

## Film Review: Josh Radnor's 'Liberal Arts' Takes Uncommonly Thoughtful Look at Growing Up

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on September 21, 2012 - 9:06am

- [Allison Janney](#) [2]
- [Elizabeth Olsen](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [IFC Films](#) [5]
- [Josh Radnor](#) [6]
- [Liberal Arts](#) [7]
- [Matt Fagerholm](#) [8]
- [Movie Review](#) [9]
- [Richard Jenkins](#) [10]
- [Zac Efron](#) [11]

CHICAGO – Josh Radnor may be one of the most good natured humanists in modern American film. His perspective contrasts sharply with that of comedic auteurs intent on depicting a cynical view of the modern world clouded with nostalgia. Radnor may not yet be up to par with the filmmakers that have inspired him, namely Woody Allen, but his sophomore directorial effort, "Liberal Arts," is practically bursting with promise.



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

Unlike Radnor's first film, the annoyingly titled, "Happythankyoumoreplease," "Liberal Arts" is neither laugh-out-loud funny nor preciously contrived. For its first third, the film is so low-key that some might deem it rather benign. Much of the witty banter falls flat and Radnor himself lacks much screen presence or comic charisma. But at around the half-hour mark, the film starts to come to life at the precise moment that Radnor's character, a jaded 35-year-old New Yorker, gets swept up in the sort of infectious exhilaration that can only be found on a college campus.



[Read Matt Fagerholm's full review of "Liberal Arts" in our reviews section.](#) [12]

It's fitting that "Liberal Arts" would open in Chicago on the same day as Todd Louiso's "Hello I Must Be Going," another fine comedic drama centering on the romance between a newly single 35-year-old and an uncommonly wise 19-year-old. While Louiso's film unfolds as one would expect, Radnor refreshingly subverts the formula in a way that is no less thoughtful or nuanced. Radnor plays Jesse, an unhappily grown man whose visit to his old alma mater, Kenyon College, resurrects his youthful excitement. He's there to celebrate the retirement of his beloved professor, Peter (Richard Jenkins), who finds it unexpectedly difficult to let go of the position he'd held on to for so many years. Suddenly, a ray of the sunshine in the form of a quick-witted sophomore, Zibby (Elizabeth Olsen), brightens Jesse's world. Zibby has grown impatient with the guys her age and takes an instant liking to the handsome yet sensitive bachelor. Since both would-be lovers consider themselves old-fashioned, they continue their correspondence via mail—not e-mail, but actual written letters. And it's here where Radnor's film began to work its magic on me. There's a wonderful sequence in which the two friends connect over classical music, as Jesse suddenly finds his perception of the world altered and enhanced by the melodic genius of Mozart and Vivaldi. The scene also serves as a poignant metaphor for the impact that an exceptionally good college course can have on the mind and spirit—it can reawaken one's awe of existence.

*'Liberal Arts' stars Josh Radnor, Elizabeth Olsen, Richard Jenkins, John Magaro, Allison Janney, Elizabeth Reaser and Zac Efron. It was written and directed by Josh Radnor. It was released September 21st at the Landmark Century Centre Cinema. It is rated R.*



[Continue reading for Matt Fagerholm's full "Liberal Arts" review.](#) [12]



Elizabeth Olsen and Josh Radnor star in Radnor's Liberal Arts.  
*Photo credit: Kevin Moss. An IFC Films Release.*

**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 19 2024 - 10:00pm):**

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/20016/film-review-josh-radnor-s-liberal-arts-takes-uncommonly-thoughtful-look-at-growing-up>

**Links:**

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/mattmovieman>
- [2] [http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/allison\\_janney.html](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/allison_janney.html)
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/elizabeth-olsen>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/ifc-films>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/josh-radnor>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/liberal-arts>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/matt-fagerholm>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/movie-review>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/richard-jenkins>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/zac-efron>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/20015/josh-radnor-s-liberal-arts-takes-uncommonly-thoughtful-look-at-growing-up>