

## Boyhood: A Triumph From Beginning To End

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In a movie universe filled with *Tammy*, *Sex Tape* and yet another go around of *Transformers*, one would think that Hollywood's slow crawl toward mediocrity officially morphed into a mad dash. Not so. And we have filmmaker [Richard Linklater](#) to thank.



Universal Pictures

With *Boyhood* (\*\*\*\* out of four/Rated R), the writer/director who sired the rich, dialogue-driven *Before Sunrise/ Before Sunset/ Before Midnight* trilogy creates a cinematic masterpiece that unravels with sublime grace and haunting realism. As courageous as it is breathtaking, the offering hearkens back to the thing that originally attracted the masses into the screening room in the glory days of the late 1960s and early 1970s: real "cinema." We could argue for eons about when the vast majority of film experiences ceased being an "experience" and just another two hours to numb out before heading onto another mind-numbing experience in the real world. The point is this: Works of art this profound and moving are rare. Best to dip our psyche into them when we can.

Shot in sequence over the course of 12 years, and filming three to four days each year—think about

that undertaking for a moment because only an artist would dare to "go there"—the filmmaker chronicles the life and maturation of a Texas boy, Mason (Ellar Coltrane), from age 7 through 19. Mason and his sister Samantha (Lorelei Linklater, the filmmaker's daughter) live with their divorced mother Olivia (Patricia Arquette in fine form) and enjoy occasional visits from their artistic father, Mason Sr. ([Ethan Hawke](#), a Linklater alum). The ripple effects of the parents' estrangement are felt by both of the children and "over the years," we witness a subtle stunted emotional development; a kind of deadening of the soul if you will, even though both Mason and Samantha employ the same adolescent cravings as their peers.

My, the human condition can be haunting but, oh, is it ever refreshing to see a set of lives blossom and deplete and shift and endure without the slather of a frightened producer's manipulation.

"People acted as if it would be scary," Hawke noted of the shoot-it-in-12-years concept in a recent interview. "It was such a good idea."

Meanwhile Arquette admitted that the first time she was told about the idea, "I felt that the sky opened up. I was so excited about the concept. [The film business] is such a 'banking' business at this point. I thought, 'how are you going to finance something 13 years ahead of time?'"

And without a traditional script to boot. Linklater's concept grew, for the most part, organically and mostly from his own intuition. Each sequence we see—each year in Mason's life—has have its own feel. There are times when some life events are more challenging for Mason to move through—Olivia's penchant for attracting unstable men for instance—while others give us a glimpse of his interests (photography) and the philosophical soul he seems to becoming. Surprisingly, Hawke's Mason Sr.—the "unstable" father—emerges as the most emotionally stable of the bunch here and mostly because the character knows who he is and does not apologize for it. The others, especially Olivia, grapple to find something on the outside to satisfy the emptiness and confusion inside. There's a delicious line toward the end of the film which I dare not give away but most of us can relate to Olivia's conundrum.

But make no mistake: Ultimately, we're here for Mason, and while most movies have a beginning, middle and end—and most scenes for that matter—*Boyhood* presents something different and far more authentic. As Mason grows, so, too, does our emotional investment in him. Think of how you, yourself, feel about those to whom you are the most closest. Watching *Boyhood* evokes similar feelings. In many ways, Mason is ours—to cherish, to worry about, to question. We're befuddled when we have to leave him in the end and curiously craving some more time with him.

That's quite a feat for Linklater and the overall experience we're left with is a kind of wildly fascinating labyrinth filled with soulful rumination. *Boyhood* is not just one of the best films of the year—it is one of the finest film experiences of the last decade.



## **Greg Archer**

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