



FEEL ALL THE FEELINGS: THE FILMS OF GRETA GERWIG

Frances Ha

Frances Ha

Directed by: Noah Baumbach

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a Pine District Pictures / Scott Rudin production

Presented by: RT Features

Executive Producers: Fernando Loureiro,
Lourenco Sant'anna

Produced by: Noah Baumbach, Scott Rudin,
Lila Yacoub, Rodrigo Teixeira

Co-producers: Oscar Boyson, Eli Bush

Unit Production Manager: Lila Yacoub

Production Accountants: Anthony Bonsignore,
Paula Zinca, Frank Selvaggi

Location Manager: Jonathan Urband

Location Manager - Paris: Martin Scalì

1st Assistant Director: Lila Yacoub

Script Supervisor: Sasha Vitelli

CASTING BY: Douglas Aibel

WRITTEN BY: Noah Baumbach, Greta Gerwig

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Sam Levy

VISUAL EFFECTS: Boxmotion

EDITED BY: Jennifer Lame

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: Sam Lisenco

VISUAL CONSULTANT: Harris Savides

TITLES: Boxmotion

TITLE DESIGNER: Sam Lisenco

COLOR MASTERING: Pascal Dangin

ADDITIONAL MUSIC BY: Dean Wareham, Britta Phillips

MUSIC SUPERVISOR: George Drakoulis

SOUND MIXERS: Gillian Arthur, Colin R. Alexander

RE-RECORDING MIXER: Paul Hsu

SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR: Paul Hsu

DIGITAL INTERMEDIATE: Boxmotion

FOR: Harris [Savides]

CAST:

Greta Gerwig (*Frances*)

Mickey Sumner (*Sophie*)

Charlotte D'Amboise (*Colleen*)

Adam Driver (*Lev*)

Hannah Dunne (*'ask me' girl*)

Michael Esper (*Dan*)

Grace Gummer (*Rachel*)

Josh Hamilton (*Andy*)

Patrick Heusinger (*Patch*)

Cindy Katz (*Congresswoman*)

Maya Kazan (*Caroline*)

Justine Lupe (*Nessa*)

Juliet Rylance (*Janelle*)

Dean Wareham (*Spencer*)

Michael Zegen (*Benji*)

Britta Phillips (*Nadia*)

USA 2012©

86 mins

The Japanese, no doubt have a word for it. The French, several: *savoir faire*, for instance, maybe even *l'art de vivre*. For the twentysomethings in Noah Baumbach's latest serio-comic character piece *Frances Ha*, the term, though, is definitely 'getting your shit together'. And it's something the movie's floundering heroine, played to note-perfect effect by erstwhile mumblecore poster girl Greta Gerwig, is patently failing to accomplish. At the age of 27, Frances is both marginally employed and romantically unmoored. Oh, and her surname isn't actually Ha, that's just part of it. The title merely offers a sly signpost that this is a young woman on the way to becoming herself. Just not there yet.

For one thing, her prospect of being awarded a fulltime contract by the downtown modern dance troupe with whom she's been studying looks distinctly iffy. Her male flatmate pronounces her 'undateable' and the rock in her life, best pal and confidante Sophie (a sparkily abrasive Mickey Sumner), is about to move on, focused on career and romantic priorities of her own. It's make-or-break time for Frances but then again, in Baumbach's work, it always is. He's fascinated by moments in which individuals are at their most vulnerable, when their sense of who they are is at a pivotal stage: change is threatening, continuity evidently untenable. Ben Stiller's embittered fortysomething man-child in 2010's *Greenberg* reaches crisis point when confronted with the grown-up lives of family and old friends in blithe, hang-loose LA; Nicole Kidman senses the diminishing returns of her own hauteur in *Margot at the Wedding* (2007); while his parents' marital travails challenge teenager Jesse Eisenberg's self-perception in *The Squid and the Whale* (2005); even the befuddled graduates in his 1995 debut *Kicking and Screaming* spend their time comically contemplating the ominous approach of real-world responsibilities.

'I find myself following where the characters take me when I'm writing these movies,' reflects Baumbach by phone from New York, 'only to find that I'm working out similar themes and exploring these similar transitions in life. Twenty-seven is a distinct moment for Frances but that basic theme of squaring the romantic and egotistical ideas about yourself with who you actually are is very much broader than that. Who you are versus who you thought you were, or versus who you thought you might be – that's still a major thing for a lot of people, no matter what sort of success you might have.'

In case that sounds as if Baumbach, or indeed his latest movie, is about to be sucked into navel-gazing self-regard, it is crucial to note that *Frances Ha*, unlike the piercingly amusing but at times astringent *Greenberg* and *Margot*, serves up its wit and wisdom with a generous measure of the pleasure principle. As she showed in Whit Stillman's *Damsels in Distress* (2011), Gerwig has a natural feel for the contours of a zingy line and here, delivering a script she co-wrote with Baumbach, she never makes the character's social gracelessness or muddle-through resilience seem like a comic routine. Instead the cumulative emotional impact of Frances's often self-inflicted bumps and scrapes is richer because we're laughing with her. The fact that Baumbach shot it in unshowy yet undeniably retro black and white and has marshalled all sorts of vintage treats on the soundtrack, including lashings of *nouvelle vague*-era Georges Delerue and Bowie's 'Modern Love' (in an admitted nod to Carax's 1986 *Mauvais Sang*) only adds to the allure *Frances Ha* will surely hold for knowing arthouse audiences.

New York, black and white, serious comedy: it's a combination that points to one major influence, which Baumbach has no qualms about acknowledging. 'Those movies Woody Allen made in black and white with Gordon Willis, they're so majestic, they bring this epic quality to essentially intimate stories,' says the 43-year-old Brooklynite, who admits he grew up so immersed in Allen's output that his own adolescent scribbles amounted to mere imitations. 'He's an influence I wholly absorbed but at a certain point I had to shake. Now I'm on the other side of that, there's something so exciting about making movies in this city with him as the person I try to emulate.'

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Hannah Takes the Stairs

Sat 1 Jul 20:40; Fri 14 Jul 18:15 (+ intro by
Programmer Kimberley Sheehan)

Damsels in Distress

Wed 5 Jul 20:40; Sat 15 Jul 20:30

Greenberg

Fri 7 Jul 18:05; Sat 29 Jul 20:50

20th Century Women

Sat 8 Jul 20:30; Fri 21 Jul 18:10

Little Women

Sun 9 Jul 18:10; Tue 25 Jul 20:20; Sun 30 Jul 18:00

Frances Ha

Mon 10 Jul 20:50; Tue 18 Jul 18:30; Fri 21 Jul 20:45

Mistress America

Wed 12 Jul 20:50; Sun 30 Jul 12:50

Lady Bird

Mon 17 Jul 20:45; Tue 25 Jul 18:30;

Wed 26 Jul 20:30

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Baumbach, it's worth recalling, cast Gerwig in *Greenberg* before Allen called on her services for last year's *To Rome with Love*. For Allen, Gerwig was pretty much as she always is when Hollywood comes calling (cf the Russell Brand remake of *Arthur* and the Ashton Kutcher romcom *No Strings Attached*): likeable, 'kooky' and under taxed. In marked contrast, her affecting turn in *Greenberg* – as the emotionally unco-ordinated nanny with whom the uptight Stiller forms a predictably awkward liaison – stands as an obvious catalyst for the working (and subsequently personal) partnership which has since brought *Frances Ha* to the screen. 'She's funny both verbally and physically, so I thought there was an opportunity to do something here which was, in a way, a showcase for her,' says Baumbach, who's recently had the experience of seeing the congruence of his creative and private lives unpicked in unsettlingly forensic detail in the pages of *The New Yorker*, a publication where he once interned and for whom he's written an off-and-on series of sketch pieces.

Frances Ha began as a series of email exchanges which blossomed into a screenplay, a collaboration which has continued through Baumbach and Gerwig's co-authored script for an animated feature now in the Hollywood development pipeline and a second independent movie shot in New York last year with Gerwig again in the lead (currently under wraps until its makers declare it finished). In a separate transatlantic conversation, Gerwig outlined how the beginning of their writing process was daunting – in a good way – after her previous script collaborations on two of the improv-led Joe Swanberg titles (*Hannah Takes the Stairs*, *Nights and Weekends*) that first brought her attention as a fresh new screen presence. 'The best part of making this with Noah was that, for the first time, I was working with someone who was challenging me to write as precisely as he does. Improv to me is not actually a style I'm very invested in as a writer, because I first fell in love with the idea of dramatic storytelling through the theatre. I mean, things which had to be word-perfect because there was an internal rhythm to each line.'

And as an actor? The woman once dubbed 'the Meryl Streep of mumblecore' definitely has things to say about the difference between her vulnerable and touching contribution to *Hannah Takes the Stairs* (where Baumbach first spotted her) and the rather more modulated approach to emotional revelation taken in *Frances Ha* – notwithstanding Baumbach's multi-take determination to get exactly what he wanted from each scene. 'With *Hannah* the difficult thing for me was that there was no intermediary between me having an idea and me executing that idea,' explains Gerwig, who'll face the milestone of her 30th birthday this August. 'Yes, it feels raw and it can yield something that's immediate, but the more freedom I'm given as an actress the worse my performance will be. I'm really more interested in those moments where, like with *Frances*, I can put them in something that has a superstructure.'

With its chapter headings and its own individual twist on generic romcom story beats, Baumbach and Gerwig's writing ensures that *Frances Ha* the movie always knows where it's going even if the same can't be said for its protagonist. That tension between spontaneity and structure is just one of its many charms, allowing it to feel comfortable in its gestures towards the *nouvelle vague* (right down to Frances and her flatmates blocking out a cheeky stolen moment from 1964's *Bande à part*). The clincher, though, is the warmth it displays towards its characters, something which Baumbach intended to mark it apart from his previous offering. 'It's definitely the case in *Greenberg* that the movie is going to give Ben's character very little help with his ideas about himself,' he admits. 'He's going to have to do all the work. He's going to have to make the transition. He's in his forties, so it's a little late for him, whereas Frances in her late twenties is pretty much on track. Here I felt, and Greta felt, that the movie needed to protect Frances and, in a way, to celebrate her.'

Celebrate Frances in all her wrong-headed, bighearted befuddlement it certainly does and, while the movie's velvety assurance shows Baumbach building on his already considerable skillset, the sheer range of moods in Gerwig's deceptively nonchalant yet precisely pointed performance has put down a new marker of her capabilities in front of and behind the camera.

Trevor Johnston, *Sight and Sound*, August 2013