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1226 N Salsipuedes Unit C 1(805)704-5994 |https://hollywoodglee.com Larry@HollywoodGlee.com



FILM REVIEW: La La Land (Chazelle, 2016): USA

Description

Viewed by Larry Gleeson at Venice Film Festival.

Film Director Damien Chazelleâ??s *La La Land* comes on the heels of his Oscar nominated screenplay adaptation for 2015â??s *Whiplash,* where a highly intense music teacher molds a young, dedicated student. J.K. Simmons performance as the teacher garnered him an Oscar for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role.

Chazelle, an avid music lover, had wanted to do a musical spectacle in the manner of Jacques Demyâ??s *The Young Girls of Rochefort* and *The Umbrellas of Chambourg* while mixing in a splash of Gene Kelly and Stanley Donenâ??s *Singing in the Rain*. Moreover, Chazelle wanted a realism mixed into the story. Having resided in Los Angeles for the last ten years and having had a love affair with the city, Chazelle chose the City of Angels to set his Hollywood success-seeker film.

The film opens without much fanfare in a typical Los Angeles morning traffic jam. A young woman, Mia, played by Emma Stone, in a white Prius, is having an issue with her phone and misses an opportunity to move forward as the traffic jam has freed up somewhat. The young man behind her in a late 1980â??s maroon-colored, Buick Riviera convertible, Sebastian, played by Ryan Gosling, lets her know with a blare of his horn and a not-so-friendly â??good morning to youâ?• gesture. Soon traffic slows again. This time, however, as radio are being dialed in, drivers begin exiting their vehicles and break into to an energetic, six-minute song and dance number, â??Another Day of Sun,â?• staged on the 110 freeway overlooking downtown Los Angeles. As the song concludes, the title is flashed across the screen and the film is off and running with a start reminiscent of Elvis Presley and Ann-Margret in *Viva Las Vegas.*

La La Land is more about relationship and the life-changing experience two young lovers gain from each other. Mia is an aspiring actress mired in her real job as a barista juxtaposed against a series of failed acting auditions where she is continually interrupted. Sebastian, on the other hand, is a coarse, die-hard classical jazz pianist who doesnâ??t believe in compromising his convictions for anything or anyone. As their paths begin to cross Sebastian brushes off Mia as someone who will never understand his plight â?? until she does. When their paths finally converge, the harsh realities of life begin to set in

and the two unknowingly turn to each other in raw emotional exchanges and thereby find the strength each needs to reach the stars.

In a powerful denouement in the city full of optimism and broken dreams, the story concludes with a Mick Jagger and Rolling Stones truism echoed faintly at first only to be finished with an exclamation point:

â??You canâ??t always get what you want

But if you try sometime you find

You get what you need!â?•

And if the story isnâ??t enough in itself, the catchy musical numbers credited to Chazelleâ??s long-time friend and co-collaborator, Justin Hurwitz, will keep almost any music aficionadoâ??s attention. If not, then the roving camera movement of cinematographer Linus Sandgren is bound to keep eyes in the scene. And, if thatâ??s not enough, then the supercharged production numbers from choreographer Mandy Moore will keep you riveted as they sync in timing with Sandgrenâ??s camera movement allowing the actors seemingly the ability to levitate. And in vein with Chazelleâ??s vision and outright homage to the musicals of the 50â??s and 60â??s, Production Designer David Wasco keeps the screen illuminated with a bright vision of reds, yellows, pinks, pastel greens and sky blues, aided wonderfully by Mary Zophresâ?? costuming, while the filming locations could very well serve as a Los Angeles pop culture tour.

If thereâ??s only one film you can see this year â?? make it *La La Land*! Highest recommendation.

Category

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