



FILM: **CALL ME BY YOUR NAME**

FDG RATING: 3.3 ☺☺☺☺○

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

Luca Guadagnino: *director*
Timothée Chalamet: *actor, Elio*
Armie Hammer: *actor, Oliver*
Michael Stuhlbarg: *actor, Mr. Perlman*

DATE: January 21, 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **CALL ME BY YOUR NAME**

Call Me By Your Name is a beautifully filmed coming of age story about the sexual awakening of a precocious 17 year old boy during a summer romance with a 24 year old male grad student who is assisting the boy's father with research and staying at the family's secluded 17th century villa in Northern Italy. The young teen, Elio, enjoys a serene, tranquil, privileged, heavily cultural-academic life. His parents are Jewish intellectuals who have turned their countryside villa into a scholarly retreat.

Some of us were completely immersed in the lazy, heat soaked days, watching the soft spoken, very intelligent and cultured teen tentatively realize his attraction to the handsome, confident, tanned, physically sculpted, carefree, a bit brash American, Oliver. The contrast in their physical and emotional maturity as well as personalities is purposely extreme. Oliver initiates a flirtatious relationship and Elio is at first resistant, then hesitant, but gradually becomes more comfortable with his sensual and romantic feelings for the worldly, experienced Oliver who romances the teen. The French girl who Elio had flirted with previously is quickly forgotten. For some of us, the attraction of Oliver for the much younger Elio was a little hard to accept. But for others, both were sublimely attractive males (almost reminiscent of Greek sculptures), intelligent, and cultured, at an age where hormones can rage uncontrollably.

An idyllic summer romance in Italy is the plot of many films but this story also touches on the parents' nuanced relationship with their son and places the story in the context of Greek antiquities (an era known for homosexuality especially between adult men and adolescent boys) which is the subject of the father's research. One stunning scene was when the professor and his assistant are on the sand, examining a weathered, tarnished partial bronze sculpture of a nude young male that they have just dredged up from the Mediterranean. The handsomely sculpted relic draws attention to the physical sensuality of Oliver and Elio while the relic's decay speaks to how the passage of time can deteriorate physical elements as well as relationships.

One discussion participant summed up the film saying "It's about love and lust." Elio was experiencing the deep pangs of emotional young love, while for Oliver, it was more of a summer fling, something he seemed to be very good at. On one hand, Oliver was very convincing in the intimate scenes with Elio. On the other hand, the scene where they embraced and Oliver whispers "Call me by your name, and I'll call you by mine" could be an expression of extreme closeness, becoming one, or it could hint at Oliver's nature to suppress who he really is. Sensual desire emulates in almost every scene.

Another discussion participant said the film was about experiencing a deep soul love connection with another being. But even if some scenes seemed to show a deep loving connection between Elio and Oliver, Oliver later announces his engagement to a girl he has had an on-again, off-again relationship. So it could be said that Oliver was manipulative, taking advantage of Elio's naïve lack of experience. Or was Oliver helping Elio discover his deeper self? It also seems that Oliver accepts the secrecy of his own desires.

Maybe the real message is about not being afraid to experience relationships for what they have to offer even if they don't last. The father's monologue to his heartbroken son (Oliver has just left), at the end captures the heart of the film, "You had a beautiful friendship. Maybe more than a friendship. And I envy you." Yes, it's dad's acceptance of his gay son but also there's a hint of remorse that the father perhaps had passed up his own opportunity to experience a similar relationship. For some, it sounded less like a father speaking to his son and more like a therapist.

Most of our resident reviewers praised the film for its delicate storytelling, gorgeous cinematography, and excellent portrayal of the hesitation in a new relationship. Plus, the acting was outstanding. Michael Stuhlbarg plays the father, Mr. Perlman, with precision, balancing an intellectual academic whose emotions are measured but whose feelings are generous and sensitive. Both he and Amira Casar as the mother, had an aloof, laissez faire attitude toward their son. Timothée Chalamet as Elio is deservedly Oscar nominated for his role. Armie Hammer's performance as Oliver is also exceptional.

But the film's shortcomings bothered a few of our resident and virtual reviewers. "Lovingly crafted and beautifully filmed but definitely too slow and too long" was a repeated sentiment. Another thought the relationship was too fraught with drama about getting together. One reviewer described the film as Hallmark-esque. The family seemed too sophisticated for some resident critics. A few wondered why it was important to identify the family as Jewish. A virtual participant pointed out one really bothersome flaw: the blond Jewish grad student looked out of place, despite wearing the Star of David around his neck as proof. This reviewer said you could put Oliver in a long black coat, Hassidic beaver hat, add side curls and a tallis and he would still look like a WASP country club kid.

One interesting comment was that maybe the dad and mom were contriving these relationship experiences for their son since this scholar assistant was an attractive male, and they mention the next one is a female. An insightful participant explained that the affair defines them both: It's the love that Oliver embraces but can't accept — and the one that allows Elio to open the door to who he is.

So whether we were particularly interested in the theme or not, and despite the flaws, there were enough cinematic achievements to elevate the film above an average score. On our scale of 1 to 5 (5 is best), Call Me By Your Name earned a 3.3.

See you at the movies! Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net

www.filmdiscussiongroup.com

