

Wonderful 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower' Captures Teenage Life with Grace

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 27, 2012 - 4:13pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Stephen Chbosky's "The Perks of Being a Wallflower," based on his hit book of the same name, is the most pleasant and accomplished surprise of the year, a delightful, sweet, funny, and moving examination of teenage life that merits comparison to John Hughes and Cameron Crowe. With stellar performances all around and a spectacular screenplay that does the one thing that most teen dramedies miss by taking its characters seriously, this film may start slowly given the crowded marketplace and low expectations for its genre but I have no doubt that it will become one of the most cherished and beloved films of 2012. Like the work of Hughes and Crowe, it is a movie that grateful fans will wrap their arms around and return to for decades like leafing through an old photo album. It is a truly unexpected gift this Fall movie season.

Perhaps the most surprising element of "Perks" is the strikingly genuine and heartfelt performance at its core from an actor who has not displayed this kind of depth before in mainstream junk like "The Three Musketeers" as Logan Lerman imbues the lead character of Charlie with just the right blend of insight, emotion, and apprehension. It's going to be one of the most underrated performances of the year because Lerman makes it look so much easier than it actually is. Working with Chbosky, the two turn Charlie into more than mere teen movie protagonist. He is likable, relatable, and such an easy character to root for on his journey of love, joy, pain, depression, and all the other mixed emotions that come with daily life in high school.



The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Photo credit: Summit

Charlie is a wallflower. He sits back. He watches things happen. He doesn't get involved. He clearly has a deep well of depression but he's not a morbid character. Chbosky wisely doesn't dress him in black and force him to scribble poetry in his dark bedroom. He's more of an average high school freshman who just happens to have a truly disturbing past. And he finds comfort in a world of misfits willing to express their own unique personalities.

Charlie finds himself in a circle of friends led by two charismatic seniors – Sam (a fantastic breaking-free-from-Potter role by Emma Watson) and Patrick (Ezra Miller of "We Need to Talk About Kevin"). As so many of us did in high school, Charlie falls for the older girl while Patrick teaches him a few lessons about expression and acceptance. Charlie makes other friends as well, including a punk rock girl (Mae Whitman) and a supportive teacher (Paul Rudd). His family (Dylan McDermott & Kate Walsh as his parents and Melanie Lynskey as his aunt, seen in important flashbacks) doesn't quite understand him but supports his new circle of friends.



The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Photo credit: Summit

Rarely has a film understood the intricacies of adolescent development through friendship like "Perks of Being a Wallflower." Chbosky has such a keen grip on the concept that kids at this age come to define themselves through things like crushes, the music tastes of their older friends, or a teacher who gives them a great book to read. These interactions are essential to the days in which young men and women go from children to adults and it's the great teen movies that truly understand them and don't treat them as cliché or plot device that make the movies that last. Charlie, Sam, and Patrick feel more real than any other teen movie characters in the last several years.

The truth that separates "Perks" from most of its limp competition is mostly due to Chbosky's incredible script but Lerman, Watson, and Miller deserve a ton of praise as well. I've already praised Lerman, who makes not one false move as an actor, but Watson and Miller are just as good. In particular, I love the subtle decisions made by Watson to not make Sam a showy character. And praise must go to Chbosky's period detail. As someone who was nearly exactly the age of these characters in the year in which the film is set (1991), I loved the fashion and music choices, which also feel genuine and not showy.



The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Photo credit: Summit

What you should know most of all is that "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" does something so few teen movies do – it treats being a teenager with honesty and respect. It's funny, it's sweet, it's heartfelt, and it's one of the most moving films of the year. I walked into "Perks" expecting another lackluster teen movie made by people who have forgotten what those teen years are actually like. I walked out stunned at the artistic accomplishment of a film made by a man who doesn't just remember that formative period but knows how to bring it to life on the big screen.

"The Perks of Being a Wallflower" stars Logan Lerman, Emma Watson, Ezra Miller, Johnny Simmons, Mae Whitman, Kate Walsh, Dylan McDermott, Melanie Lynskey, and Paul Rudd. It was written and directed by Stephen Chbosky. It is playing in limited release now and opens wide on September 28, 2012. It is rated PG-13.



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