

THE STATION AGENT

Rated R

While tending to review current movies, I sometimes find the unusual among the stacks at the local video store and feel they make worthy choices as well. *"The Station Agent"* is one such movie. The winner of several Sundance Film Festival awards; it was pronounced a "treasure" by film critics Ebert and Roeper. I would agree.

A story about a man with dwarfism whose hobby is train spotting does not sound like an inspiring tale, but *"The Station Agent"* is a remarkable achievement in making it just that. Relocating to a fairly remote area where he has inherited some property, the main character becomes very popular - not because of his cute dwarfism, but because he exhibits an inner strength that enables people to eventually see past his physical deformity. Superb acting by all the cast, and wonderful contrasts between their inner lives and the outer personas they use to deal with the everyday superficialities of the world (including meeting new people). The film is beautiful, uplifting, realistic, without ever becoming cheesy or moralizing. A joy to behold.

The main character in this delightful story is Finn, a young man who has led a very stable and predictable life. Yet, in one day that predictability is shattered when his best friend and business partner collapses on the floor of their shop and dies. In short order, Finn loses his home, his occupation, and his regimented lifestyle. The silver lining in this tragedy is that he inherits a piece of property, something he had no clue about. To Finn's surprise, the property is an out-of-date train station. Trains are Finn's passion and, although the train station is literally unlivable, he settles in to make it his new home. He plans to live a quiet, predictable life just as he has in the past. But that is not what life has in store for Finn.

Parked directly across from the train station is a roadside lunch counter operating out of a converted RV. Its proprietor, Joe, is aching for conversation and friendship, and quickly tries to seek out Finn's company. Finn also meets, or more accurately is nearly run over by, Olivia, a 40 something artist who is deeply distraught over the death of her son.

Finn works hard to keep Olivia and Joe out of his life, but their persistence results in Finn opening up to them about his life and coming to view them as valuable companions. Over time, the friendship that develops is both sweet and enchanting; particularly in light of the emotional needs each character brings to their relationship.

This film was a real highlight, I am very glad I chose to see it. *"The Station Agent"* shows how looks do not make the person, it was very touching as well as funny to see Joe not care that Finn was a dwarf, unlike the rest of the world. The relationships between all the characters seemed so real. The film showed that everyone has strengths and weaknesses on some level; that true friends are worth having around. At first I thought the ending was not the best, partly due to the fact I never wanted the film to end, but then I realized that it was the proper ending for a film which started with a lonely man and finished with a true group of friends.

The movie reminds us of our own childhood memories, of being a kid and hanging out with friends, of not having every minute structured and planned. Yet it also reminds us of the isolation and estrangement of modern society and the importance and impact of friendships. "*The Station Agent*" does a superb job of showing how our outer facades are often nothing like our inner struggles. Rated R for language, a sexual situation, and alcohol and drug usage but this movie is wonderfully crafted and exceptional in revealing the deep emotions of its characters in a way that is authentic. Best film of the year.

By *Curt Levang*