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Wasted On The Young



Reviewed by: [Jennie Kermode](#)

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Rather misleadingly billed as a film about the dangers of the internet, *Wasted On The Young* is really quite an old fashioned film about what happens when an ugly incident transforms the dynamic within a high school that seems entirely free of adult influence. There are echoes of *Lord Of The Flies* and of [Heathers](#), though the tone is very different. Although the use of technology saturates the story it does nothing to disrupt the claustrophobia or the sense of isolation on which everything hinges. And like the best of this burgeoning subgenre, it has as much to say about adult social interaction as it does about youth.

Adelaide Clemens is Xandrie, one of those girls whose natural ease and sensibility seems at odds with a fragile appearance that never lets us forget she's only just out of childhood. Played at first with a remarkable lightness of touch, she easily charms, and the audience can't help rooting for her in her gentle pursuit of the sullen Darren (Oliver Ackland), who can't see past his own moodiness. Darren's mother, whom we never see, has married the father of Zack (Alex Russell), forcing Darren into uncomfortable domestic intimacy with this taller, stronger, cooler boy whom he continually resents. Zack likes to throw his weight around and his friends do likewise. But when Xandrie is raped at a party, Darren is plunged into a new world with much bigger concerns.

The decision to centre this film on Darren's journey means it is inevitably going to face some serious hurdles. Ackland is good and, through his performance, does an effective job of demonstrating that rape can damage whole communities, but in the process Xandrie is sidelined. An effective scene in which she challenges his capacity to help after the fact is undermined somewhat by a story arc that gradually whittles away her human complexity, leaving the boys in a deceptively simple moral landscape. Here Russell's natural charisma provides moments when audience sympathies may shift, but there are not enough of them, and hints that he may be facing inner demons are also pushed aside in favour of a more conventional narrative focused on Darren.






The biggest problem with this film is that, having established a scenario, it doesn't really know where to take it. Imagined scenes intersect with the film's reality, pointing out the possibilities, but the audience can probably imagine them just as well without that prompting. Nevertheless, this is an intelligent look at a difficult set of issues that's well suited to a young audience. Unlike films like [Elephant](#), with some similar subject matter, it assumes from the start that its protagonists are sophisticated enough to think through and discard more obvious scenarios. These are teenagers who feel real but who are not compromised by logic as much as they are compromised by their social circumstances and their inability to conceive of a world beyond that they know.

The film also benefits from being beautifully shot, with lots of bright open spaces that remind us we're not looking at problems that only happen on run down estates. Moments of visual darkness are well constructed and have more impact because of their rarity. Though the metaphors are a bit heavy handed the overall result is good and there are a number of talents involved here who will be worth looking out for in the future.

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After a girl is attacked at a party the social fabric of her high school begins to crumble, with dangerous consequences all round.



Director: [Ben C Lucas](#)

Writer: Ben C Lucas

Starring: [Oliver Ackland](#), [Adelaide Clemens](#), [Alex Russell](#)

Year: 2010

Runtime: 97 minutes

Country: Australia

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