

# Exotica Explored

**T**he last few years have been exhilarating but rough on Armenian director **Atom Egoyan**, who is the subject of a career retrospective at the American Museum of the Moving Image March 11–19 and whose new movie, *Exotica*, opens this week. Back in 1991, he was poised to reach a wider audience with the darkly humorous film *The Adjuster* when its distributor—Orion Classics—suffered financial woes. “It was so depressing,” Egoyan, 34, recalls. “I was talking to one journalist in the Orion offices. They had these glass walls, and as I was



looking at this journalist, behind her I could see movers taking out the office furniture. She asked me a question and I almost wanted to cry.” Battle-scarred but ready for more, Egoyan—who lives and works in Canada—plunged into *Calendar*, an improvised piece shot in Armenia for less than \$80,000. “It was a very foolhardy decision,” he admits, “because the country was in the midst of war.” The result was some of the best reviews he’s received yet—and perhaps the smallest audience. Undaunted, he’s returned with *Exotica*, about a fantastical club (above) where lap dancers perform their routines with languid disinterest. The story centers on the club’s pregnant owner; her top dancer, who specializes in a schoolgirl routine; and a regular customer who uses that act as a form of therapy to deal with the murder of his daughter years ago. “It’s really interesting to work with dread and titillation,” he says amiably.

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