

## Growing Up Fast in the Skateboard Life of ‘Mid90s’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on October 29, 2018 - 10:33am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Character actor Jonah Hill has just scored behind the camera. As writer/director of a authentic look back at the “Mid90s” he went back to his inner source of growing up in that 1990s time, skateboarding with his buds and experiencing the teenage life. The story never blinks, as the teens are authentic and the situations they get in even more so.

In a recent interview, Jonah Hill said that this film became his “best friend.” And in that sense we experience his joy in each frame. Hill cast it right, he approached it right and even in the harshest moments in the film were honestly right. The lead boy, portrayed by Sunny Suljic (“The House with the Clock in Its Walls”), amazingly takes on the innocence of desire in wanting to belong, and then growing up through that opportunity. The young actors portraying the skateboard buddies are also naturalistic, with a particular kudo going to Na-kel Smith. He handles a key scene with a perfect sensitivity, totally believable for his age and background in the film. I look forward to seeing more from Jonah Hill.

Stevie (Suljic) is a typical 13-year-old boy, being raised by a single Mom (Katherine Waterson), and tormented by sadistic older brother Ian (Lucas Hedges). He longs for a break out, either through his relationship with Ian or another discovery. As if on cue, he finds a group of skateboarder buds, and buys a board to join up with them.





Skater Boi-to-Teen: Stevie (Sunny Suljic) in 'Mid90s'

Photo credit: A24

There are implications to this new life. The boys like their cigarettes, booze and pot, along with introducing Stevie to the temptations of coupling with girls. The young boy starts to lead a double life, innocent pubescent by day, raging skater boi by all other free time. When his mother finds out, everything could change.

Sunny Suljic is a great teen actor, channeling what I assume would be his own angst (he's decidedly shorter and more boyish than his counterparts) into the role of Stevie. He's asked by Jonah Hill to make a tremendous transition, from boy to independent teen. There is a poignant "boy scene" – he tries to reach out to his distant brother through a birthday present – and an confrontation with his mother on the teen side which is harsh, yet totally truthful. It really is an Oscar-worthy performance, because all the other players feed off Stevie.

The skater bois are archetypes of that 1990s teen generation, pre-smartphone but experimenting with video... Hill's later life as a creator is predicted through the character "Fourth Grade," portrayed by Ryder McLaughlin. His nickname refers to his intellect, stuck in fourth, but he remarks, "maybe I'll make a movie, I don't know." The other boys, like the wild F\*ckshit (Olen Prenatt) and Stevie's friend Ruben (Gio Galicia) are also the real deal, but the MVP is Ray. Na-kel Smith inherently knows his character is destined for other things, so there is a deeper maturity than the other boys in his performance.



Ray (Na-Kel Smith) and F\*ckshit (Olen Prenatt) in 'Mid90s'

Photo credit: A24

This is set 23 years ago or so, but so much has changed in all our lives since this time with technology, that going back to that time is to see a world gone by. Hill captures this joyfully, with plenty of freedom for the skateboarders, and some deft shot selection to communicate it. This film remarkably joins "Skate Kitchen" and the documentary "Minding the Gap" in the Year of the Skateboard Movie, and each of these films has something to say about the fleeting nature of youth.

I would have to guess that skateboard teens, when they grow up, are solid senders of life. As they wipe through the landscape at super speeds, without a care for the potential for falling down, they make great risk takers. All these boys from the Mid90s became men, and their influence is felt through this artistic statement from Jonah Hill.

*"Mid90s" opened in Chicago on October 26th, part of a nationwide release. Featuring Sunny Suljic, Katherine Waterson, Lucas Hedges, Na-kel Smith, Olan Precatt, Gio Galicia and Ryder McLaughlin. Written and directed by Jonah Hill. Rated "R"*



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [19]  
Editor and Film Writer  
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://HollywoodChicago.com)  
[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [18]

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