



A PEACHY SUMMER ROMANCE

CALL ME BY YOUR NAME IS WOWING AUDIENCE EVERYWHERE. MATTHEW MYERS REVIEWS THE FILM AND SPEAKS TO PRODUCER, HOWARD ROSENMAN.

ONE SCENE in *Call Me By Your Name* is set to become a moment of classic cinema. Seventeen-year-old Elio, the son of an American academic, masturbates into a pitted peach while fantasising about Oliver, his dad's 24-year-old research assistant. When he's done, Oliver brings the peach to his lips...

But that scene alone is not why the film has become one of the most talked-about of the year. *Call Me By Your Name* has been embraced by gay and straight audiences who are falling in love with its beauty, sweet melancholy, and authenticity and are hailing it as a bold step forward for gay-themed feature films.

Directed by Italian Luca Guadagnino, *Call Me By Your Name* is a romantic coming-of-age drama adapted from the 2007 novel by American writer Andre Aciman. The story, set in the '80s, centres around Elio Perlman who lives with his parents in Crèma, Northern Italy. When his father takes in a student, Oliver, Elio's adolescent sexuality is woken.

In the lead romantic roles are Timothée Chalamet (*Interstellar*) as Elio and Armie Hammer (*The Social Network*) as Oliver. Interestingly, the affair between the older and younger men has only caused a tiny ripple of consternation, including a tweet by actor James Woods who referred to "chipping away at the last barriers of decency". Armie Hammer shut down that line of criticism by response tweet: "Didn't you date a 19-year-old when you were 60?"

For Italians, there is no issue with the age gap. The age of consent in Italy is 14. Chalamet looks in his mid-teens in the film, even though he was 21

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ARMIE HAMMER AS OLIVER AND
TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET AS ELIO IN
SCENES FROM *CALL ME BY YOUR NAME*.

at the time of filming.

In the past, films that have dealt with age gaps in sexual relationships have been met with varying degrees of outrage: *For A Lost Soldier*, *American Beauty*, *L.I.E.*, *Lolita* and *The Graduate* spring to mind. But where those films delved into the forbidden, tweaking audiences' sense of either moral shock or fetishism, *Call Me By Your Name* neither moralizes nor judges. The story has a sincerity that seems to pluck the heartstrings of even the most cynical viewers.

Although set in the '80s, the usual demons of homophobia, HIV/AIDS, self-hatred and tragedy are blessedly absent. Producer Howard Rosenman, who optioned the rights to the book before it was even published and has been developing the movie since 2007, says this is one of the great joys of the story.

"There's no judgment," says Rosenman. "It's not about gay anxiety or someone being sick. It's not about punishment or of parent's disapproving. It's about a love affair, a summer romance and sets a different kind of pace. It's certainly ground-breaking in that way."

Rosenman also explains why he felt Armie Hammer was perfect for the role. "Armie is an extremely straight actor, with a wife and kids, and is gorgeous beyond belief," he says. "He was actually frightened to take on the role due to the nature of the story, but over a two-year period he developed a relationship of mutual admiration and respect with Luca Guadagnino and decided to do it. So he plunged into the depths of his own anxiety and came up with this exceptionally beautiful role. He trusted Luca was able to bring out the best performance of Armie's career."

"It's about first love and everybody has a first love," says Rosenman. "Then there are the parents played by Michael Stuhlbarg and Amira Casar who both realise what a wonderful thing their son has, and how it should be treasured. When they see what Elio has, they wish they'd had such a choice. It's the father's speech toward the end that really says it all."

Although adapted from the novel, Guadagnino made a point of using very little dialogue in many scenes to emphasis the subtext. The movie marks the third instalment in his *Desire* trilogy following *I Am Love* (2009) and *A Bigger Splash* (2015).

Since premiering at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2017, *Call Me By Your Name* has won many awards including the Audience Award at this year's Melbourne International Film Festival.

The film has also elevated its cast. Chalamet has been working on Woody Allen's new production *A Rainy Day In New York* with Liev Schreiber, and plays the meth-addicted son to Steve Carell's character in *Beautiful Boy*, set for release next year. Hammer is now Hollywood's "next big thing" thanks to *Call Me By Your Name*. Shia LaBeouf, the first choice for the role, is probably regretting he turned it down.

Audience are calling the film "uplifting" and "a masterpiece" but the last word belongs to its author, Aciman who said, "Wow, they've done better than the book."