

## The Night Listener

In half of his recent film roles, Robin Williams plays the fool (as in the recent and execrable *RV*); in the other half, lately, he has been also specializing in weirdoes, disturbed loners, as in *The Final Cut*, *Insomnia*, and *One Hour Photo*. In his newest film, *The Night Listener*, he leans towards the latter, the dramatic and troubled Robin, but not the psychopathic one.

Williams plays Gabriel Noone, a late-night radio talkshow host, who, when we find him, has lost his on-air mojo after a break-up with his long-time boy friend Jess (Bobby Cannavale). He is bolstered however, when he hears from a long-time listener, Pete (Rory Culkin), a bright young man in Wisconsin who, abused terribly as a child, suffers various maladies and now lives with his adopted mother Donna Logand (Toni Collette).

Pete has, partly inspired by Gabriel, found a new life as a writer, a writer good enough to be recommended by Gabriel to his editor, Ashe (Joe Morton). Intrigued by Pete's promise and looking for new meaning in his life, Gabriel is eager to meet the young man, but his plans are thwarted, even when he drives to Wisconsin to meet personally with the young man and his mom. The plot thickens when Donna seems to be fending him off, deflecting him from any contact with Pete, and Gabriel begins to question the boy's very existence.

The film, directed by and co-written by Patrick Stettner, teeters on the line between character study and offbeat mystery, with side elements of celebrity worship and stalking. Gabriel is not so much the troubled loner this time—he appears to have a vivid and varied social life—as man-of-a-certain age feeling rejected and looking for consolation. Having an acolyte is as good a balm as he can imagine. As he comes to question the existence of that fan and begins his own detective story, Williams does harassed very well. For her part, Collette moves from sympathetic, to anxious, and eventually, menacing. She plays a character that slowly becomes obsessive about the care of her foster son.

*The Night Listener* ultimately promises more than it can deliver. If one is looking for a creepy, scary—and easy--dramatic denouement, the film doesn't offer that kind of catharsis. If one is hoping for some subtle or clever twist, that, too, is lacking. The film, as it follows Gabriel's quest, keeps you—as it does him—guessing and wondering about the outcome. The outcome itself, however, comes off as—is that all there is?

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