

## Jack Goes Boating

One of our best film actors, Philip Seymour Hoffman, makes his directorial debut in “Jack Goes Boating,” a slice of contemporary New York life about a pudgy, isolated loner who has his first (last?) chance at love. This is a “Marty” for the new millennium whose principal merit is tone-perfect.

Written for the screen by Bob Glaudini and based on his own play by (in which Hoffman originally starred), the movie finds Jack, a mildly morose, fairly inarticulate limo driver, set up for a date with Connie (Amy Ryan) by his only friends, a married couple, Clyde and Lucy (touchingly played by John Ortiz and Daphne Rubin-Vega). Connie is as nervous and tentative as Jack but, having no other options, quietly lets him try to romance her. His technique is to try to identify competences to impress Connie, such as cooking and swimming, for which, not surprisingly, he has shown zero aptitude (one such aim: to take Connie boating in the spring in a Central Park pond). But Jack’s dogged pursuit of new skills shows his genuine desire to do right by her.

“Jack Goes Boating” moves at a unhurried pace with some of the stumbling encounters between the principals reaching the excruciating (especially a dinner party gone spectacularly wrong), but the relationship that develops is never less than honest and believable, made more so by the excellent ensemble of four.

Hoffman directs himself with no vanity—with sizable paunch and ratty reggae-style hairdo in evidence—and nails down precisely this figure of lower-class angst. Yet it is Amy Ryan, as the shy but gently persistent Connie, who most exquisitely embodies her character, an unassuming woman with a hidden capacity to radiate human warmth and honest spirit. Ryan is a character actress who seems to grow significantly with each role, and here she triumphs with matchless naturalism.

*(Rated R, it runs 91 min.)*

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