

Vivacity and Simplicity Come Together to Perform in ‘Teen Spirit’

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on April 22, 2019 - 5:44pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – For most of us, music literally becomes the soundtrack to our lives. They become a reflection of our mood, innermost thoughts, and even our fears. Sometimes they are just a pick me up, the same way Cardi B is currently soundtracking the writing of this review. Certain, well-placed songs can even tell our life story without us having to utter a single word, much like Teen Spirit.

Max Minghella writes and directs this ode to youth and chasing your dreams. Most recently known for his role as Nick in the bleak, near-future parable “The Handmaid’s Tale”, he too follows his dreams with this film, but with mixed success. “Teen Spirit” follows the journey of Violet (Elle Fanning) as competes in a singing competition to win a record deal and to finally be able to leave her small hometown and religious household. That’s it, that’s all you really need to know about the story since every other bit of exposition happens through song.

The youth today will never know the joys of staying up late at night watching MTV because that was the only time they played music videos anymore. Sarcasm aside, the closest feeling I can compare it to now is when your YouTube video auto-plays random songs. If the stars align, you can get several consecutive songs you like that perfectly matches your life or mood. In “Teen Spirit”, nothing is left to chance. What Minghella lacks in story development, he makes up for with his pitch-perfect choices in music to tell the story.



Photo credit: Bleecker Street

Through the music of Robyn, Ellie Goulding, Annie Lennox, Carly Rae Jepsen, and others, we are given all the storytelling we need to get the basic idea of our main character’s past and current emotional state. It does feel fairly simplistic as a whole, but the brisk pacing of each music

video sequence keeps our spirits raised. The problem we run into when it comes to musical films that use songs this way is that they oftentimes feel very forced in certain scenes, or that they don’t fully convey the correct emotions. “Teen Spirit” has much more hits than misses in that department, but that is all greatly due to the new mixes of the songs and the person providing vocals for them.

As our underdog Violet, Elle Fanning flexes some familiar muscles by playing an innocent, doe-eyed ingenue. Admittedly, a role that comes naturally to her, but also one she has mastered. The performance outside of the music sequences are all fine, but where Fanning does shine is in the spotlight of the songs. Once she is in the moment, her performances give the film a complete sense of emotional depth that it would surely be lacking in without her. She not only performs and emotes beautifully but the fact that she actually sings all of the songs adds a layer of authenticity that having the original music overlayed would stand no chance of conveying. Although the film doesn’t have the editorial or social impact that something like “Neon Demon” does, it is able to convey a humbling and sometimes striking beauty that will leave you wanting more.

“Teen Spirit” opened everywhere on April 19th. Featuring Elle Fanning, Agnieszka Grochowska, Archie Madekwe, Zlatko Buric, and Millie Brady. Directed by Max Minghella. Written by Max Minghella. Rated “PG-13”



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By [JON ESPINO](#) [20]
Film & Video Game Critic
HollywoodChicago.com
jon@hollywoodchicago.com [19]

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