn't take long at all for her to fall for one of her "students," a hunky Cuban (David Fumero) who isn't fooling anyone, not even Jenny, with the alias Patrick O'Malley.

Greetings From the Shore is seriously lacking in originality. And yet, somehow, it manages to be, almost in spite of itself, modestly amusing and genuinely engaging. That may be a tribute to the well-cast actors. But it also may say something about the irresistible appeal of movies about summertime romances.

Even the not-so-hot ones can warm your heart if you let your guard down.

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GREETINGS FROM THE SHORE

Running time: 118 minutes

2 1/2 stars

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