



First Man (Chazelle, 2018:USA) Film Capsule

Description

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[*First Man*](#)



Armstrong, from self-

claimed film auteur and Academy Award-

Winning Director, Damian Chazelle ([La La Land](#)), hits all the marks for a successful box office take in the current climate. *First Man* has already received nominations for best film from the Oscar-campaign-launching, Venice International Film Festival (Golden Lion Award) and the massive Toronto International Film Festival (The People's Choice Award).

Oscar-winning, *La La Land* composer extraordinaire, Justin Hurwitz, returns to the Chazelle fold, bringing slightly more than is required for effect with a mesmerizing *First Man* score. Hurwitz creates such a beautiful composition it is easy to overlook its occasional intrusiveness. Linus Sandgren (Best Cinematography Oscar for *La La Land*) is also back with his roving camera movement which is a bit dizzying. For the most part, despite a jar or two (not surprising with Sandgren's camera shooting style) Editor Tom Cross, kept the flow fairly continuous, if not seamless. And, last but not least, Canadian-born actor, Ryan Gosling, resumes his *La La Land* Sebastian minimalist acting style, as Neil Armstrong. Jason Clarke and Kyle Chandler provide excellent supporting characters as Edward Higgins White and Deke Slayton. Claire Foy turns in the film's deep, emotional performance as Janet Armstrong, wife of Neil Armstrong, that the other characters either don't bring or can't bring to story. Gosling almost

gets there! The costuming, hair, makeup and production design all add credence to the depicted time period in a convincing manner.

All in all, *First Man* is a nicely done film and it moves Director Chazelle up a notch on the Hollywood list of bigger budgeted films. Surprisingly, or unsurprisingly, Steven Spielberg received an Executive Producer credit. Nevertheless, the opening sequence, glaringly fails. The imagery is blatantly and conspicuously shot in an empty studio. I know Chazelle felt the lack of a bigger budget with *La La Land* not only curtailed his efforts but hamstrung his vision of a big-production, Hollywood-style musical of yesteryear. Personally, I like all three of Director Chazelle's full-length, feature films; *Whiplash* (2014) *La La Land* (2016) and *First Man* (2018).

As I watched the credits roll yesterday night, I noticed the film was based on the New York Times Bestseller *First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong* from James R. Hansen (who seemingly makes a cameo in the film). Josh Singer [*The Post* (2017) and *Spotlight* (2015)] gets credit for the screenplay. In my opinion, the best part of the film, by far, is the special effects. And, apparently, Chazelle shot on 35MM with IMAX cameras.

The spectacular rocket launches and the use of mirror-effects heighten sensibilities. Furthermore, the use of smoke and gasses also added a deft sense of the surreal and a touch of dream logic. In addition, Chazelle pumps in some nice archival footage and effectively utilizes foreshadowing with early frames of daytime, lunar shots. Screenwriter Singer also weaves some heady lines referencing an often under-reported and underappreciated aspect of the Space Program and NASA. Rory Kennedy's documentary, [Above and Beyond: NASA's Journey to Tomorrow](#) recently aired on Discovery Channel, October 13th, and details NASA's mission as a viable reporting agency on the health of Planet Earth and Singer encodes this concept as Armstrong is asked, "Why do we explore and travel in space?"

Smartly crafting a timely topic of space exploration and NASA, Chazelle and company manage to bring the vessel home and to fruition with another buzz-worthy, award-contending product with *First Man*. What the film does well, it does really, really well! Warmly recommended.

In theatres now!

Category

1. Feature Film

Date Created

October 2018

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