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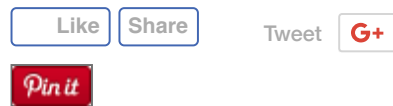


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Film Review: While We're Young

Sharply observed, often LOL comedy about artistic integrity and the shrinking horizons of middle age.

By [Erica Abeel \(Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/93\)](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/93) Mar 23, 2015



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In his delicious new outing, Noah Baumbach expands on the issues that bedeviled Ben Stiller as the eponymous protagonist of *Greenberg*. Once again he taps Stiller to play a malcontent artist and thwarted achiever who, through bad timing, bad luck, cluelessness—or a combo thereof—has fallen far short of his own expectations. While *Greenberg* was a New York fish out of water in L.A., the new film's Josh, based in Brooklyn, seems equally at odds with his environs. An unsuccessful documentarian, he's married to Cornelia (Naomi Watts), a producer whose father (Charles Grodin) is a famous documentary maker along the lines of Frederick Wiseman, his very existence constantly reminding Josh of his own failure.

L.A., of course, always makes good fodder for satire, yet in *Greenberg* Baumbach held his fire. Not so in *While We're Young*, where he targets the type of pretentious, aspirational forty-somethings associated with upscale Brooklyn, tapping into a new vein of LOL humor at their expense. Baumbach draws guffaws, too, with his sendup of hipsters and a younger cut of strivers (inspired by his partnership with Greta Gerwig?), who are displacing the so-yesterday Josh and seem puzzled by such old-school issues as integrity.

While We're Young announces a key theme in the opening scene of Cornelia making goo-goo eyes at a baby—which cleverly meshes with the ending. Turns out the adorable tyke belongs to their best friends (a fine Maria Dizzia and hilarious Adam Horovitz, who resembles every harried dad in Park Slope). Though outwardly happy, forty-something Josh and Cornelia have missed out on becoming parents; in funny/sad scenes they earnestly rationalize the joys of childlessness (“You can fly to Paris for the weekend”). Compounding their discontent, Josh can neither finish nor fund the bloated Casaubon-like doc he’s shooting about Important Issues in America (the subject’s never clear) and earns a living teaching in a community college.

Into this rickety union walks Young Turk Jamie (Adam Driver), another doc maker, and his girlfriend Darby (Amanda Seyfried), creator of designer ice cream, after the pair flatter Josh by lauding his earlier overlooked films. Despite Cornelia’s resistance, Josh becomes smitten with the younger couple, seduced by their hipster, freewheeling style, even going so far as to ape Jamie’s cool fashion-forward look. Act II offers Baumbach opportunities aplenty for comic bits, including Cornelia’s fixation on her new hip-hop class (Watts getting down with the moves is a hoot), a hallucinogenic “Ayahuasca party,” and a rockabilly singalong for mothers and their babies. In a priceless cameo, a hedgeie (Ryan Serhant) who funds films sits toying with his iPhone while Josh pitches his convoluted film script.

Once Jamie persuades Josh and Cornelia to collaborate on his new documentary, the love affair sours. Not only is Cornelia higher on Jamie’s work than on her husband’s—Jamie’s trumped-up approach to filmmaking, which juggles facts with storytelling effects, offends Josh’s standard of (decidedly less sexy) truthfulness. During an evening at Lincoln Center to celebrate the career of his father-in-law, in a terrific set-piece Josh vents his rage at Jamie for debasing the art of documentary by dragging it into a murky netherworld where fact blurs into fiction.

Ben Stiller as an actor is an acquired taste, but he turns in a performance best with this aria of a frustrated artist who rages against getting overtaken by a culture with standards that don’t jibe with his own. Baumbach withholds judgment, delivering no easy resolution, which adds to the film’s way-cool style. Jamie may be ruthless, but Josh’s flabby-willed approach has stood in his way. A scene-stealer from the start, Adam Driver nails the sleazy hustler with such offbeat charm you forgive him everything. (Thank you, Lena Dunham, for discovering this actor!) In *While We're Young*—his most Woody Allen-esque film—Baumbach confirms his status as a canny observer of East Coast neurotics, expanding his terrain by marrying sly comedy to a film of ideas.

Click [here \(http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1791682/?ref=nm_sr_1\)](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1791682/?ref=nm_sr_1) for cast and crew information.

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