

Search for Salinger in the 'Rye'

James Verniere Friday, October 28, 2016



Credit: Courtesy

Chris Cooper as author J.D. Salinger in "Coming Through the Rye." Photo from movie site.

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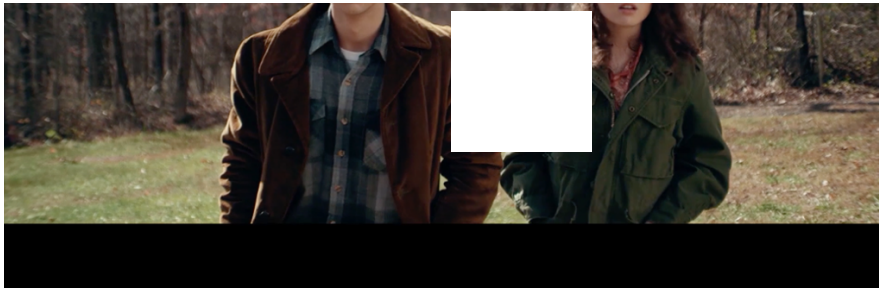
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Coming Through the Rye

ScreenPlay





“Coming Through the Rye”

Rated PG-13. At Coolidge Corner Theatre.

Grade: B+

Inspired by J. D. Salinger’s 1951 classic coming-of-age novel “The Catcher in the Rye,” writer-director James Steven Sadwith’s “Coming Through the Rye” tells the story of a maladjusted young man in tumultuous 1969 America who is determined to meet J. D. Salinger (Chris Cooper). The young man plans to get Salinger to agree to allow him to adapt “The Catcher in the Rye” to the stage.

The story, which grows on you in spite of some cliched dialogue, begins with Jamie Schwartz (Alex Wolff, who plays Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in the upcoming “Patriots Day”) asking his

faculty adviser (Adrian Pasdar) at Crampton Prep in Pennsylvania if he can adapt J.D. Salinger's novel to the stage and play Salinger's immortal anti-hero Holden Caulfield as an independent study.

In flashbacks, we also meet Jamie's screw-up older brother Gerry (Zephyr Benson), who got thrown out of a boarding school and was in danger of being sent to Vietnam. Jamie feels that Holden speaks to him, and he identifies very strongly with the character. Like Holden, Jamie has troubles at school, where he has made enemies of the entire football team, been attacked and had his dorm room vandalized.

When Jamie starts out on a quest to go to New Hampshire to find Salinger, local townie girl Deedee (an appealing Stefania Owen) goes with him, although his heart at first belongs to shapely shiksa Maureen (Kabby Borders).

As a coming-of-age tale, "Coming Through the Rye" stands out from the usual American indie mix because of its literary ties and thankfully abandons the "trick" of having Jamie address the audience directly. Wolff may not give the definitive Holden Caulfield-esque performance as the troubled, tormented, somewhat wimpy Jamie, who may also be homosexual. But the actor grows on you.

In his limited scenes as Salinger, Academy Award-winner Cooper brings the fire we associate with his highly accomplished work. His Salinger explains that director Elia Kazan (“On the Waterfront”) offered him a million dollars to bring “The Catcher in the Rye” to the screen (I think they just retitled it “Rebel Without a Cause”). Cooper’s Salinger fiercely explains why he will not allow anyone, especially a schmo like Jamie, to “interpret” his book and change it in any way (Salinger was also the subject of a problematic, recent documentary titled “Salinger”).

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“Coming Through the Rye,” which was shot in Virginia, features wonderful landscape photography by Eric Hurt, and the film actually gets better as you watch it, although I could have done

without the emo music that arrives as if on cue, punctuating every emotionally fraught scene.

(“Coming Through the Rye” contains profanity and sexually suggestive dialogue and scenes.)

Kingston, Mass., resident Chris Cooper will be present at the Coolidge Corner showing of “Coming Through the Rye,” along with the film’s writer-director, at 3 p.m. on Sunday