

# Serious first-world issues dealt with charming ease in moody teen drama



CHENNAI: Many of us in India like to believe that life in rich and prosperous first-world countries such as America is all joy and bliss.



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But director Brett Haley's latest outing, "All Together Now," quickly diminishes the idea.

On Netflix now and adapted from "The Silver Linings Playbook" author Matthew Quick's novel, "Sorta Like a Rockstar," Haley's work looks at homelessness, parental callousness, and a teenager's struggle to come out on top of all this.



The film was adapted from "The Silver Linings Playbook" author Matthew Quick's novel, "Sorta Like a Rockstar." Supplied

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Haley, who made the lyrically charming drama "Hearts Beat Loud," was highly lauded at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival, but it stumbled at the box office that summer. So, it is possible he got another done quickly and sent it straight to the streaming platform. A bigger audience may watch this.

"All Together Now" is very well-crafted and helmed with a touch of softness to deal with unpleasant situations in a teenager's life.

Amber Appleton (Auli'i Cravalho) is a bright, good-natured kid who works at multiple places – a restaurant, a home for the aged, and as a private caregiver to a wealthy old woman, who grumbles most of the time and is sickeningly sarcastic.

At night, Amber sleeps in a school bus along with her alcoholic mother Becky (Justina Machado). The girl's father died when she was 12, and when her mom found a boyfriend and moved in with him, Amber could not relate to the man, who turned violent.

But Amber has one great friend, a little dog whom she adores and calls Bobby.

When Bobby falls seriously ill, she cancels her out-of-the-city trip for a music audition. A good singer who has a band as well, she needs the money she has saved to get the dog back to its old self. It is heartening to watch how her friends, the rich and the poor, rally around her to collect funds.



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Cravalho’s cheery disposition keeps the plot flying, and although there are many movies about issues such as parental cruelty and what the lack of a stable home can do to the psyche of a teen, she manages to make all these look so different.

She acts with a lovely sense of feeling, which sometimes sinks into remorse when she suffers a personal loss. Her love for Bobby is overwhelming and is a delight to watch.

Set in some picture-postcard locations in Portland, Oregon, “All Together Now” happily rises above Dickens’ brand of dreariness. But the climax appears too rushed, and sometimes we are left wondering if the world is made up of so many helpful souls.

