

**S**low and steady, and with remarkable assuredness, Keith Miller's "Five Star" plays mean-streets drama in the lowest of keys. Relying on neither raised voices nor cocked weapons — although both appear sparingly — this documentary-fiction hybrid observes gang culture with a calm eye and a clear head.

Both attributes belong to Primo (James Grant, playing a dramatized version of himself), a so-called five-star general whose Brooklyn fief straddles gang boundaries. Bald and bearded, solid and solemn, Mr. Grant is a natural performer whose mournful gravitas grounds the ghost of a plot. His opening monologue, in which Primo laments the prison term that kept him from witnessing the birth of his son, has a quiet intensity that no amount of acting tuition could improve.

While raising four rambunctious children and

working as a bouncer in a neighborhood bar, Primo takes John (John Diaz), a nervy teenager, under his tattooed wing. Before taking a bullet to the head, John's father had been Primo's highly respected mentor, and now John wants an introduction to the drug business that's humming softly in the film's background.

"I did not raise you to be a player," John's watchful mother (Wanda Nobles Colon) admonishes, advising fidelity to his sweetheart (Jasmin Burgos) and his minimum-wage job. But mothers are not the point here: "Five Star" is about being a father and mourning the absence of one. Mixing professional and nonprofessional actors with naturalistic street sounds, Mr. Miller draws less on hard-guy hierarchies than on the softness that threatens their power. In this volatile place, the past has a long reach, and the future defies contemplation.

Indiewire

**"Like John Cassavetes directing an episode of 'The Wire'..."**

— Eric Kohn

# FIVE STAR



The New York Times  
**Ⓞ Critic's Pick**



NOT RATED

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