

A Bit of Pop/Rock Magic Spins in ‘Juliet, Naked’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 26, 2018 - 10:14am

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The story of a drop-out rock and roll star... usually disappearing at the height of their fame... has fascinated the movies in both fiction (“Eddie and the Cruisers”) and documentary (“Waiting for Sugarman”). “Juliet, Naked” takes the premise and creates a charming, romantic story about fandom and redemptive decisions.

All the cast is at the top of their game with a solid and very funny script. The Year of Ethan Hawke continues with another great performance by the man as the disappeared rocker. And Irish actor Chris O’Dowd nearly steals the picture as an obsessed fan, who inadvertently begins the demise of his long time relationship. Rose Byrne is his live-in girlfriend and the centerpiece of the proceedings, and she proves again that beyond her radiant good looks lies a deft and subtle comic actor. “Juliet, Naked” is a fun and intuitive life transition story, and is recognizable on many emotional levels.

The film begins with Tucker Crowe (Ethan Hawke), who left the pop/rock stage in the 1990s during a key part of his rising popularity. This obsesses a small but ardent fan base, led by blogger and British college instructor Duncan (Chris O’Dowd). Duncan is sent a package, which contains the demo recordings for his favorite Tucker Crowe album, “Juliet.” The disk is entitled “Juliet, Naked.”



Annie (Rose Byrne) and Tucker Crowe (Ethan Hawke) in 'Juliet, Naked'

Photo credit: Lionsgate

Duncan's live-in girlfriend Annie (Rose Byrne) runs a small museum in the seaside British where they reside, and also listens to Juliet, Naked... but has a decidedly negative reaction (she's sick of Duncan's obsession). Her blistering review of the disk is noticed by the actual Tucker Crowe, who lives in American exile inside a garage owned by his Baby Mama. Annie and Tucker begin a correspondence, which grows in ardor, and when Annie decides to end her relationship with Duncan, the door is open to connect more closely with Tucker.

Yes, the elevator pitch is "the world's most obsessed fan of a rock star becomes a rival for his girlfriend's attention with that rock star." And it works perfectly, thanks to a tight and charming script adaptation (by three writers) of the source novel by Nick Hornby ("About a Boy"). Thematically, it continues Hornby's exploration into man children, for both Duncan and Tucker are lost in their own fears of responsibility. It falls to the woman to be more sensible, but Annie's safe path through life (she inherited the museum after caring for a dying father) is also bothering her. The mix of needs for the the "next phase in life" is what makes the movie sing.

Ethan Hawke relishes the role as Tucker Crowe, and nails it. The character's lack of responsibility comes through his habit of having children by different women, and that is brought to comic fore when all the kids encounter him in London. His latest son is the one he is trying to rehabilitate himself with, and the boy (Azhy Robertson) has great chemistry with his similarly child-like father. Tucker's "secret" for leaving the pop/rock scene is appropriately guilt-ridden, and in fact all of the reasons for things happening are authentically structured by Jesse Peretz, a hip TV director doing his first feature since 2011.



Annie and Duncan (Chris O'Dowd) in 'Juliet, Naked'
Photo credit: Lionsgate

Rose Byrne also is fantastic, and created a low-key character who reacts organically to that itch that people get when they want to change their lives. The way Annie wants to set up an exhibit (about the summer of 1964) clashes with the bureaucracy of her hometown, which foreshadows her need to move on. There is a beautiful moment when an 84-year-old women recognizes herself in the '64 exhibit, and laments that all she did was follow the rules her entire life. The expression on Annie/Rose's face says it all.

Of course the title was inspired, no doubt, by The Beatle's "Let it Be... Naked," released in 2003. It is interesting that fans want to find some deeper meaning from a stripped down version of their favorite albums, when usually the demos are not meant for the light of day. My disappointment came when Rose Byrne wasn't THE title character, and the action described wasn't therein.

"Juliet, Naked" continues its nationwide release in Chicago on August 24th. See local listings for theaters and showtimes. Featuring Ethan Hawke, Rose Byrne, Chris O'Dowd, Azhy Robinson and Ayoola Smart. Screenplay adapted by Evgenia Peretz, Jim Taylor and Tamara Jenkins, from a novel by Nick Hornby. Directed by Jesse Peretz. Rated "R"



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Source URL (retrieved on Apr 19 2024 - 6:14am):

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