



FILM: **20th Century Women**

FDG RATING: 3.4 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Mike Mills: *director*
Annette Bening: *actress, Dorothea*
Lucas Jade Zumann: *actor, Jaime*
Elle Fanning: *actress, Julie*
Greta Gerwig: *actress, Abbie*

DATE: September 20, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **20th Century Women**

The title **20th Century Women** is a bit pretentious for a film that takes place in a very short, specific and unique slice of time: 1979 in Santa Barbara, California, where feminism is in full bloom. At the heart of the story is single mom Dorothea's 15-year-old son, Jamie Fields, who Dorothea believes could be best ushered into manhood by the young women in their midst: punk artist/photographer Abbie who rents a room upstairs in Dorothea's large ramshackle Victorian house (under renovation), and self-absorbed, precocious, teen neighbor, Julie, who has an odd relationship with Jamie, frequently sneaking over to chastely sleep next to him. Each of the three females are a bit ditsy, which irked a few female resident reviewers who would have preferred the phrase "20th century women" be applied to the notable rebellious females who stood up for women's rights. And why Dorothea believes Abbie and Julie would be better than a male to indoctrinate her son, is a question that was repeatedly raised.

The mother was likeably flawed, allowing her son liberal freedom and rolling with the punches as one discussion participant noted. When her son takes off on a road trip without letting her know, her free spirited response is "you should have let me know so I wouldn't have dinner ready." Contrived, lack of depth, loose and disjointed were some of the negative comments as well as noting that the death and cancer themed elements were unnecessarily depressing. The voice over narration threads worked for some viewers but others found it annoying. None the less, we gave the film quite a few high marks noting the excellent performance of Annette Bening, some laugh-out-loud funny scenes, and the unique diversity of the characters. We liked being transported to the 70s with the music (Talking Heads), cars (Ford Mavericks, Galaxies, VW Beetles), clothes (short shorts, halter tops, Dorothea's Birkenstock sandals), macramé plant hangers. The psychedelic coloration in some scenes was icing on the cake.

Jamie, a skateboarding loner, actually is the most grounded of the characters. His statement to his mom at the end of the film underscores the silliness of his mom's ardent efforts.

Our scores wallowed in several lows of 1s and 2s, leaped to a few maximum 5s (one of our most critical resident reviewers gave it a 5), with the rest hopping around the middle resulting in a moderately formed 3.4 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best)

Footnote:

For director Mike Mills, "20th Century Women," set in 1979 and centering on three female characters and their influence on a 15-year-old boy, was chiefly inspired by Mills' relationship with his mother, with bits and pieces of the two younger women drawn from his older sisters.



See you at the movies!

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