

Movie Review: '17 Again' and star Efron a pair of lightweights

by Lee Grant

Here's the question: Will Zac Efron, 21, poster boy for teenage girls everywhere and *Us Weekly's* Hot Hollywood Star of the Year, grow up to look like a jowled, pudgy Matthew Perry?

RATINGS GUIDE:

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.)

That's what "17 Again" would have you believe. Perry, 39, his 10-season "Friends" career over, isn't a bad actor. In fact, he was pretty terrific on NBC's underappreciated "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip."

But a sex object? Efron, on the other hand, had the young girls who packed a preview of "17 Again" oohing and ahing from the shirtless opening scenes of him on a basketball court, showing off his dance steps accompanying rather professionally choreographed high school cheerleaders. No doubt, the boy can dance.

"17 Again" has a decent premise: You're approaching middle age, your wife (Leslie Mann), whom you married when she got pregnant in high school, has filed for divorce, your kids disrespect you, you've been passed over for a promotion at your job.

You were the former high school star who never lived up to his potential. What if you could go back and change things?

The movie is a light and bright time-traveling tale and has a number of laughs, mostly thanks to Thomas Lennon, the wild man from TV's "Reno 911!," who plays the grown-up nerd from school, Perry/Efron's best friend who made millions as a software genius and lives in a house decorated like something out of "Star Wars."

Efron, meanwhile, takes direction well enough, having been trained in the "High School Musical" mode, but he lacks warmth and an identity beyond his looks. Even hosting the recent "Saturday Night Live," making jest of his image as a teenybopper's delight, he seemed distant and cold.

His "Zac Efron's Pool Party" is a riot on funnyordie.com (it's closing in on 1 million views), but it's not because he's funny.

Zac Efron, maybe, needs to be 17 again.

"17 Again." Rated: PG-13. Running time: 1 hour, 35 minutes. 2.5 stars.

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