

Film Review: ‘The Art of Getting By’ Explores a Teenage Wasteland

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 19, 2011 - 11:55am

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CHICAGO – The angst ridden, doom-and-gloom adolescent has been fodder for the movies ever since teenagers were invented. From James Dean to “Heathers,” the juvenile anti-hero trying to figure out life has lit up the screen. Freddie Highmore takes his turn in “The Art of Getting By.”



This is Holden Caulfield (“Catcher in the Rye”) territory, because the setting is New York City among the upper middle class, private school types. While the character of George Zinavoy (Highmore) can never reach the rarified fatalism of Mr. Caulfield, his questioning of existence does have a mordant perversion. And although the film makes some bad “happy ending” decisions, for the most part it exposes the subject matter in an interesting manner.

George Zinavoy is in his senior year at a college prep New York City academy. He barely can tolerate school, and sits in his classes moodily drawing unique images in a sketchbook. For some reason the school tolerates this, and George even has an ally in Principal Martinson (Blair Underwood). George’s rejection of conventional wisdom seeps into his family life, where his stepfather Jack (Sam Robards) is constantly prodding him to do better, and his mother Vivian (Rita Wilson) can’t seem to get through to him.

Life for George takes an unexpected turn when Sally (Emma Roberts), one of his classmates, takes an interest in his dark creationism. They become friends, but George’s natural hormonal instinct wants more. Around the same time George meets a Brooklyn artist named Dustin (Michael Angarano), who takes an interest in both mentoring the George’s art and perhaps hooking up with Sally. That situation will eventually create a conflict

There are a number of events that starts George on a downhill road. He and Sally need to part because their relationship doesn’t go further, his kinship with the school principal goes into crisis mode and his family life contains a secret that will eventually change everything. This is all about transition, including George’s awkward and instinctive boy-to-man progression.

“The Art of Getting By” had a limited release, including Chicago, on June 17th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Freddie Highmore, Emma Roberts, Sasha Spielberg, Blair Underwood, Alicia Silverstone, Michael Angarano, Sam Robards and Rita Wilson. Written and directed by Gavin Wiesen. Rated “PG-13”

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Finding Common Ground: George (Freddie Highmore), and Sally (Emma Roberts) in ‘The Art of Getting By’
Photo credit: © 2011 Twentieth Century Fox Films

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