

'Coming Through the Rye': Film Review

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Courtesy of Life Out Loud Films

Holden Caulfield would have approved. [TWITTER](#)

Oscar winner Chris Cooper plays reclusive author J.D. Salinger in this coming-of-age tale set in the late 1960s.

We've seen other films about fans setting out to meet a famous idol — a reclusive singer or movie star or writer, for example. But few of these movies have the charm of *Coming Through the Rye*, the tale of a boy determined to track down his hero, J.D. Salinger. The film has been shown at a few smaller festivals around the country, frequently winning awards along the way, but is still seeking a distributor. Although it won't set the box office on fire, it will definitely find an appreciative audience, and a savvy distributor could capitalize on the rising profiles of the two young leads, Alex Wolff and Stefania LaVie Owen (both of whom have major movies in the pipeline), as well as the presence of Oscar winner Chris Cooper, who has a superb cameo as Salinger.

Writer-director James Sadwith, who directed several Emmy-winning TV shows in the 1990s, admits that the story was inspired by his own youthful journey in search of Salinger. The time is the late 1960s, and Jamie Schwartz (Wolff) is consigned to a Pennsylvania prep school, not so different from the one that

Holden Caulfield fled in Salinger's iconic novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Like many adolescents of the era, Jamie is obsessed with Salinger's novel and has even turned it into a play that he wants to produce at school. But to do that, he needs Salinger's permission. School authorities assure him that will be impossible, but Jamie is undeterred and manages to entice a local girl, Deedee (Owen), to drive him to New Hampshire to find the mysterious author and argue his case in person.

Early scenes that depict Jamie's bullying by the popular kids at school and his infatuation with the local blonde bombshell are well observed, but they tread fairly familiar ground. The film builds intensity once Jamie and Deedee head to New Hampshire. Deedee isn't the glamorous type that Jamie envisions for himself, so Deedee has to make the romantic overtures. Their relationship is sharply observed throughout. She's appreciative of his intelligence and determination, but she also recognizes his weaknesses, so we can sense that they are well matched long before Jamie realizes it.

The scenes of Jamie grilling the New Hampshire locals for their knowledge of Salinger's whereabouts are wonderfully droll. The casting of these minor roles is spot-on, as the *American Gothic* citizens parry with this outsider to conceal the homestead of their most famous resident. Jamie finally finds people who are willing to spill the beans, and he locates his hero. Cooper strikes just the right notes in his two scenes as Salinger. He's stubborn, intimidating, but not cruel; he has the sharp intelligence of an artist as well as a convincing weariness in fending off someone who is obviously not the first fan trying to penetrate his solitude.

Cooper seizes control of the movie when he's onscreen, but the two young leads are also enormously appealing. Wolff, the younger brother of Nat Wolff, recently appeared in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2* and has been cast as one of the terrorist brothers in the upcoming film about the Boston Marathon bombings, *Patriots Day*. He conveys exactly the right mixture of confidence, determination and vulnerability. Owen, who stars in Katie Holmes' upcoming directorial debut, *All We Had*, also has an unforced, low-key magnetism. These two young actors have an irresistible chemistry.

Sadwith works expertly with all of the castmembers, and he also brings visual flair to the pastoral scenes in New Hampshire. Eric Hurt's cinematography is a strong asset. Sadwith's writing is equally perceptive. Even the minor characters at the prep school come alive, and the backstory of Jamie's dissipated older brother and his stint in Vietnam is well integrated and adds some gravitas to the adolescent hijinks. All of the story's motifs come together for a climax that packs an unexpected emotional wallop.

Production: River Band Pictures, Red Hat Films

Cast: Alex Wolff, Stefania LaVieOwen, Chris Cooper, Jacob Leinbach, Eric Nelsen, Kabby Borders, Zephyr Benson, Adrian Pasdar

Director-screenwriter: James Sadwith

Producers: Stan Erdreich, Teddy Grennan, James Sadwith

Co-producer: Sara Elizabeth Timmins

Executive producers: Alexandra Woodward, Jeff Steen

Director of photography: Eric Hurt

Production designer: Jack Ryan

Costume designer: Sasha Long

Editor: Todd Holmes

Music: Jay Nash, Heath McNease, Greg LaFollette Not rated, 97 minutes