



Wonder



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Julia Roberts, Jacob Tremblay, Owen Wilson, Izabella Vidovic, Mandy Patinkin, Noah Jupe, Emma Tremblay. Directed by Steve Chbosky.

Wonder is an appealing example of the feel-good film. Yes, it is highly emotional and often wears its heart on its sleeve. However, it is a film which believes in the basic goodness of human nature.

Before going into see this film, everybody will know that is about a young boy who has facial deformities, craniofacial difficulties, a very difficult birth, 27 operations for plastic surgery enabling him to both hear and to see well. As Auggie remarks, "it took 27 operations of plastic surgery to make me look this good!"

Strong praise is deserved by the actor, Jacob Tremblay. He made such an impression in the film, Room, playing Oscar-winning Brie Larsen's small son, that many thought he deserved an Oscar nomination himself. As Auggie here, he is completely believable and compelling. And he is aged 10.

It was a very smart move to cast Julia Roberts as Auggie's mother. Ever popular, but not so frequently on screen in recent years, she is both strong and loving as Auggie's mother, Isabel, who experienced the hardships of his difficult birth, has given up any hopes of a career and completing her thesis or developing her drawing skills, completely devoting herself to her son, even to homeschooling. Julia Roberts' fans will respond warmly to this film.

And, it was a very smart move, and a surprising one, to cast Owen Wilson, usually in comic roles, as Nate, Auggie's ever-supportive father. Owen Wilson fits very well into this role. Very strong support is given by Izabella Vidovic as Via, Auggie's older sister who had wanted a little brother when she was four but has had to accept always being in the background as the attention is given to her little brother. In fact, she goes to high school, suffers the unexpected spurning by her best friend but then is encouraged by a fellow student rehearsing for performance of Thornton Wilder's Our Town, she does get the benefit of her innate goodness and self-sacrifice.

Auggie goes to school. The students stare. They don't sit with him in the dining area. They are puzzled, some insulting, and, especially, Julian (Bryce Gheiser) who is one of those deputed to be kind to Auggie is guilty of some cruel bullying (and when the principal takes him to task in front of his parents, his mother is the most disagreeable character in the whole film making us realise that while everybody has goodness in them, there are some exceptions!). One of the other students, Jack (Noah Jupe, Matt Damon's son in Suburbicon,) has some friendly moments, some bad moments, but an apology and a strong friendship.

Without a doubt, we will the audience who might have felt like staring at Auggie when we first saw him on screen, will almost imperceptibly go beyond the appearances, almost forgetting them, as we

appreciate the reality of Auggie as a person.

The film ends in affirmation - and why not? There can be enough tragedy and pain in life so we can rejoice in and with those who rejoice.

Fr Peter Malone MSC

Peter is a former president of SIGNIS - the World Catholic Association for Communication. He's a highly experienced film critic and author who has travelled the world watching, writing on and talking about movies. Since 1968, he's written reviews for a number of Catholic magazines and periodicals. He has also written many books on cinema including Films and Values, Movie Christs and Antichrists, Cinema Down Under and the excellent Lights, Camera, Faith (Movie Lectionary) series.