

Woody Allen Has Run Out of Ideas with ‘Wonder Wheel’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 10, 2017 - 9:03am

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Rating: **1.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Woody Allen emptied out his junk drawer of discarded script ideas and somehow managed to convince Kate Winslet to star in it. That’s the gist of the latest “serious Woody” entry in the Oscar winner’s long running career. Woody Allen has had some timeless triumphs, but lately he’s been more about quantity than quality.

“Wonder Wheel” has all the hallmarks of Woody’s style over six decades in cinema... the 1950’s setting, the Tin Pan Alley jazz score, the references to theater and analysis, but in this film nothing fits. It has the aura of a man trying to keep up his one picture a year pace, but is at a loss for a real idea. Justin Timberlake is a budding playwright working as a lifeguard on Coney Island in Brooklyn. He serves as the film’s narrator, and occasionally talks directly to the camera. Kate Winslet is a former actress, who now works as a waitress at a clam dive on Coney Island. She’s married to a merry-go-round carny named Humpty (Jim Belushi), who is barely scraping amid the artificial clatter and clanging of the increasingly seedy tourist trap during the 1950’s era.



Kate Winslet and Justin Timberlake in ‘Wonder Wheel’

Photo credit: Amazon Studios

Timberlake and Winslet's characters have an affair, until Timberlake falls for Humpty's daughter (Juno Temple), who's the wife of a mobster on the lam. Temple is in her usual squeaky-voiced femme fatale persona, and arrives penniless to seek shelter with her estranged dad. Ideas are introduced and then discarded. Subplots are introduced and then go absolutely nowhere. Winslet also has a son from her first marriage who is a bit of a pyromaniac. Where does that lead? Nowhere, except the kid shows up starting fires every now and then as a kind of sick comic relief.

Winslet does what she can, but most of the time she's complaining about having a migraine. It certainly doesn't help that she has to share many of her scenes with Jim Belushi. It may be hard to believe but there was a time when Jim Belushi was a pretty decent actor. However that time was 30 years ago, and Belushi embarrasses himself with a half assed Stanley Kowalski impression in this reheated Tennessee Williams drama.

Belushi looks absolutely lost in most of his scenes, not knowing how to spit out Allen's dialogue or how to interact with the actors around him. In Allen's search for drama, he seems to have taken inspiration from his own personal sets of piccadillos. Belushi dotes perhaps a little too delicately on his daughter and is actually accused of having a bit of a thing for her. This seems to be a bit on the nose, considering Allen dated and then married Soon Yi Previn, the adopted daughter of his ex-girlfriend (Mia Farrow).



The Lifeguard Meets the Mob Wife in 'Wonder Wheel'

Photo credit: Amazon Studios

The best that can be said about Justin Timberlake is that at least he doesn't try to do a Woody Allen impression, but he can't find his character beyond a checklist of Woody's own personal cultural benchmarks. While the set design does an admirable job of bringing the seediness of Coney Island to the screen, there's nothing worth seeing here in this film about miserable people making each other miserable. In the long list of Woody Allen's film, "Wonder Wheel" will end up ranking near the bottom of the barrel.

"Wonder Wheel" continued its nationwide release in Chicago on December 8th. See local listings for theaters and showtimes. Featuring Kate Winslet, Juno Temple, Jim Belushi, Justin Timberlake, Max Casella and Jack Gore. Written and directed by Woody Allen. Rated "PG-13"



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