

Film Review: While We're Young (Noah Baumbach, 2015)



I feel terrible for admitting it, but my expectations for Noah Baumbach's follow up to the near perfect Frances Ha were worryingly low. I have a slight issue with Ben Stiller; an actor who has struggled to make a really good, funny film since 2008's Tropic Thunder. His appearance in a Baumbach film made me uneasy; a director known for comedy that's slick, natural and engrained in dialogue – the antithesis of Stiller's style.

Saying this, I knew the time would come when I would want to catch the latest from a personal favourite director of mine. Noah Baumbach is cinema's go-to man for breezy, natural comedy. There's a lack of pretence in his work that thankfully is palpable in his latest piece; the sharp and witty, While We're Young.

For filmmaker Josh (Ben Stiller) and his wife Cornelia (Naomi Watts), life has grown stagnant. A series of failed pregnancies and a burden of a documentary in the making has made their days mundane. But, with a midlife crisis fast approaching, they are given a new lease of life when they become friends with a free spirited couple (Adam Driver, Amanda Seyfried) almost half their age.

To put it simply, this is Stiller's strongest performance in years; playing a man eager to be influenced and desperate to be respected by anyone. It requires little effort to create this character, but with Baumbach's influence, he manages to deliver a performance free of the brash sensibilities he's usually given. Naomi Watts manages to complete the double act with a satisfying amount of lax.

Adam Driver is the true star here; a role most likely written for him as the director's right hand man, he plays the hipster that seemingly falls at Stiller's feet. His dialogue feels natural, and his discerning amount of charm is a central part of the film's great enjoyability.

Plot wise, this might just be one of Noah Baumbach's most elaborate pieces of work. While a lot of his scripts thrive off of simplicity, *While We're Young* feels taut and complex for him; brilliantly thought out and imaginative in its progression. It reminds me, on a certain level of a less infantile *Bad Neighbours*; more art references than crude anatomical ones. But its characters, as they grow and unfold become multifaceted in the most delicious fashion; right up to a conclusion that, whilst not being overly gratifying, can be forgiven for the film's strength throughout.

For many people, this was Noah Baumbach's test in unfamiliar, mainstream waters. Thankfully, he passes with flying colours. We can forgive it for finishing in an unsatisfying way; it is simply dwelling on the way in which we all wind up. *While We're Young's* characters are *people* above all else; quick-witted and tangible, refreshing and brilliantly performed – allowing us to think that Baumbach *might* just be Woody Allen's worthy successor.

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While We're Young opens at the Cameo on Home St on Friday April 3rd