



Kino Ken screened LADY BIRD on February 16, 2018 at the Diamond Theater in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Here is his evaluation of that live action feature dramedy.

8 of a possible 20 points

**** of a possible *******

**United States 2017 color 94 minutes live action feature dramedy
Scott Rudin Productions / Entertainment 360 / IAC Films Producers:
Eli Bush, Evelyn O'Neill, Scott Rudin, Jason Sack**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 1 Direction: Greta Gerwig**
- 1 Editing: Nick Hoey Online Editing: Keith Jenson**
- 1 Cinematography: Sam Levy 2nd Unit DP: David Feeney-Mosier
Still Photography: Merie Weismiller Wallace, Merrick Morton**
- 1 Lighting: Ian Carre-Burritt, Benjamin Cumming, Eric Fahy, Jesse Smith
Special Visual Effects: Andrew Lim (Supervision)**

- 0** **Screenplay: Greta Gerwig**
Script Supervision: Jan McWilliams, Heather Quick (NYC)
Music Supervision: Michael Hill, Brian Ross
- 1** **Music: Jon Brion, José Miguel Ortegon**
Orchestrations: Steve Bartek and Edward Trybek
- 1** **Production Design: Chris Jones**
Art Direction: Maite Perez-Nievas
Set Decoration: Traci Spadorcia
Set Dressing: Lesli Lytle, Kristen Granados, Alex Potter, Andre Rivera
Props: Perry Pascual, Zebah Pinkham
Costume Design: April Napier
Makeup: Jacqueline Knowlton (head), Erin Walters (key), James Freitas
- 1** **Sound**
Sound Editing Supervision: Paul Hsu
Sound Editing: Nicholas Schenk
Sound Effects: Justine Baker
Sound Recording: Lee Salevan
Sound Mixing: Amanda Beggs, Alex Altman, Bryan Dembinski,
Matt Hovland, Paul Hsu, Skip Lievsay,
Jeffrey Lee Zimmerman
Casting: Emily Buntyn, Ben Harris, Toni Staniewicz, Angie Glover (extras),
Stacey McCain (extras), Sydney Medlin (extras), Heidi Griffiths,
Allison Jones, Jordan Thaler
- 1** **Acting**
- 0** **Creativity**
- 8 total points**

Cast: Saoirse Ronan* (Lady Bird McPherson), Laurie Metcalf
(Marion McPherson, Lady Bird’s mother), Tracy Letts (Larry McPherson,
Lady Bird’s dad), Lucas Hedges (Danny O’Neill), Timothée Chalamet
(Kyle Scheible), Beanie Feldstein (Julie Steffans), Lois Smith
(Sister Sarah Joan), Stephen Henderson (Father Leviatch), Odeya Rush
(Jenna Walton), Jordan Rodrigues (Miguel McPherson, Lady Bird’s adopted older
brother), Marielle Scott (Shelly Yuhan), John Karna (Greg Anrue),
Jake McDorman (Mr. Bruno), Bayne Gibby (Casey Kelly), Laura Marano

(Diana Greenway), Marietta DePrima (Miss Patty), Daniel Zovatto (Jonah Ruiz), Kristen Cloke (Ms. Steffans), Andy Buckley (Uncle Matthew), Paul Keller (Parish Priest), Kathryn Newton (Darlene Bell), Myra Turley (Sister Gina), Bob Stephenson (Father Walther), Abhimanyu Katyal (Friendly Banker), Chris Witaske (Business Jock), Ben Konigsberg (David from College), Gurpreet Gill (Convenience Store Clerk), Richard Jin (Cool Coffee Manager), Joan Patricia O'Neill (Danny's Grandmother), Robert Figueroa (Cast Removal Doctor), Carla Valentine (Guidance Counselor), Roman Arabia (Luis Cruz), Monique Edwards (New York City Nurse), Matthew Maher (New York City Man On Street), Anita Kalathara (Prom Chairwoman), Debra Miller (Saleswoman Joyce), Georgia Leva (Senior Class Candidate), Rebecca Light (Mr. Bruno's wife), Adam Brock (Band Lead Singer)

Purported to mirror screenwriter Greta Gerwig's adolescent experiences in Sacramento, California, LADY BIRD is not so much autobiography as study of mother-daughter relationship anchored on the director's own. Attending a Catholic High School isn't chic for a millennial juvenile aspiring to become someone exceptional.

Lady Bird defines uniqueness as being extraordinary, which her given name of Christine McPherson doesn't suggest. Being a nonconformist is an end in itself. Conformity is boring. Lady Bird wants to avoid that designation at all costs. She sets out to escape any connections with the everyday world in which she lives.

The problem confronting her is that nothing she says or does represents novelty, only opposition. You say white, I say black. There's no emotional attachment to anything around her. Only utter rejection of community values. Nihilism beckons. Lady Bird finds its siren call irresistible.

Her older brother is what she and her peers would term a "brain." Nomenclature no one uses to describe Miguel's desperately unhappy sibling. It seems the McPherson family home is located on what Lady Bird terms the "wrong side of the tracks." Too much television or Internet viewing has generated desire to be rich, famous, and artistic, accomplishments made difficult in her present unpromising location. With a very weak work ethic, indifference to study, and no familial connections to assist in elevating social

status, the story's protagonist faces a discouragingly uphill climb to achieve her goals.

Socializing with assorted losers doesn't promote the cause any. Her first teen romance pairs the girl with a closeted homosexual, sure recipe for future disaster. On the rebound, she woos a slacker idealist whose vital interests are hedonistic, selfish ones sharply contrasting with ecological platitudes. Kyle gives her nothing but fear of pregnancy. Lady Bird squanders romantic illusions on him, a libertine unable to even name and precisely enumerate previous sexual conquests.

Nor does she display sharper acumen in choosing comrades of the same gender. Initially content to pal with another social outcast, both scoffing at queen bees through sheer envy, Miss Special Case later jettisons old reliable out of jealousy. Julie has genuine acting talent, landing her a leading dramatic role in an upcoming school drama. Lady Bird auditions too, only earning a minor supporting role. Her misdirected revenge against Julie is to dump the rising star in favor of overindulged, stylishly popular Jenna Walton, who lives on the correct side of Sacramento's railroad tracks in affluence.

In order to keep such a lopsided attachment intact, it's necessary for the McPherson girl to lie about preferences, residency, and motivation. That isn't particularly bothersome, as sniping away at adult hypocrisy blinds her to unfaithfulness she herself displays.

If Gerwig perceives her creation as an updated feminist variation on picaresque Huckleberry Finn, she's in the wrong pew of a tottery church because Finn is no exemplar for boys. Lady Bird is no better model for girls. Neither possesses moral direction.

However, Finn's family is completely dysfunctional; Lady Bird's is still operative. True, adopted Miguel is underemployed at a fast food joint, but that is at least partly due to premature carnal adventuring restricting mobility, funds, and job prospects. While it may be generous of Mom and Dad to allow Miguel and girlfriend Shelly extended boarding privileges, that charity is perversely stifling Miguel's initiative.

Lady Bird has other grievances against her family. They, meaning Mom, don't appreciate art. Or a longing for independence, flying solo. Besides, Mother is suffocating Lady Bird's life, preempting choices, constantly harping on frugality. Daughter's dream is to break free entirely from dictates of capitalism, but to do

so with subsidizing from adult benefactors. She covets a scholarship, yet won't study diligently. How is that supposed to work? Just because Lady Bird imagines herself a deserving candidate because of limited parental finances doesn't mean admissions offices must race to grant substitute funding. Personal vocal scorn for all California colleges and universities doesn't improve chances of obtaining an exit visa from native soil for her, either.

To flaunt the heroine's rebel credentials, there's a scene included depicting her embarrassing a school visitor touting abstinence and adoption over abortion. Lady Bird publicly proclaims allegiance to contrary positions, those being libertinism and feticide. She hasn't really explored the issues and is only being typically obnoxious.

With parents certifiably accepting and progressive in social attitudes, Lady Bird has no one to counsel her except the Sisters at school, classmates, and a disparaging Miguel. They, unfortunately, are products of the times, too, either encouraging experimentation when censure is better – making them enablers rather than guides – or flippantly discounting such serious slipups as playing hooky and defacing private property.

One area where the movie scores Brownie points is through depiction of tensions between underachieving mother and ambitious daughter. A late plot twist, though, vitiates these by showing a distant, evil urban environment precipitating retreat to familial security. In a battle between haranguing mother and exploitative stranger the winner is patently Mama. The saw about home being a magnet for comfort resurfaces. Kansas triumphs over Oz, a resolution satisfying only immature, indiscriminating audiences. For some youths, home is the monster requiring flight despite assertions to the contrary.

Mom isn't an ogre. She's just terribly afraid of losing her daughter Christine's love through geographical separation or academic snobbery. Lacking a college diploma, Marion fears if Lady Bird acquires one arrogance, condescension, and shame about maternal upbringing will follow. Marion is chiefly focused on holding her family together, whereas Christine's intent on pulling it apart. Can these two opponents working at cross-purposes ever negotiate a cease-fire?

Saiorse Ronan brings to life, probably using not-yet-forgotten incidents from her own youth, the troubled and troubling uncertainty of a teen girl in transition, unsure of identity or vocation, gripped more strongly by resistance than cooperation. Obstructing such willfulness is Laurie Metcalf's Marion,

seeking at times a mirror of herself in filial attitudes and interests, a quest impossible of wholly satisfying fulfillment. Lady Bird is both more and less than her mother's hopes and dreams, not a young imitation of aging model. She's looking for validation from the opposite sex. Or at least approval by leaders of her school's power clique. She will have to decide on her own which influence is of paramount significance and respond accordingly. A cell phone call back to Sacramento, heartbreakingly rendered by Ronan, seems warranted by an earlier soliloquy by Metcalf at the regional airport, where bravura exposition of catharsis brought welcome relief from successive prickly clashes with an obsessively self-centered malcontent.

Hewing to the flavorless, emotional sinkhole of contemporary pop music for auditory background leads to a curious match with Lady Bird's fluid personality, something in transition like a cocooned caterpillar. It seems quite appropriate for this movie. Sound recording is likewise satisfactory overall.

Lighting, generally low-key and rather fuzzy, may be reflective of a tight budget.

Sets and costumes offer sufficient detail for credibility, perhaps unintentionally revealing sterile functionality in home furnishings of the period.

Not so effective is a screenplay designed in episodic jerks, leading to discontinuity of characterization and occasional lapses in motivation. All too often, one character explains the actions or motives of another when the director ought to be eliciting those directly from performances.

What causes Christine, for much of the movie a whining critic of her hometown, to suddenly become laudatory about it? Doesn't Tracy Letts' Larry McPherson show excessive resignation to unemployment status? How does Lady Bird feel about sharing parents with a sister-in-law banished from her own family? Don't her revolving door boyfriends feel like calculated types rather than vivid personalities? Considering how immersed the central character is in reinventing herself, why are there no indicators of movies or stories influencing her? Is it logical an Eastern Ivy League college would extend a scholarship to someone as academically unpromising as Lady Bird? Why does Christine repeat the same errors in picking companions, considering only what she wants from them and not their needs at all?

In addition, dialogue has no clinchers. Nor are strong adversaries capable of eliciting passionate responses present. Lady Bird seldom encounters a

temptation weak enough to ignore or resist. Instead, drifting from folly to folly, she learns little through them except obstinacy in defending misjudgments. Her actions are too silly to be witty, too reckless to merit admiration. They are only instructive in a negative way, depicting how not to win friends and influence others.

As mentioned above, editing fails to unify the story, replacing significant gestures with explanatory talk. There are too many cruel betrayals, too much unapologetic prevarication. Suddenly, all the preceding deceptions culminate in overdue sensitivity to feelings of companions, tolerances shoehorned into place to accommodate a rapidly impending forced conclusion. That doesn't make for an electrifying motion picture, only a rushed manipulation of material to please expectations of viewers. Lacking any nemesis to react against, Lady Bird is guilty of unmotivated turnaround, a plotting trap the scripter might have avoided if recognized. It wasn't.

Further hampered by irrelevant titillation scenes, Lady Bird is, despite a coming-of-age storyline, strictly for adult audiences, its overriding merit being the two lead female performances. Viewers captivated by either or both of them will find the movie quite palatable. Others had best bypass this one.