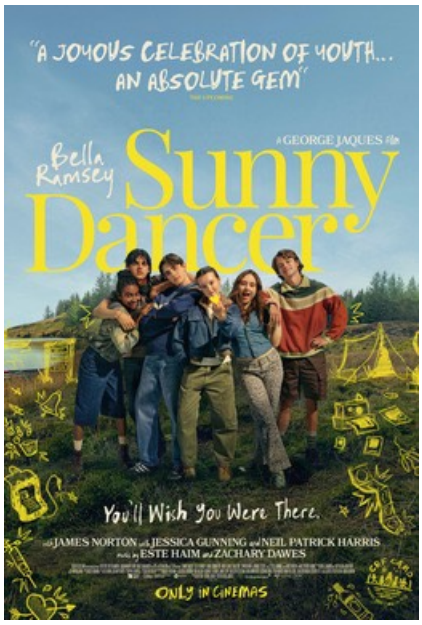
Sunny Dancer – Review

This is a film, directed by the 25 year old George Jaques, which I found, firstly, emotionally moving, secondly, informative on the possible lives of teenagers with some form of cancer diagnosis, and thirdly highly enjoyable as a coming of age story, with a number of hilarious interludes, for more than one of the characters portrayed. I would definitely recommend watching the film as I believe everyone will derive something of benefit from it. It should not be anticipated as a misery memoir despite the sadness that is conveyed at various points.



Ivy (Bella Ramsey) is a 17 year old only child whose cancer is in remission. Her parents, Bob and Karen, well played by James Norton and Jessica Gunning, are concerned by her lack of friends and her evident anger with the world, book her into a four week "therapeutic" camp. This provides for young people whose cancer is in remission but are struggling with the consequences, both emotional and physical, of their cancer history, and with the knowledge that it could possibly return. There is a similar facility in Cumbria.

Ivy, after significant initial resistance to the idea, agrees to attend the camp, but finds her early experiences of camp life very difficult and her antagonistic behavior results in her being threatened with exclusion. An altercation with the camp leader, Patrick (Neil Patrick Harris) and sessions with a psychologist help her to recognize that she is not alone in her anxieties about cancer. She becomes a strong member of the "cool" group and by the conclusion of the film is the leader. She is capable of both ribaldry and of sensitivity towards and empathy with other members of the group. The establishing of her relationship with the vulnerable Jake (Daniel Quinn-Troye) is very moving as is its finale.

The various members of the group helpfully illustrate the challenges of adolescence. These include the desire to challenge the rules, their sexual identity, their need for reassurance from their peers that they are accepted socially, and the wish for independence while having a dependence on their families for both practical and emotional support. Ivy and her friends are all experiencing the turbulence of adolescence while knowing of the possibility of their cancer returning. This possibility is vividly illustrated in the film which confronts the viewer with the harsh reality of the lives of those with cancer. The unease is, I believe, exacerbated by the illness being experienced by young people whose lives to this point have yet to be fully fulfilled.

This film is an emotional roller coaster for the viewer. It would be very hard for anyone watching it not to be drawn into the lives of the young people portrayed as

the senses are pulled in a number of directions. The characters, both the young people and those responsible for overseeing their life in the camp, are all very believable as are the different factors influencing their behaviour. I reiterate my recommendation that this is a film very worth watching for its many qualities.