

**FILM: LICORICE PIZZA**

FDG RATING: 2.6 😊😊😊😊😊

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

Paul Anderson: *director/writer*
Cooper Hoffman: *actor, Gary*
Alana Haim: *actress, Alana*

DATE: April 17, 2022

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: LICORICE PIZZA

Licorice Pizza is a romp through 1970s San Fernando Valley, where an overly, self-confident, 15 year old boy, Gary Valentine, is infatuated with 25 year-old Alana, a photographer's assistant. He meets her when she is photographing his class for their school portraits. A child actor, with an optimistic entrepreneur spirit, Gary starts a variety of businesses such a retail water bed store, and next, a pin ball hangout, touching on the entertainment icons of the 70s. One discussion participant who spent time in San Fernando Valley during the 70s could totally relate to the characters and situations in the film. Discussion participants who grew up in the Midwest, for example, viewed it as absurd.

Alana actually becomes Gary's cohort, as the two pull off crazy scheme after scheme. A favorite scene is when Alana is driving the delivery truck with Gary in passenger seat, up a steep, windy private road to deliver a water bed to Barbra Streisand's boyfriend, Jon Peters (Bradley Cooper is perfect in his bell bottom leisure suit). They run out of gas and she needs to back it down what must be Mulholland Drive, to get to the gas station. Another favorite is seeing Sean Penn as William Holden, pontificating to Alana as they sit in a booth in a restaurant.

Some of us were thoroughly entertained and enjoyed the comedic spoof of the 70s. You really did feel as if you were there with so many nostalgic details such as the gas lines and the campaign headquarters. Others thought it was a ridiculous adventure and couldn't understand why a 25 year old young lady, even though she was rather directionless, would be interested in spending so much time with a 15 year old boy. Positive comments included "fresh" and "authentic" while others thought the few funny scenes weren't enough. "A forgettable film" was one of the more negative comments. Another resident critic pointed out that the age discrepancy was uncomfortable, suggesting that if the roles were switched and Gary was 25 while Alana was 15, it would be even more disturbing. Other tasteless scenes were in the Chinese restaurant when the husband speaks to his wife in English with a mocking fake Chinese accent, explaining he doesn't speak Chinese. It wasn't funny and added nothing to the story. Also, the acting agent tells Alana that she has a good Jewish nose which might help her get certain parts. Also, not funny.

Despite many glowing published reviews and a nomination for a 2022 best film Oscar, we were split on this coming of age story. We agreed the acting was excellent and the nostalgia was convincing, but most of us couldn't buy into the Gary-Alana relationship and how their young lives were completely enveloped in the LA-Hollywood movie industry. We learn that the film's title, Licorice Pizza, refers to round shaped black vinyl records, but the mention is so brief, it seems insignificant. Just as the film felt insignificant to most in our discussion group, no matter how you slice it, Licorice Pizza received a soggy score of 2.6 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)

Footnote:

The director/writer, Paul Thomas Anderson, had a best friend growing up in San Fernando Valley, who was like so many kids he knew. They had agents and headshots, they got to leave school early for auditions, they had parents who would schlep them all over town to pursue their dreams of stardom.

Anderson's earlier films are very different from Licorice Pizza and several discussion participants praised Phantom Thread, The Master, and There Will Be Blood while having little to say about Licorice Pizza.



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net
www.filmdiscussiongroup.com