

## Joe Swanberg Hits Again with Gentle ‘All the Light in the Sky’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 18, 2013 - 3:03pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

Joe Swanberg had quite a year. In the same summer, he appeared in the horror hit “You’re Next” and saw his most high-profile success in the excellent “Drinking Buddies” with Olivia Wilde, Jake Johnson, and Anna Kendrick. The year ended with the announcement that his next feature, “Happy Christmas,” starring Kendrick & Lena Dunham, will play in competition at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival. And that’s not even the whole Swanberg story. There’s a whole separate film opening in some markets and premiering on VOD this weekend, written, directed, edited, and shot by Swanberg, called “All the Light in the Sky,” and it’s a surprisingly amiable, enjoyable piece of work. It features minimal dramatic thrust, even for Swanberg, but the cast works and Swanberg finds a gentle, interesting tone in the way he sketches a woman over a seemingly average few days of her life but who may be taking a turn emotionally by the end of them.

It helps “All the Light in the Sky” notably that Swanberg cast the always-great Jane Adams (“Happiness”) in the lead role of an actress named Marie, a character who seems not too distant from the performer who plays her. Marie is an actress in her 40s, who has clearly seen enough success to be discussing several upcoming projects with an agent and to afford the gorgeous, ocean-view from her Malibu apartment, but who worries she’s heading down the other side of the peak of her career. She’s having trouble sleeping, taking roles in “ultra-low-budget films” (clearly a meta reference to Swanberg), and even lamenting the decline of her youthful figure.



All the Light in the Sky  
*Photo credit: Swanberry*

Marie feels slightly rattled and slightly invigorated at the same time by the arrival of her niece Faye (Sophia Takal) for a few days’ vacation. Faye is a beautiful, sweet girl and Marie clearly loves her, but she also notices that her breasts are a little perkier when they’re changing, adding a small bit of the insecurity that seems to be invading Marie’s confidence as she gets older. Marie & Faye talk a lot, go out drinking, hang out with Ti West, and, well, that’s about it. There’s not much narrative in “All the Light in the Sky,” and much of the film seems built

around a few stellar bits of conversation near the end, particularly a fantastic scene between Adams and Larry Fessenden as a long-time friend. There are bits of exposition here and there that could be symbolic – like the discussions about solar power being limited (like the star power of an actress) and the inevitable erosion of the land keeping the beach homes like Marie’s from plummeting into the ocean – but it’s mostly a quiet, sweet character study.

And it’s likable on those terms. We’re seeing a lot of high-concept (“Her”), high-profile (“The Wolf of Wall Street”), and just high-velocity (“Lone Survivor”) films this season. Joe Swanberg’s “All the Light in the Sky” will get a small percentage of the attention of those films but I like that it was a part of its creator’s landmark year. It won’t have as many fans as “Drinking Buddies” and people are already talking about “Happy Christmas” more but it’s proof that the ultra-low-budget, character-driven, true indie spirit of Joe Swanberg has not eroded in the slightest.

*“All the Light in the Sky” stars Jane Adams, Sophia Takal, Kent Osborne, and Larry Fessenden. It was written and directed by Joe Swanberg. It opens in select markets this Friday, December 20, 2013, as well premiering on VOD that same day.*



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