

‘The Odd Life of Timothy Green’ Misses Emotional Connection

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 15, 2012 - 11:04am

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Rating: **1.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Peter Hedges’ “The Odd Life of Timothy Green” has a warm, gooey center that’s admirable in a family movie way but what’s around it can’t hold together as the lack of focus in the narrative and the rather grating performance from the young man playing its title character causes it to annoy more than entertain. I want to like “Timothy Green.” I don’t think there are enough fantasy-driven family films and the cast is filled with actors that I’ve enjoyed before. But the movie simply doesn’t have the energy or creativity it needed to connect.

Cindy (Jennifer Garner) and Jim Green (Joel Edgerton) are meeting with a pair of adoption officers (Shohreh Aghdashloo & Michael Arden) and they have a story to tell that won’t fit on the form that asks them why they’d make good parents. It’s the story of Timothy Green (CJ Adams), the child that showed them the art of parenting through a series of miraculous events and kind gestures. Their story is a fable, a fantasy about the power of creativity, the bond between parent & child, and how being different isn’t always a bad thing. It’s a ton of narrative for a relatively short film and the unfocused nature of Hedges’ narrative (from a story by Ahmet Zappa) is the film’s biggest problem. Cindy & Jim Green’s story isn’t ridiculous because it features a magical child but because it feels that it needs to feature so much more.



The Odd Life of Timothy Green
Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

After discovering that they're not going to have a biological child, Cindy & Jim have a wine-soaked evening in which they make notes about what their never-to-be son would have been like. They take their dreams of a son named Timothy and bury them in a box in the backyard. A rainstorm commences and Timothy Green, complete with leaves growing out of his legs, sprouts from the backyard and starts calling the Greens "Mom" & "Dad."

Of course, Timothy touches the lives of everyone in the small town in which he lives. He makes Uncle Bub (M. Emmet Walsh) laugh one last time before he passes. He teaches Aunt Brenda (Rosemarie DeWitt) not to be so stuck up. He impacts his demanding grandfather (David Morse), his Mom's boss (Dianne Wiest), his dad's boss (Ron Livingston), his soccer coach (Common), a girl at school (Odeya Rush), and even saves the town from economic destruction. Timothy Green could easily be seen as a Christ figure – the beautiful child who rises from the ether to teach us all a lesson or two about being good human beings.

To be clear – I have zero problem with that intention. I love a good heartwarming family film every now and then and I know fully the power of a child to change your life (my sons have thoroughly changed mine). So don't think that I'm merely a cynical critic unable to appreciate a family dramedy. In fact, the opposite is true. I think I see so much potential in the fantastic concept of "The Odd Life of Timothy Green" that the film's failures aggravate me even more than most.

Why? Timothy Green as a character and his arc as a life changer don't work dramatically or emotionally. First, I found the actual character of Timothy and how's he played by the young Mr. Adams to be grating more than enjoyable. Admittedly, that's a huge problem with a film like this. If you don't fall for Timothy Green, you won't fall for anything he does. You won't have the emotional investment.



The Odd Life of Timothy Green

Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

And that lack of emotional investment allowed me to see flaws in every subplot of Hedges' crowded narrative. There are too many great actors here reduced to single-line descriptions. The archetypes played by DeWitt and Morse don't exist in real life. They are more cartoonishly ridiculous than Timothy himself and he has foliage growing from his shins. I found myself increasingly annoyed by the pat lessons and emotional manipulation of "Timothy Green" more than encouraged or moved by his story arc.

To be fair, some of the performers make it out better than others. I found Garner to be stiff but the great Edgerton does fantastic work here. He's the best thing about the movie. Odeya Rush is an interesting young star (I wanted to know more about her arc and less about Timothy's when they were together) and Common is always a charismatic supporting actor.

"The Odd Life of Timothy Green" is one of those films with plenty of great parts – a strong cast, an uplifting message, a heartwarming story – that never coalesce into something entertaining. It moves in fits and starts, never engaging on the emotional level it needed to in order to be as memorable as it is odd.

"The Odd Life of Timothy Green" stars Jennifer Garner, Joel Edgerton, CJ Adams, M. Emmet Walsh, Shohreh Aghdashloo, Michael Arden, Rosemarie DeWitt, David Morse, Ron Livingston, Dianne Wiest, Odeya Rush, and Common. It was written and directed by Peter Hedges. It was released on August 15, 2012 and is rated PG.



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