

Film Review: John Hawkes' Honest Work Just Saves 'The Sessions'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 26, 2012 - 9:09am

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CHICAGO – Sometimes an actor can deliver on so many levels at once that it makes flaws of a film easier to overlook. I'll admit that while watching "The Sessions," I was so caught up in the honest, true performance from the great John Hawkes that I didn't consider many of the film's dramatic failings until I began to consider my review. Hawkes' work here is that good that it carries one away on a wave of emotion that dismisses critical thought. The film around him could have been better but you're unlikely to realize that while you're watching it.



Rating: **3.0/5.0**

"The Sessions" is the story of Mark O'Brien, a man with such debilitating physical handicaps that he is forced to spend a majority of his life in an iron lung. By most accounts, Mark seems to have overcome his physical issues in remarkable ways when it comes to important things like friendship, intellectual stimulation, and personal engagement. He has not, however, felt the sexual touch of another person. Naturally, this is something he'd like to do before he dies. How can one really claim to have lived a full life without knowing the intimate embrace of another?



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Enter Cheryl (Helen Hunt), a sexual therapist who agrees, after much hesitation on her part, to engage Mark as a client. After getting the blessing of a thoughtful priest named Father Brendan (William H. Macy) and with the help of a supportive assistant named Vera (Moon Bloodgood), Mark and Cheryl begin to undergo "The Sessions." The best of these physically revealing scenes have an honest intimacy that strikes one in the way that they feel they're intruding on something deeply personal; something we "shouldn't be watching." The ensemble is interestingly filled out with a unique cast that includes Adam Arkin, Rhea Perlman, W. Earl Brown, and Robin Weigert ("Deadwood" fans will like seeing three stars of their fave show in one movie.)

The great John Hawkes (Oscar-nominated for "Winter's Bone" and shoulda-been-Oscar-nominated for "Martha Marcy May Marlene") is spectacular here, very likely earning himself another Academy Award nod. He finds such a delicacy about Mark, a man who had to have been remarkably strong just to overcome the doctor's warnings that he would never survive as long as had but was also understandably fragile on an emotional level. I found Hawkes' decisions to play many of his scenes with Cheryl with a heavy and believable dose of outright fear to be so right. There's an organic honesty to Hawkes' work here that's heartbreaking and inspiring. He alone makes it worth seeing.



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"The Sessions" stars John Hawkes, Helen Hunt, William H. Macy, Moon Bloodgood, Annika Marks, Adam Arkin, Rhea Perlman, W. Earl Brown, and Robin Weigert. It was written and directed by Ben Lewin. It opens in Chicago on October 26, 2012.



The Sessions

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