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'Baby Driver' has virtue without condescension

If I were 18, I'd see the heist movie "Baby Driver" every weekend this summer. I'd go with the boys who asked me out for dates, with my friends visiting from college and the girls in my high school clique.

We'd see it at the old Esquire Theater, then migrate to Oak Street Beach, cantering through the shadowy underpass. In the luminous glow of the Drake Hotel sign, we'd walk barefoot in the cool sand, arguing into the night about the many loopholes in the movie's logic.

High on violence and low on authority figures, "Baby Driver" is a great movie for trying on adulthood.

Baby (Ansel Elgort, "The Fault in Our Stars"), is the getaway driver for Kevin Spacey's acerbic heist-meister, Doc, who assembles and reassembles teams for the hold-ups he masterminds.

Baby drives for Doc to work off a debt. No two teams are the same, but Baby is on every team.

Above all else, the movie is driven by music, not cars. Even the exhilarating chase scenes aren't really about the chase — they are precise, high-acceleration balletic performances set to music; vehicular dressage.

As a tyke in the back seat, Baby watched his heedless parents crash and die as they bickered in the front seat. Because of the accident, Baby suffers from chronic tinnitus. He listens incessantly to music to tame the "hum in his drum."

Donning his shades both indoors and out, ears perpetually jacked to an iPod, Baby represents an adolescent's ideal of obtainable accessorized cool.



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The movie's soundtrack — the music he's mixed to quiet his mind — tells the story. It drives the film as fast and furiously as Baby drives the fathomless fleet of hot rods and OG vintage vehicles miraculously at his disposal.

Director Edgar Wright took pains to sync the action sequences with full-length songs. Whimsical cameos by popular musicians are parked around every corner:

In his appeal, honor-bound Baby is as old fashioned as Gary Cooper. The adults in the movie are impotent, corrupt or both.

Killer Mike and Big Boi are restaurant patrons. Flea is a hapless criminal, Eddie No Nose. Paul Williams is a diminutive gun dealer named The Butcher. And Sky Ferreira plays Baby's mama.

Enigmatic and antisocial as any sullen teenager, Baby is kind and solicitous to his deaf African-American foster dad Joseph (CJ Jones).

And he is true to his girl Debora (Lily James), a waitress who catches his attention with her absent-minded singing.

"What do you want, Baby?" Debora asks.

"I want to head west on 20 in a car we can't afford with a plan we don't have and never stop," he answers earnestly.

No one needs a GPS to realize that's a dead end, but Debora sees no stop sign.

And, of course, there will be one last job.

The laconic Baby infuriates the verbal, violent grown-ups. Bats (a terrifying Jamie Foxx) can't trust someone he can't read, and he is determined to break Baby's sphinxlike façade.

Lovers Buddy (Jon Hamm) and Darling (Eiza Gonzalez), natural-born killers raw in their voluptuous sensuality and sadism, are mawkish mirrors of wholesome Baby and Debora.

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"Baby Driver" serves up virtue without condescension and anticipates that young audiences will take vicarious pleasure in someone who is conscientious, capable and skilled, rather than dominant.

This youthful, violent flick is positive in its aspirations and offers hope that the reign of the nihilistic antihero may finally be ending.

Could this teenage fantasy of high velocity, first love and turned-up music take us on the ride from here to there?

Baby, you can drive my car.