

## Authentic Coming-of-Age in Expressive ‘Lady Bird’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 13, 2017 - 1:30pm

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Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – In one of the best American films of 2017, Greta Gerwig went behind the camera to write and direct an autobiographical overview of her Senior Year in high school, within a directionless town and family. The result is enlightening truth, told with laugh-out-loud directness and connective empathy. The film is a total winner.

What sets “Lady Bird” apart – the title refers to a nickname the main character wants people to call her – is that it deals with both average and underlying problems with American life in this post millennial haze. The family of Lady Bird is emotionally struggling and is in paycheck-to-paycheck mode, which adds more stress. Tracy Letts and Laurie Metcalfe, veterans of Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre, portray the parents with such gritty honesty that you could meet them at the grocery store right now. The actor who portrays the title character, Saoirse Ronan, masters the Greta Gerwig-style of detachment that makes the autobiography that much more precise. It’s really a wonderful film, that maintains its emotional surprises all the way to the conclusion.

Christine AKA Lady Bird (Ronan) has an itch that she doesn’t know how to scratch, but in the meantime she will endure her Senior Year at a Catholic high school in Sacramento (the “Midwest of California”). The relationship with her mother (Metcalfe) is strained, and her father (Letts) is going through an unemployment phase. She desires to get out of her sleepy town, but she hasn’t a clue as to how to accomplish that goal.



Saoirse Ronan is the Title Character in 'Lady Bird'

*Photo credit: A24*

She finds solace in her best friend (Beanie Feldstein), who encourages her to be in the school play. She connects with a boy crush during that run, but it turns sour quickly. She indoctrinates herself with some cooler kids, but that also leads to a point – after some deception on her part – that ends badly. She also applies to colleges beyond the family’s means, if only to escape where she is. Her graduation will occur beyond the cap and gown.

A word about Irish actor Saoirse Ronan, she is a clear “empath.” She knows the sides of this character, and accesses and mixes them to complete performance. She also portrayed a similarly transitioning character in last year’s “Brooklyn,” from another place and time. Comparing the two roles, they seem like different people, which calls attention to Ronan’s attention to interpretive detail. She is strikingly poignant and strident as Lady Bird.

There is much to admire about Greta Gerwig as a storyteller. She cuts through the usual “screenplay” familiarities in the coming-of-age genre, and tells an adolescent tale of “what it is.” The answer-it-now world of technology was developing (the film is set in 2001 and 2002), it was beginning to create a void in people’s lives, and the parenting of pubescent teens was also getting more difficult. We feel that difficulty in the film, and it permeates every relationship. However, the survival instinct ultimately has to be about love, and learning the proper lessons. Every person takes a journey through that phase.





Ronan with Laurie Metcalfe in ‘Lady Bird’

Photo credit: A24

Tracy Letts turns in another remarkable performance. As a middle aged character actor, he’s on a major hot streak (“Weiner-Dog,” “Indignation” and “The Lovers” come to mind) just because he knows how to deliver the right feeling. His actor partner Laurie Metcalfe is stunning as the mother, especially when she reveals her vulnerabilities and past sorrowful life. Yet, her and Lady Bird still have a relationship of sorts, a common and recognizable mother/daughter pairing, just as presented.

I do find it fascinating that Greta Gerwig grew up under the auspices of Catholic faith, because much of the film has that peculiar dignity and conflict flowing through it. The meditation of religion has power, even to the lucky few who can access it by creating the God within themselves.

*“Lady Bird” is currently in theaters nationwide. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Saoirse Ronan, Tracy Letts, Laurie Metcalfe, Beanie Feldstein, Odeya Rush and Timothée Chalamet. Written and directed by Greta Gerwig. Rated “R”*



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