

Adolescence Boldly Drawn in 'Diary of a Teenage Girl'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 14, 2015 - 3:42pm

- [Abby Wait](#) [2]
- [Alexander Skarsgard](#) [3]
- [Bel Powley](#) [4]
- [Christopher Meloni](#) [5]
- [Diary of a Teenage Girl](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Kristen Wiig](#) [8]
- [Marielle Heller](#) [9]
- [Movie Review](#) [10]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [11]
- [Phoebe Gloeckner](#) [12]
- [Sony Pictures Releasing](#) [13]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Real boldness, real truth, is hard to find in teenage stories. The confusing and hormonal time is often trivialized, or used as a prop for unlikely situations. "Diary of a Teenage Girl" pulls no such punches, in a tale of a 15 year old girl having her first love affair – with a 35 year old man.

The film is based on the graphic novel by Phoebe Gloeckner, and was adapted and directed by Marielle Heller. The woman-centric production is willing to go "all the way" with the depiction of the affair, which sets it apart from American attitudes in cinema towards sex. The title actress, Bel Powley, is able to handle all the feelings of the arrows shot toward her character, and communicates a combination of vulnerability and strength that makes her a real survivor. The ending was not in concert with the rest of the film – except for the last encounter with the girl and her lover – and it offered a Deus ex machina for a very difficult scenario that clashed with the rest of the audacious narrative. It's not enough to spoil the whole thing, but it was enough to desire something more.

It's 1976 in San Francisco, and Millie (Bel Powley) begins the film by informing the audience – via her era appropriate cassette tape recorder – that she has had sex for the first time, and it was with her mother's boyfriend Monroe (Alexander Skarsgard). This begins her journey, which involves the ongoing relationship with Monroe, the confrontations with her mother Charlotte (Kristen Wiig) and sister Gretel (Abby Wait).



Millie (Bel Powley) Tells All in 'Diary of a Teenage Girl'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

The affair complicates everything in Millie's life, including her erotic drawings in the style of fellow San Franciscan graphic artists R. Crumb

and Aline Kominsky. She wants the situation to make her more of a woman, but her mother's slow meltdown, her ex-stepfather's shaming and her best friend's temptations take her in the opposite direction. She will have to learn her lessons by herself.

The film rises through the performances, especially Bel Powley as Millie. The actress is fearless, exposing the 15-year-old's emotions both audibly and physically. There is fairly graphic nudity in the film, but it's never exploitative, and it communicates the adolescent shame and discovery during that changing time of life. Kristen Wiig takes her mother character to a vital place, as she feels the pull of middle age against the emergence of her daughter as a woman. Alexander Skarsgard ("True Blood") portrays Monroe as a man child, swept up by his own desires and his need to avoid growing up.

Creating an atmosphere was as important as the performances. Screenplay adapter/director Marielle Heller took care to recreate 1970s San Francisco, no small feat in a city that has changed profoundly in the last 40 years. Most of the action takes place inside, where the look of the era is controlled, but Millie does venture to parts of the city that still look like that time of innocence, and the film does emphasize that living before our current tech age meant more reliance on keeping tabs on each other, and opposite to that, more of an opportunity for Millie to roam freely in her new skin.

There is a happy ending, which was more convenient than truthful to what had occurred before, but perhaps it was following the novel directly. The family is splintered in an extreme way, and the novel/screenplay decides that the separation is a cleansing. It might have served Millie's adventure to make it less so, but that is only an opinion. The ending is the ending, and does create a moment of clarity regarding a lesson that Millie's ex-stepdad (portrayed with fine character by the underrated Christopher Meloni) had taught her, coming back in a scene that is truly conscience clearing. As Woody Allen said in "Annie Hall," we create art because we can't get it right in real life.



Charlotte (Kristen Wiig), Millie and Monroe (Alexander Skarsgard) in 'Diary of a Teenage Girl'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Is this a proper film for teenagers? Yes, perhaps with some discussion afterward. There are universal truths in the film about adapting in adolescence, with many issues all girls (and boys, to a degree) will be familiar with – it's something that could elicit some good dialogue, if the teen and their conversation partner are open about the joy and potential sorrows of life.

Otherwise, relive those hazy crazy years of youth in "Diary of a Teenage Girl," brought to you by biological changes, hormonal overload, social maladjustment and certain uncertainty. Nobody told me there'd be those days, but eventually you survive them.

"Diary of a Teenage Girl" continues its limited release in Chicago on August 14th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Kristen Wiig, Bel Powley, Alexander Skarsgard, Abby Wait and Christopher Meloni. Screenplay adapted and directed by Marielle Heller. Rated "R"



[14]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [15]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [14]

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/25784/adolescence-boldly-drawn-in-diary-of-a-teenage-girl>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/abby-wait>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/alexander-skarsgard>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/bel-powley>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/christopher-meloni>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/diary-of-a-teenage-girl>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/kristen-wiig>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/marielle-heller>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/patrick-mcdonald>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/phoebe-gloeckner>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/sony-pictures-releasing>
- [14] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>