

MOONRISE KINGDOM

TV presenter and musician Beric Livingstone on Wes Anderson's most effortlessly optimistic work

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STRAIGHTAWAY you can tell you're going to have a great couple of hours of Wes Anderson bingo. Right from the yellow-saturated tracking shots that open *Moonrise Kingdom*, you find yourself inferring themes (isolation, discontentment, the meaning of kindness, the struggle to be understood...) and reckoning you've figured the narrative style (a magic realist grand adventure, maybe?); very quickly you tick off symmetrical framing, deadpan delivery, the use of letters, views through lenses — check, check, check...



There are fairly few filmmakers that create worlds so distinctive that watching their movies feels like a return to somewhere very familiar. But the flipside of this is that you can assume their body of work adds up to just one story, told in different ways — and rate the particular film according to how well, in that instance, you think Lynch is ‘doing’ Lynch, or Tarantino’s ‘doing’ Tarantino. I love Wes Anderson’s movies. The intricacy, the humour, the visual flair, and all the bits that are so pleasingly out there. I’d seen most of them on release but had somehow missed *Moonrise Kingdom*. By the reckoning above, would I think it was the best example of Anderson doing Anderson? It’s definitely funny. The bone-dry dialogue is all there — “I’ll be out back,” says a pained Bill Murray to his kids as he walks past with an axe, “I’m going to find a tree to chop down” — and so’s the randomness. As Jared Gilman’s Sam and Kara Hayward’s Suzy — looking like a very young Charlie Sheen and Lana Del Rey — escape from respectively stultifying worlds, they fish a turtle from the water, which has ‘ALBERT’ written on its shell; we never find out why. But what the film does so well is convey the humour from a child’s-eye view. Frances McDormand summoning her family to dinner with a loud-hailer; Tilda Swinton’s ‘Social Services’ flying in like a mirthless Mary Pop-

pins.

Children on the verge of adulthood make ideal vehicles for Anderson's explorations of what we think we're sure about, when we're wrong — or what the world thinks we're wrong about, when we're right. "Sometimes I stick leaves in my hair: helps cool my head down," says a Sam keen to share his survival skills. "Yeah," Suzy replies, "might also help if you didn't wear a fur hat." Anderson has done rite-of-passage before, of course, but here the voices of the protagonists align so well with the narrative and visual style that things

click in a particularly pleasing way. As Sam and Suzy dance on the beach to a Françoise Hardy record, we cringe in recognition, and at the same time we smile. The intense, quizzical gaze of Robert Yeoman's camera (Yeoman's been Anderson's DP on almost all his films) captures so well both the sharpness of observation and the propensity to day-dream that growing up tends to dull.

Although Anderson's other long-time collaborators, Mark Mothersbaugh and Alexandre Desplat, both had a hand in the scoring, this isn't a soundtrack full of arch harpsichord; instead we're immersed in the slightly uncomfortable mellifluousness of Benjamin Britten, and his 'Noye's Fludde' is woven in neatly: Sam and Suzy meet during a performance in a church, and the same church becomes a symbolic ark, as both an actual storm and a surge of interfering adults threaten to overwhelm the two runaways. For a while it looks like there'll be no room for non-conformity in a world without the tools to understand difference, but where his other movies might have let things teeter on a bittersweet but ambiguous ledge, here Anderson is much more optimistic — interesting given he has spoken about the autobiographical elements of the story and the difficulties in his own life.

There's a possible clue in the film's dedication — "for Juman" — to his partner of two years at the time of release, Juman Malouf, who did some of the artwork. This is a world where what's beautiful or right or good can survive, and — some flesh wounds and a misplaced arrow notwithstanding — without excessive collateral damage.

Is Moonrise Kingdom the best example of Anderson doing Anderson? The most enjoyable game of Wes Anderson bingo? Arguably *The Royal Tenenbaums* is funnier and goes deeper; *The Life Aquatic* is more inventive; *The Grand Budapest Hotel* pushes the implausible adventure envelope further. But for me this movie, for all its artfulness, feels effortless in the way great things do. Maybe it's that alignment of stylistic elements with adolescent perspectives — or the good vibes of a Wes Anderson in love mean something brand-new is brought to the game. Whatever, I thought Moonrise Kingdom was terrific. Moonrise kingdom is out now on dvd, blu-ray and download