

Wendy and Lucy

Michelle Williams, Will Patton, and Will Oldham star in a film written by Jonathan Raymond and Kelly Reichardt and directed by Reichardt.

By Josef Woodard

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Dog people alert: whatever its other slow-brew charms and artistic merits, *Wendy and Lucy* will tug at heartstrings in ways deep and bittersweet, while affirming our suspicion that dogs indeed rule the planet. For anyone who has been waiting for a dog-friendly project from the indie film cosmos, your time has come.

In this mesmerizing new film written and directed by subtlety queen Kelly Reichardt, Wendy (played with a slow but sure rightness by Michelle Williams, making the best of one set of clothes) is an economically strapped Hoosier headed for the promise of work in Alaska with her soul mate, a mixed breed pooch named Lucy. Fate, as doled out by a broke-down car, a quick stint in jail and, worst of all, a lost dog, finds her derailed in an unstated town in Oregon (the film was shot in Portland). From there, her forced hiatus takes on Kafkaesque proportions, with redemption in the wings.

Reichardt first made waves—gently rippling ones, at least—with the hypnotic film *Old Joy*, another Portland-based slacker saga, coated with a slow, stoned, Zen-like contemplativeness. By comparison, *Wendy and Lucy* has more of a clear and present (not to mention empathetic)



narrative flow. Stylistic similarities are in place, though, including a darkly strange cameo and musical contributions from Will Oldham, a more prominent actor in *Old Joy*. Screenwriter Jonathan Raymond was involved in both projects, and a general, deceptively lazy grace ennobles the filmmaking. Shots are long and carefully composed, and a conspicuous lack of music—apart from Wendy’s occasional idle humming—adds to the powerful yet understated atmosphere of the film.

Atmosphere, in the end, counts for much here. Conventional trappings on the surface of the story, in which a protagonist works through a comprehensible series of conflicts, carefully disguise existential and socio-economic dilemma undercurrents. Yes, we sympathize with the economic/employment struggles in the plot more now than we would have a year ago. But more than that, we emotionally sink into Wendy’s particular predicament and her resolve, and pray for Lucy’s discovery. It’s as simple and as complex as that, and a small gem of a film.

For showtimes, check the Independent's movie listings, [here](#).