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## 'Daze': Something's Mything

By Stephen Hunter

To judge from the many movies on the theme, no date is more fabled than the last day of high school. It's been featured as recently as in last year's great raunch fest "Superbad" and goes back at least as far as George Lucas's mythic "American Graffiti" of 1981.

*"Remember the Daze,"* written and directed by Alexandria native Jess Manafort, recalls the same evening, possibly in her own life, as the story is set in 1999, when she was 17.

Her film has some virtues: great performances by an able if largely unknown cast, enormous energy and, above all, a persuasive sense of teen reality.

It's nowhere near as funny as "Superbad" and nowhere near as mythic as "American Graffiti," but it has its own sense of conviction as it swirls, Balzac-like, through a prosperous middle-class suburban high school. It is populated with characters who may seem familiar: an elite class of jocks and beauties who stomp and swagger like the princes and princesses they are, hangers-on trying desperately to fit in, an isolated artist, a fat loser popular only because he has a marijuana source, a couple of secret gay lovers, parents to be bullied and assistant principals to be avoided. It hits all the stations of the cross: the easy hookups and breakups, the casual physical intimacy, the hormones raging like the bulls on the streets of Pamplona, the occasional fight, the occasional rampage, but in the end an affirmation of the fact that life goes on and everything always blows over.

On the negative side, one feels Manafort clinging too closely to formula without ever quite transcending it. She gives us way too many young blond actresses to tell apart, and often opts for the sentimental, especially as conveyed in a sugary soundtrack and opening and closing shots of -- gack! -- butterflies bursting skyward.