

Wes Anderson's 'Moonrise Kingdom' Delights with Clever Tale of Young Love

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 31, 2012 - 9:22am

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Wes Anderson's "Moonrise Kingdom" is a true delight — a fun, clever, and, of course, whimsical tale about the days when love seemed worth running away from home over and getting a scout badge meant the world. Easily Anderson's best film since "The Royal Tenenbaums," "Moonrise" is arguably the most tonally consistent film he's made to date, a thoroughly enjoyable endeavor that one would have to be pretty cynical to dismiss entirely. While Anderson's distinct style will be off-putting to some, most who have fallen under his spell before are likely to do so again by the light of "Moonrise."

Anderson & Roman Coppola's beautifully streamlined script wastes no time with set-up for what is essentially a very simple tale – two kids run away from home. Well, sorta. One runs away from the Khaki Scouts Camp at which he lives and actually has no home to return to as his foster home parents decide not to take him back. Sam (Jared Gilman) runs away from "no home." And he does so to find the gawky girl that he's had a penpal relationship with for the last year, the sweet Suzy (Kara Hayward), and head off into the wilderness. Neither Sam nor Suzy are what you would call the most popular kids in school. He faces abuse by foster home brothers that look like they're practicing for "The Outsiders" and she seems ignored by a family in which she has three younger brothers and two distant parents (Frances McDormand & Bill Murray). It makes sense that these two social outcasts would be drawn to each other.



Moonrise Kingdom

Photo credit: Focus

And so, a year after spotting her at a church show about Noah's Ark, Sam breaks free from the Khaki Scouts Camp run by Scout Master Ward (Edward Norton) and crosses an island to find her. They run away together, tracing an old Indian path, reading her favorite books,

listening to records on a battery-powered player, and being chased by an increasing number of people, including the rest of the Scouts, Suzy's parents, and a sad-sack police officer named Captain Sharp (Bruce Willis). Eventually, Social Services (Tilda Swinton) has to get involved. (Yes, her character's name is "Social Services.") Jason Schwartzman, Harvey Keitel, and Bob Balaban are hilarious in small roles.

Wes Anderson's best films have always channeled his whimsy through the eyes of children or simply adults who never grew up. One can easily draw a straight line from Dignan in "Bottle Rocket" to Max Fischer in "Rushmore" to Sam Shakusky in "Moonrise Kingdom." Anderson's recent work seemed to replace that innocence, that sense of committed wonder, with pretension. He's back to doing what he did so well with his first three films here.

Don't worry. Anderson isn't losing his style. In fact, he's almost embracing it more than ever but with more thematic purpose. "Moonrise Kingdom" is a distinctly affected piece. There's no denying it. When Sam seems to be having an honest moment with Suzy that's broken by a desire to inventory what they brought, one can feel Anderson being more excited about the opportunity to frame the inventory in his unique way than to shoot the character development. And yet, I would argue that this is his least cynical and least affected piece overall. It's almost as if his time with "The Fantastic Mr. Fox" allowed him to embrace the childish whimsy again instead of the dreary pretension.



Moonrise Kingdom

Photo credit: Focus

It helps to have such an amazingly talented cast, several of whom haven't had this much fun in years. It's great to see actors like Willis and Norton, who, let's be honest, have made some bad choices lately, proving how straight-up enjoyable they can be as actors. We know Bill Murray and Jason Schwartzman are going to rock in a Wes Anderson movie but Willis, Norton, McDormand, and Swinton are just as delightful. The children are a bit harder to judge on a performance level in that their characters are so mannered. Even through that, I found both young actors effective, especially Hayward.

On a technical level, "Moonrise Kingdom" is a remarkable accomplishment. The great Alexandre Desplat proves yet again why he's at the forefront of any discussion of the best film composers working today with a delightful score and regular Anderson cinematographer Robert S. Yeoman frames the film beautifully. Art direction, Anderson's choice of music, incredibly tight editing – every technical element is above par.

Why not a perfect score? There is a missing emotional beat, a reason to truly care about the saga of Sam and Suzy. However, it's a minor complaint and one that I think could be dismissed with time. "Moonrise Kingdom" is close to perfect now and, just as the hazy memories of young love smooth out the rough edges over time, I have a feeling it will get even better with time.

"Moonrise Kingdom" stars Jared Gilman, Kara Hayward, Bruce Willis, Edward Norton, Frances McDormand, Tilda Swinton, Bill Murray, Jason Schwartzman, Harvey Keitel, and Bob Balaban. It was written by Wes Anderson & Roman Coppola and directed by Anderson. It is now playing in New York and Los Angeles and will be released in Chicago on June 1, 2012.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [18]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [17]

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