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1226 N Salsipuedes Unit C 1(805)704-5994 |https://hollywoodglee.com Larry@HollywoodGlee.com



Summer of â??42, A Time of Lost Innocence and Reflection

Description

Reviewed by Larry Gleeson during the annual TCM 31 Days of Oscar.

Summer of â??42, directed by Robert Mulligan tells the story of three friends who vacation on an island in the Summer of â??42 and how certain events transform their lives. The film opens with montage of nostalgic photos set melancholic non-diegetic music. In turn, the beat increases in tempo becoming more upbeat and more pensive. The film won an Oscar for Best Music. Voice-over narration informs the audience of a time and place. the time is when the narrator was fifteen years old, and the place is an island where the narratorâ??s family came for summer vacation. It was a simpler time and a less hectic locale where loneliness tended to abound.



In the opening scene, Director of Photography, Robert Surtees uses an out of focus establishing shot before bringing a foregrounded flowered bed into focus eventually bringing the three running figures into focus on a beach. The narrator introduces his friends that summer, Oscy, his best friend, and Benji, his next to best friend. The three called themselves the Terrible Trio. They find themselves on a beachhead position to see a beach house with a young couple and its pile of freshly cut firewood. With an element of foreshadowing the narrator continues with,

â??That was her house. And nothing from that first day I saw her. And no one that has happened to me since been as frightening and confusing. For no person I have ever known has done more to make me feel more sure, more insecure, more important and less significant.â?•



The voice-over ends and the film transitions to the friends spending a typical summer day, horsing around and sharing moments of teen angst. In a vein similar to *American Graffiti,* the majority of the film centers around the relationships between Oscy and the narrator, Hermie. They meet girls, go on a double date to a Bette Davis flick, and spend a coming-of-age moment with their dates on the beach at night. Through it all, Hermie has his eyes on Dorothy (Jennifer Oâ??Neill), the attractive wife of a naval officer called to duty in World War II. Hermie befriends Dorothy helping her with carrying groceries and putting boxes into the attic.



When Dorothy receives news, her husband has perished everything changes and nothing will ever be the same. Dorothy departs for her home leaving a note for Hermie on the door of her beach house wishing Hermie well and to be kept safe from any senseless tragedy. The film concludes with a wistful voice-over narration from Hermie on the porch of Dorothyâ??s now vacant beach house,

â??I was never the see her again. Nor was I ever to learn what became of her. We were different then. Kids were different. It took us longer to understand the things we felt. Life is made up of comings and goingsâ?¦.and in the Summer of â??42â?¦, in a very special way, I lost Hermie forever.â?•



I first saw the â??Summer of â??42 when I was the same age as the Terrible Trio. The film had a profound impact on me despite not knowing any of the devices the filmmaker uses to elicit such a response. The musical score by Andre Hossein and Michael Legrand mixes highs and lows while changing pace with subtlety. The mise-en-scen, especially the cinematography, is done with an artful touch full of revelation at the beginning and ending of the narrative. In addition, Gary Grimesâ?? acting is excellent as he seems to convey the utmost emotionality at the precise moment needed. And Oâ??Neillâ??s presence onscreen is captivating. Also, Houser more than holds his own as Oscy.



Produced and distributed by Warner Brothers, the film came in with a runtime of one hour and forty-four minutes. The pacing is good. Very few dull moments. Pay close attention to the music and cinematography, especially at the beginning and end of *Summer of â??42*. Youâ??ll be glad you did! Highly recommended.

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hollywoodglee