

Hidden Gem 'The Last Five Years' Launches Anna Kendrick as a Serious Singer

Submitted by [HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com) [1] on February 22, 2015 - 2:26pm

- [Adam Fendelman](#) [2]
- [Anna Kendrick](#) [3]
- [Betsy Wolfe](#) [4]
- [Bettina Bresnan](#) [5]
- [Cassandra Inman](#) [6]
- [Charly Bivona](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Jason Robert Brown](#) [9]
- [Jeremy Jordan](#) [10]
- [Lauren Kennedy](#) [11]
- [Lily LaGravenese](#) [12]
- [Movie Review](#) [13]
- [RADIUS-TWC](#) [14]
- [Richard LaGravenese](#) [15]
- [Robert Imberman](#) [16]
- [Sherie Rene Scott](#) [17]
- [Tamara Mintz](#) [18]
- [The Last Five Years](#) [19]
- [Theresa O'Neill](#) [20]



Rating: **4.0**/5.0

CHICAGO – Perhaps you’ve heard Anna Kendrick dabble in that thing called “singing” with her cutesy “Cups” on the radio, her runaway princess role in “Into the Woods” or “Pitch Perfect”. But apparently it takes an under-the-radar indie film that adapts a commercially failed off-Broadway play for her to shine as a dramatic actress and especially carry the tune as a powerful, spine-chilling singer.

“The Last Five Years” is a tough watch, but it’s real – not in the way “Schindler’s List” is, but more like how “Birdman” is an honest portrayal of the behind the scenes of putting up a Broadway show in New York. And instead of the real life of staging a play, “The Last Five Years” is the true story of the burdens and blessings of an artistic male/female relationship merged with the nightmares and paid-off dreams of living as a struggling artist. I love this story’s truth instead of being lied to with a glamorized version of it through rose-colored glasses.



Jeremy Jordan and Anna Kendrick in “The Last Five Years”.

Image credit: RADiUS-TWC

Based on Tony-winning writer Jason Robert Brown’s (“Parade,” “Bridges of Madison County”) failed marriage to Theresa O’Neill, Kendrick takes some convincing to pull off the role of the “shiksa goddess” in the film adaptation.

She’s more of the girl next door versus the play’s bombshells: Lauren Kennedy in 2001 from the local stage premiere at Northlight Theatre in Skokie, Ill. and then Sherie Rene Scott in the 2002 off-Broadway failure. The play briefly went off-Broadway again in 2013 with Betsy Wolfe in the leading role of Cathy.

Though Kendrick isn’t the first leading lady who’d come to mind to fill the role of the non-Jewish bombshell with powerhouse musical theatre lungs, she quickly sells it from the evocative intro song “Still Hurting” and leaves you sold through the final number.

And her match with Jeremy Jordan – a Broadway actor known for “Newsies” and “Bonnie & Clyde” – equally balances this 95% all-musical screen adaptation with chemistry you can actually feel between them.



Anna Kendrick and Jeremy Jordan in “The Last Five Years”.

Image credit: RADiUS-TWC

Attempting to broaden its audience beyond the few people who saw it live, the film didn’t come quickly or easy. Brown’s former wife, Theresa O’Neill, threatened legal action on the grounds that the story of the musical represented her relationship with Brown too closely.

Brown changed the song “I Could Be in Love With Someone Like You” (from the Chicago production) to “Shiksa Goddess” in order to reduce the similarity between the character Cathy (played by Anna Kendrick in the film) and Theresa.

The film feels different than the two-person, more intimate musical play where Cathy and Jamie are never on stage together (except for when they meet in the middle) and supporting characters don’t exist at all. The film uses many more people and various New York backdrops to tell the same story in a more grandiose way.

For the many who didn’t see the play, the film captures the spirit, retells it with equally hard-hitting power and opens it up to a new audience both in movie theatres and at home. In Chicago, the film opened exclusively at the Logan Theatre on Friday, Feb. 20, 2015 and is also available On Demand and on Amazon Instant Video. But so far, the film has only earned \$60,351 at the box office (through Feb. 19) with a release in only three theatres nationwide (since Feb. 13, 2015).



Jeremy Jordan in “The Last Five Years”.

Image credit: RADiUS-TWC

When music is done right, it can stick with us more powerfully than unsung words or eye-pleasing visuals. And that's exactly what Brown has pulled off here with a perfect compilation of songs I've never heard of before wrapped within a story I never knew.

The film, which does feel like one music video after another conjoined by phase-outs and phase-ins, is entirely propelled by Brown's brilliant, naturally flowing music and lyrics. I'm awed by how unpretentious and ultimately natural the lyrics are without ever feeling overwritten. Lyrics fail when you can hear them being written as if the writer was forcibly trying to find a fancy word to rhyme with. Brown's lyrics simply flow as if they're a normal conversation and his pop musical arrangements match effortlessly.

The songs span the emotional roller-coaster gamut from the tear wrenching (“Still Hurting”) to the absolutely hilarious (“The Schmuel Song”), the romantic (“The Next Ten Minutes”) and the very sad (“Goodbye Until Tomorrow/I Could Never Rescue You”). What's so special about this soundtrack, though, is that you can watch the film just once, look at the lists of songs it featured and actually remember every single one of them.



Anna Kendrick in “The Last Five Years”.

Image credit: RADiUS-TWC

In addition to the music, the film also is propelled by an interesting use of time. The time sequencing may be the most confusing part of the film, and for some, it could take explaining. The film flip-flops between five years in the lives of these two: Cathy a struggling, cynical actor and Jamie a narcissistic, accomplished novelist.



[Read our interview with “The Last Five Years” director Richard LaGravenese.](#) [21]

Ultimately Cathy is starting out at the end and moving toward the happy beginning of the relationship. All the while, Jamie starts at the beginning and moves toward the end through the loneliness of his infidelity. As their progressions move forward in reverse, they do meet in the middle for a duet during a wedding sequence.

Aside from this middle-act duet and a brief duet in the film’s final act, all the other “music video movie scenes” only have Cathy or Jamie singing solo because in the source material the other person physically is not on stage. The film puts them there for visual cohesion, but the play leaves them out for intimacy. It’s two different ways of accomplishing the same effect and neither method is right or wrong.

The musical film, which you’ll fall in love with even if you don’t like musicals, is also dotted with hidden gems including clever cameos such as the bra-bearing secretary, who is Jeremy Jordan’s real-life wife (Ashley Spencer since 2012), and Brown himself playing the piano at one of Cathy’s failed auditions.

“The Last Five Years” stars Anna Kendrick, Jeremy Jordan, Tamara Mintz, Cassandra Inman, Bettina Bresnan, Charly Bivona, Lily LaGravenese and Robert Imberman from writer and director Richard LaGravenese based on the musical play by Jason Robert Brown. The film, which has a running time of 93 minutes, opened in Chicago exclusively at the Logan Theatre on Feb. 20, 2015 and is also available On Demand and on Amazon Instant Video. It is rated “PG-13” for sexual material, brief strong language and a drug image.



[22]

By [ADAM FENDELMAN](#) [23]
Publisher
HollywoodChicago.com
adam@hollywoodchicago.com [22]

© 2015 Adam Fendelman, HollywoodChicago.com LLC

Source URL (retrieved on Apr 19 2024 - 2:28pm):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/25199/hidden-gem-the-last-five-years-launches-anna-kendrick-as-a-serious-singer>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hollywoodchicagocom>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/adam-fendelman>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/anna-kendrick>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/betsy-wolfe>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/bettina-bresnan>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/cassandra-inman>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/charly-bivona>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jason-robert-brown>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jeremy-jordan>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/lauren-kennedy>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/lily-lagravenese>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/radius-twc>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/richard-lagravenese>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/robert-immerman>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/sherie-rene-scott>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/tamara-mintz>
- [19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/the-last-five-years>
- [20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/theresa-oneill>
- [21] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/25185/interview-director-richard-lagravenese-on-the-last-five-years>
- [22] <mailto:adam@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [23] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#ADAM>