



Note from Santa Barbara International Film Festival's Executive Director Roger Durling

Description

Dear Cinephiles,

The indie film "Little Men" was the Critics' Pick by the New York Times. We're attaching the review below.

I'm a huge fan of this movie and director's Ira Sachs' work. You may have seen his previous film "Love is Strange."

This coming of age story is warm and smart and as the NY Times points out "something richer and harder to classify." It plays tonight at 5:00pm and tomorrow at 7:30pm at the Riviera Theatre.

See you at the movies!
Roger Durling

Get tickets by [clicking here.](#)



In *Little Men*, Boys Develop a Bond That Is Threatened by Money

By A.O. Scott • The New York Times

There is hardly a shortage of buddy movies about mismatched men bonding under duress, but films that chart the emotional weather of everyday male friendship are rare. Literature has more to offer, at least as far as boys are concerned. Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn have a rich and renewable legacy. And it may be that association that imparts a novelistic vibe to Ira Sachs's *Little Men*, beyond the Louisa May Alcott echo in the title. It's a subtle movie, alert to the almost imperceptible currents of feeling that pass between its title characters.

They are Jake Jardine (Theo Taplitz) and Tony Calvelli (Michael Barbieri), two middle schoolers who cross paths in Brooklyn. I almost ended that sentence "and fall in love," a possibly misleading but not at all inaccurate account of what happens. The childhood bond that the psychologist Harry Stack Sullivan called "chumship" can be as intense and mysterious as romantic love, and can be sparked by the kind of intuitive connection that arises between Jake and Tony when they first meet.

Jake, pale and reserved, is an exile from Manhattan, flung across the East River by the tides of family fortune. His father, Brian (Greg Kinnear), might be described as a struggling actor if it didn't seem that the fight had mostly gone out of him. He works, but he mostly worries, tries to be a nice guy and feels guilty when he fails at it. Jake's mother, Kathy (Jennifer Ehle), who is a bit more decisive, is a therapist, and her smiling demeanor acts as a shield against the unspoken tensions hovering in the air whenever she and her husband are together.

The family moves into an apartment that used to belong to Brian's father, whose death is the movie's precipitating catastrophe. The old man also owned the building where Tony's mother, Leonor (Paulina Garc a) runs a dress shop, and if *Little Men* is a love story it is also a tale of economic conflict in a rapidly changing city, a fable about the insidious, toxic power of money and real estate.

Jake's grandfather is recalled as a big-hearted bohemian of the kind that used to be more plentiful in New York. "He loved me," Leonor says, perhaps hinting that they were lovers but more pointedly explaining why he charged her so little rent. Brian, urged on by his sister, wants to raise it. As the dispute between them escalates, it casts a shadow over Jake's relationship with Tony.

All the grown-ups think they are being perfectly reasonable as they dig in their heels and allow a business matter to turn into a personal grudge. None of them can help it; everyone needs money. Their behavior – the politesse that grows increasingly cold, the contempt that seethes among people who believe themselves to be not only right but righteous – is dismaying, but hardly surprising.

It's also not really the point. Mr. Sachs holds the adults at arm's length, declining either to judge them too harshly for their selfishness or to extend them more than minimal sympathy for their difficulties. In other words, "Little Men" is on the side of Jake and Tony, as both a narrative strategy and a moral choice. Their temperaments and backgrounds are different, as are their interests. Jake is a hothouse flower, his artistic talents and sensitivities carefully cultivated by his parents. Tony, whose father travels for work and is almost never at home (Hernan, a friend of Leonor's played by Alfred Molina, is around a lot), is more of a free-range kid. He's gregarious and easygoing and dreams of being an actor. The two boys conceive a plan to apply to a specialized arts high school together.

When parents are around, "Little Men" feels like a modest, precise drama of urban life, but when it follows Tony and Jake, absorbing the loose rhythms of their companionship, the film becomes something richer and harder to classify. It's a boys adventure story edged with unspoken risks, and the young actors take the kind of chances that their more careful and disciplined elders have been trained to avoid. There are inklings of sexual desire between the boys and implications of homophobia in the world around them, but mostly there is a sense of discovery and change, of all the unruly and enigmatic experiences often collapsed into the phrase "coming-of-age."

There is also a protest against the banal imperatives of maturity, and above all against the ways that adults ignore and discount the emotional lives of the young. Kathy, Brian and Leonor would do anything for their sons except take their relationship seriously, and the possibility that something as precious and real as friendship could be sacrificed because of money registers as a profound insult.

And also as a fact of life. Mr. Sachs, in his last three features – this one, "Love Is Strange" and "Keep the Lights On" – has refined a style of emotional realism that stands out against both the mumbly diffidence and the sociological scorekeeping of too much independent American cinema. "Little Men" only looks like a small movie.

Category

1. Venice International Film Festival

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