



SEARCH



Features ▾

Reviews ▾

Podcasts

Onlooker ▾

About Us ▾

2017 STAR OF THE YEAR: GRETA GERWIG

Posted by Christina Tucker | Dec 26, 2017 | Features |



Greta Gerwig brings a distinctly millennial character to her acting, full of realism, dry humor, and vulnerability, but without the same level of self-pity or biting cynicism that makes many of the young adult characters of our time feel grating or unlikable. Decidedly of her time, there is an unashamed sweetness in her acting that grounds often-messy characters in truthful humanity. Her acting style, with

NEW RELEASES

**Mom and Dad
Should Just Go
On Vacation**

SCORE:

**All the Money in
the World
Touches Upon
Tragedy But Can
Resort to
Moralizing**

SCORE: 78%

**Bright is a Well-
Intentioned
Mess**

SCORE: 71%

**With 'The Post',
Steven Spielberg
Affirms A Key
To Democracy**

SCORE: 91%

**Jumanji:
Welcome to the
Jungle Plays on
Expectations
with Wit and
Comedy**

SCORE: 85%

its awkwardness and downplayed humor, is easily undervalued. But to every character she plays, Gerwig brings a unique energy.

In the past several years Gerwig has performed in and written some of the most interesting films about young adulthood; *Frances Ha*, *Maggie's Plan*, *Mistress America*, and *20th Century Women* among them. And with 2017's *Lady Bird*, she has proven she can not only act and write with sensitivity but also nurture similarly touching performances from other actors. What Gerwig brings to each film in both writing and performance are characters that feel lived-in and familiar, no matter the context.

Frances Ha (2012) – Directed and Written by Noah Baumbach and Greta Gerwig



IFC Films

Frances Halladay is in many ways a type of character for which Gerwig has become known: metropolitan, sympathetic, and unable to pay rent for one reason or another. “I’m so embarrassed,” she says at one point, “I’m not a real person yet.”

Frances Ha is not confrontational in its creation of Frances; she is not a rebel out to prove something but someone who is lost, frustrated, and exhausted.

Gerwig’s Frances runs and dances, gets excited about

The Greatest Showman Will Leave You Demanding A Refund

SCORE:

Te-Ata Isn't a Good Film, But It Comes from a Good Place

SCORE:

The Shape of Water Shows the Beauty in Our Differences

SCORE: 94%

The Last Jedi is a Mostly-Successful Exploration of Morality and Legacy

SCORE: 88%

FOLLOW US



FACEBOOK



TWITTER



INSTAGRAM

STAFF & WRITERS

a tax rebate, desperately shouts after her friend as she is left behind, feels real and uninhibited. And all these highs and lows of everyday life are painted with such realism that you cannot help but want the best for her.

A modest, realistic ending in which Frances earns a modest but dream-adjacent living reflects the same modesty and realism with which Gerwig anchors the film.

***Maggie's Plan* (2015) – Directed and Written
by Rebecca Miller**



Sony Pictures Classics

In *Maggie's Plan*, Rebecca Miller creates Maggie's character in a way that allows Gerwig to explore the complicated mindset behind Maggie's frustrating choices; at heart Maggie is a closet romantic who hesitates to place too much trust in romance due to her family history, heartbreakingly told early on in the film by a tearful Maggie.

Gerwig holds her own with comedians Bill Hader and Maya Rudolph, as well as opposite more dramatic actors Ethan Hawke and Julianne Moore. Moore's put-on European accent reflects the broad elements of this comedy that with a different actress playing Maggie may have suffered from a lack of an emotional



BECKY BELZILE

112 Posts



GRACE PORTER

33 Posts



**RICHARD
NEWBY**

391 Posts



**SAMANTHA
SANDERS**

100 Posts

center. But with Maggie's more interior flaws allowed to shine through with charm and specificity, her seemingly nonsensical behavior is given grounding, due in no small part to Gerwig's performance. There is a genuine sweetness to Maggie that Gerwig brings to her excitement, humor, awkwardness, and insecurity that permeates the character.

***Mistress America* (2015) – Directed and
Written by Noah Baumbach and Greta Gerwig**



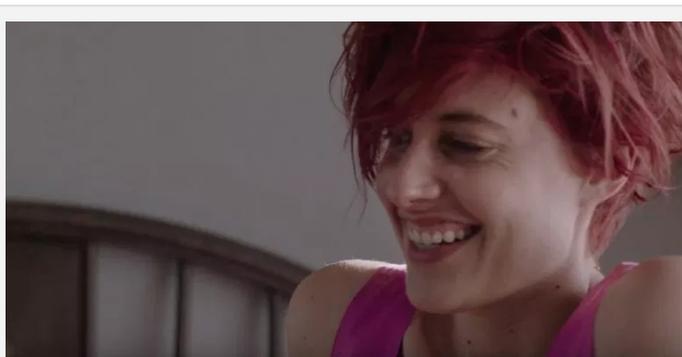
Fox Searchlight Pictures

There is an overwhelming but difficult-to-describe strangeness to *Mistress America*. Characters, Gerwig's Brooke and Lola Kirke's Tracy in particular, seem to not listen to one another or even respond to one another directly. In many conversations the lack of empathy and understanding that must be overcome is palpable. Still, Gerwig and Kirke are able to create a gratifying sense of connection and create a necessary sense of empathy for two characters who often behave terribly toward others.

Brooke, as much as she initially appears like the ideal older sister to Tracy, is quickly revealed to be misguided and generally exhausting. Pretentious, delusional, and manipulative in turn, she would be steps away from a cartoonish villain if not for Gerwig's restraint. She is difficult to like, and in a film that can

feel almost absurdist, Gerwig's performance must deliver on the difficult challenge set by Gerwig and Baumbach's writing; she must convince the viewer to not only enjoy watching Brooke but also sympathize with her. And on that front both Gerwig and Kirke deliver beautifully.

***20th Century Women* (2016) – Directed and Written by Mike Mills**



A24

20th Century Women is a character-driven film rooted in a moment in American history, a film that explores American generations and where they conflict, overlap, interact. The film's ensemble cast is drawn with nuance and variation, with Annette Bening, Greta Gerwig, and Elle Fanning given specificity while also being used to represent the lot in life of different generations of women in 1979.

Gerwig's Abbie Porter, born in the '50s, is a photographer and music fan, and a woman recovering from cervical cancer. Abbie as a character doesn't necessarily dominate screen time when compared to Bening's Dorothea or her son Jacob (Lucas Jade Zumann). But she carries a good deal of the tragedy present in the film, and her scenes have some of the strongest emotional impact. Her character brings a welcoming warmth to her interactions, particularly

with Jacob, and is remarkably fun to watch. The energy behind her uninhibited dancing, for instance, is infectious and charming. But there is also a quiet sadness, loneliness, and helplessness that emerges, particularly when she confronts her health issues. And in these moments, the pain Gerwig conjures feel absolutely raw, believably from a deeply vulnerable place.

***Lady Bird* (2017) – Directed and Written by
Greta Gerwig**



A24

It is no wonder that the naturalism, sensitivity, and sincerity that Greta Gerwig brings to her performances would also be present in her solo directorial debut, *Lady Bird*, starring Saoirse Ronan as Christine “Lady Bird” McPherson and Laurie Metcalf as her mother, Marion.

One of *Lady Bird*’s greatest strengths, and likely why it resonates with so many, is that every conversation, every argument, and every awkward moment feels undeniably true. Every character, scene, and moment feels representative of a real interaction, a both universal yet specific type of person, experience, and memory. *Lady Bird* in many ways exemplifies what films have the capacity to do. Despite the differences that may exist between your own upbringing and

Christine's, there is something almost transcendent of time and demographic that Gerwig and the incredible performances of Ronan and Metcalf were able to tap into that moved my mother, me, and so many others.

Coming-of-age stories seem to have slightly fallen out of fashion in the past decade, with few exceptions. In a similar way to romantic comedies, they seem to be too saccharine or sincere for an audience either expecting comedy to have more bite, or drama to have life-or-death, high concept stakes. But that *Lady Bird* has resonated with people is no surprise; emotional insight is timeless if executed well, and *Lady Bird* has the kind of remarkable quality that proves that to tap into universality one can, in fact, start from the most personal and most specific source material.

Featured Image: IFC Films

SHARE:



< PREVIOUS

NEXT >

[Bright is a Well-Intentioned Mess](#)

[Ode to a Forgotten Captain: On Top 10s, Film Discourse, and Underpants](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Christina Tucker



Christina is formerly an art history student, currently an aspiring film critic, screenwriter, and/or starving artist. Born and raised in Michigan, she is currently based in New York City.

RELATED POSTS



Aliens and Goonies: Friendship in Children's Adventure Movies

July 3, 2014



Cinema Saints: Judd Apatow

July 17, 2015



Two Blackhat Two Podcast

January 6, 2016



What We're Watching: 01/15/2015

January 15, 2015

