

‘Wish I Was Here’ Will Make You Wish You Weren’t There

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 18, 2014 - 11:43am

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Writer, director and lead actor Zach Braff has put it on the line for his latest feature, “Wish I Was Here.” He infamously used a crowdfunding Kickstarter campaign to maintain creative control of the film, but he needn’t have bothered. The movie result is a sappy, high concept emotional manipulator with no basis in authenticity, and that might be the best thing that can be said about it.

This film wasn’t something that showcased what makes Braff interesting. Unlike his successful cult film of ten years ago, “Garden State,” Braff casts himself in a circumstance unlike his usual character, and too far from his real life for him to understand it (and he wrote it!). Braff plays a father in this film, but with no chemistry with his kids or wife – portrayed by Kate Hudson – and he disarmingly seems estranged from the family. Some might argue that is the point of the film, but the separation is so vast that the inevitable coming together is forced rather than natural. The whole film is like that – everything feels forced rather than emanating from truth. Braff likes to boast that film took “only” 26 days to make, but once it is viewed that fact is apparent in all the relationships and the connections between the characters.

Aidan (Zach Braff) is a struggling actor, whose wife Sarah (Kate Hudson) holds their children Grace and Tucker (Joey King and Pierce Gagnon) and the family together by working at a soulless job. When Aidan finds out his father Gabe (Mandy Patinkin) is dying, his life takes a turn, and he begins questioning his choice of career, his past life, his religion and his relationships.



Aidan (Zach Braff), his Swear Jar and His Kids (Pierce Gagnon and Joey King) in ‘Wish I Was Here’
Photo credit: Focus Features

He seeks out his brother Noah (Josh Gad), a loner geek holed up in a trailer, and begs him for reconciliation with the dying patriarch. He wants to mend fences – literally and figuratively – with this children, and of course he wants to understand his father’s journey into the next realm. All the while, his wife is having problems of her own, but what is happening could heal all calamity.

This kind of exploration is juicy – how does a person’s inner life shift when confronted with a parent’s mortality? Yet Braff chooses to ignore the emotional possibilities of that statement and instead creates a series of “wacky adventures” for himself and the kids to fulfill – and because he uses a well-funded and high concept “swear jar” to monetize these adventures, it gives an indication of how far flung they are. He also creates a fantasy character – a space hero of some sort – which he cuts too whenever the real life starts to get too boring, which is often. Okay, I get it, that’s how he fantasizes fighting his demons, but it comes off as being superfluous.

[In an interview with HollywoodChicago.com.](#) [17] Braff expressed how casting is vital for independent films such as this. He fell down in that casting in a vital way – Hudson was totally wrong for the wife. Instead of giving her some real frustration over the family situation, Braff’s script – co-written with his brother Adam – chose to make her brilliantly sunny and sexy, a complete opposite to where the character needed to be. Her clothing, for example, is expressly wrong for a working mother. Braff also wrote her a confrontation scene with the dying Patinkin, that felt like it was in another film. Kate was game, but aimless.

Braff also expressed in the interview how the story was not specifically about Judaism, but all religions. This coming from a film that features a Orthodox rabbi doing funny bits on a Segway scooter. I wish I were kidding. Also the non-religious parents send their children to Orthodox Hebrew school (grandfather Gabe conveniently pays for it), and their daughter clings to the strict dogma even though her parents – as the main influence in her life – openly don’t participate. It’s totally improbable given that the Braff character is adamant against it all, even though the overall view of the sect are magically favorable. it would have been more interesting to actually critique the Orthodoxy.



Sarah (Kate Hudson) Confronts Aidan in ‘Wish I Was Here’
Photo credit: Focus Features

Braff’s style as a director is dreamy ... given a good script he can conjure a feeling of almost floating through his world of creation. But this wasn’t a good script, and relied too much on people-being-against-things-until-they’re-not. Inside and around the story is something deeper, which never emerges. And emotionally, it cops out, even as it is filmed so beautifully.

It will be interesting to see the reactions of the 46,520 people who contributed to the Kickstarter campaign of “Wish I Was Here,” to the total tune of three million bucks. Will they be proud that they gave, or will they wonder what the fuss was about regarding Zach Braff and his “creative control”?

“Wish I Was Here” has a limited release, including Chicago, on July 18th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Zach Braff, Kate Hudson, Mandy Patinkin, Jim Parsons, Josh Gad, Joey King, Ashley Greene and James Avery. Written by Adam J. Braff and Zach Braff. Directed by Zach Braff. Rated “R”



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