

A documentary about peace, and a comedy about teenagers

By **Brooks Robards** -Jul 8, 2015



Olivia Cooke, Thomas Mann, and R.J. Cyler in "Me and Earl and the Dying Girl." – Photo courtesy wired.com.

Playing at the Martha's Vineyard Film Center this weekend are Greg Reitman's documentary "Rooted in Peace" and the unexpectedly uplifting and funny feature film "Me and Earl and the Dying Girl."

Known as Hollywood’s “green” director, Mr. Reitman takes an amiably meandering look at how to bring peace to the world in “Rooted in Peace.” Mr. Reitman will attend the Thursday, July 10, screening, which is a preview of the film’s official release in September, and lead a Q & A session afterward. Carrying around a small bonsai tree during much of the movie, Mr. Reitman envisions trees as a metaphor for our connectedness to the natural world. He interviews a host of prominent activists, thinkers, and celebrities ranging from author and spiritualist Deepak Chopra, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, neuroscientist Dan Siegel, and peace activist and Nobel laureate Mairead Maguire to singers Donovan, Mike Love of the Beach Boys, and Pete Seeger.



Mr. Reitman’s quest for understanding of his own sometimes contentious relationship with a desire for peace in the world sends him to many countries. Interviewee Maharishi Mahesh Yogi best expresses how to find peace: “If the forest is to be green, every tree must be green; if there’s going to be peace on earth, then everybody must need to feel that quality of peace.”

Adolescent humor at its best

Don’t let the title of “Me and Earl and the Dying Girl” keep you away from this delightful film. Nor the fact that it’s about teenagers; it’s a winner for viewers of all ages. Thomas Mann (“Project X”) plays Greg, a high school senior who pals around with Earl (R.J. Cyler). These young men eschew aspirations for

joining the usual high school cliques – jocks, brains, nerds, dopers – preferring to spend their time remaking classic films as parodies. Then Greg’s mother badgers him into hanging out with classmate Rachel (Olivia Cooke), who has contracted leukemia.

“Me and Earl and the Dying Girl” defies most of the conventions and stereotypes associated with domestic family comedy. Greg’s father is a hilariously kooky version of parenthood, with his mother not far behind. Rather than plunge into the icy waters of their high school cafeteria, Greg and Earl eat lunch in the office of their heavily tattooed, suspected pot-smoking history teacher Mr. McCarthy (Jon Bernthal). Best of all is Greg’s well-modulated sense of humor, a refreshing mix of semi-adult insight and gawky teen insecurity. The relationship between Rachel and Greg never develops into a romance. They simply become good friends, despite Rachel’s initial, grumpy resistance to Greg’s reluctant attempts to hang. The road to that friendship is a bumpy one, but that seems particularly appropriate to the ups and downs of adolescents moving slowly into maturity. Like the best of comedies, gravitas underlies and enriches “Me and Earl and the Dying Girl.”

“Rooted in Peace,” Wednesday, July 15, 7:30 pm.

“Me and Earl and the Dying Girl,” Thursday, July 9, and Saturday, July 11, 7:30 pm. Both films at Martha’s Vineyard Film Center, Tisbury Marketplace, Vineyard Haven. For information and tickets, see mvfilmsociety.com.