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LAW BULLETIN MEDIA

Music reigns in pop-filled 'Teen Spirit'

"Teen Spirit" is a smaller, somewhat tattered version of films we've seen many times before: A guilty pleasure featuring a plucky protagonist from the provinces who escapes her stifling circumstances through talent, determination and luck.

Like Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood and Dorothy of Oz before her, Violet Valenski (Elle Fanning) finds the outside world filled with unreliable mentors, big bad wolves and charming yet insincere princes.

You're gonna have to fight, girl.

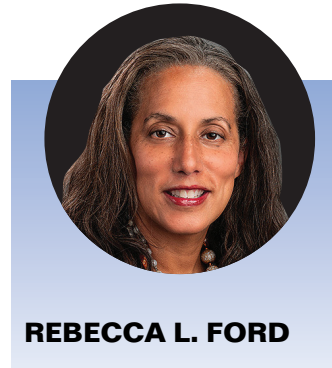
Like the hopeful innocents in "Flashdance," "Fame" and "Almost Famous," Violet escapes into a world filled with music. The "Teen Spirit" screenplay seems to have been written by director Max Minghella (son of the late Academy Award-winning director

Wight, who lives on a farm with her single mom. In addition to high school, Violet waits tables in a bar, does chores on the farm and sings in the church choir.

She sneaks out to parties but is too exhausted to engage with other young people, and she sings pop songs during open mic sessions at the bar where she works.

Vlad (Zlatko Buric), a dissipated former opera singer deep into his cups, is the only patron listening. Violet doesn't entirely trust him, but he offers boozy encouragement and some measure of grandfatherly protection. When Violet and her schoolmates learn that "Teen Spirit," an "American Idol" knockoff reality show, will be auditioning on Wight, she turns to Vlad for help.

So is launched Violet's journey into the enchanted forest



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gifts and gains wisdom, confidence and heart.

"Teen Spirit" isn't exactly a musical, but it is all about the

vehicle for Fanning as a singer, who performs all of Violet's songs in her own pop-worthy voice.

As Violet's mother and Vlad, Agnieszka Grochowska and Buric are unimpeachable in their supporting roles, but "Teen Spirit" is Fanning's coming-out party.

She performs Violet as a detached and affectless adolescent churning with anxiety and emotions underneath. It's a stretch project for Fanning who, in total control of her craft, delivers.

Minghella, too, hits all his marks in this directorial debut. "Teen Spirit" will be a calling card for both director and lead actor to lead and helm higher-budget films.

This post-punk, Eastern European-infused "Flashdance" (minus the legwarmers and chair showers) will appeal to

“Teen Spirit” will be a calling card for both director and lead actor to lead and helm higher-budget films.

Anthony Minghella) under throbbing headphones, with a copy of "The Hero's Journey" in one hand and a Billboard playlist in the other.

Violet is a 17-year-old Polish immigrant to the British Isle of

of high-stakes music competition with Vlad — part Tin Man, part Scarecrow, part Cowardly Lion — as her manager.

In navigating this new terrain, she witnesses the regrets spawned by squandering one's

music. Minghella says he was inspired to write and direct the screenplay by a Robyn song, "Dancing on My Own," the linchpin of the movie's solid millennial soundtrack.

The movie is an important

fans of the film's MTV look and girl-power soundtrack — "No Doubt," Ellie Goulding, Sigrid — young women longing to venture out into the world.

In other words, it's got teen spirit.