



'The Photograph' Utilizes Solid Performances To Elevate A Time Spanning Love Story

By **Murjani Rawls** - Feb 20, 2020

Can you truly have it all? Love is always going to require sacrifice. Is it possible to experience it without losing a part of yourself? If you decide to defer it, can you ever get that moment back again? Think back to the 80's rom-com movies where two characters lock into a gaze and it seems like the world disappears around them. Sometimes, love presents itself and you figure out the details later. **The Photograph** is a movie that ponders both sides of that coin.

Director/writer **Stella Meghie** presents us with two different situations over different time periods.

The movie starts with journalist Michael Block (**Lakeith Stanfield**) going to New Orleans to interview Isaac Jefferson (**Rob Morgan**). While this interview is going on, he sees an aged photograph of a young lady. Right before then, Isaac tells him about regret. That's our starting point. We also meet Mae Morton (**Issa Rae**), a museum curator that just recently lost her mother. She has left two letters, one for her and one for her father to read. The Photograph is where past lessons meet in the present. There's predestination that is inferred in the makeup of the film.

Stella Meghie a couple of intertwining devices that take place where dialogue would be throughout the film. One of these is music. As you go back and forth in the different timelines,

the musical artists of the time period are there to meet you. Whether it be **Whitney Houston**, **Teddy Pendergrass**, or modern artists like **Anderson Paak** and **Solange**. There's a part of the movie where Al Green is played during the first time that Michael and Mae realize they like each other.

The setting also plays a part. Meghie and cinematographer Mark Schwartzbard are able to show the rich culture of the New Orleans environment in both eras of the film. For one couple, this is where they consummate their love. In the present, this is where things almost fall apart. There are choices presented in similar ways where the movie makes the audience hope that the right one is chosen. That could mean different things for different people and that's the dilemma of Christina (**Chanté Adams**).

The overall story of Christina and the younger version of Issac Jefferson (**Y'lan Noel**) strives to be the glue that holds everything together. The performances of both Adams and Noel really try to convey how sad their story is. Christina wants to be with Issac, but also wants more her small-town upbringing would allow. Eventually, she has to make a choice. With that choice comes tragedy and regret.

Meghie is able to use all four characters as puzzle pieces to fill in the blanks. While you only spend a finite amount of time with Michael and Mae, there are little things that strive to fill that gap. This is from the type of music they like (Mae likes Drake, Michael is more of a Kendrick Lamar fan) to camera framing where things unspoken are shown through the gaze of both characters.

The chemistry between Stanfield and Rae grows throughout the film. Michael and Mae are depicted as both recently getting out of relationships. Michael, in particular, might have a little trouble with commitment. It seems like there are points that each of the four character arcs end. You only get hints of Christina and Mae's relationship through the letter or a brief flashback. We don't learn too much about the backstories of both Michael and Mae other than jokes they tell each other about past relationships. The performance of Rae keeps Mae's character present throughout the movie. Sometimes, it feels like Mae is a secondary character to Christina instead of being a presence in her own story.

The Photograph also presents different types of relationships. While Michael and Mae were both single and seemingly falling for each other, you meet the married couple of Kyle (**Lil Rel Howery**)

and Asia (**Teyonah Parris**). They bring both humor and well-intended advice within the film. There are also Michael and Mae's friends, Andy (Kelvin Harrison Jr.) and Rachel (Jasmine Cephas Jones) who play off like they don't like each other at first. Then, it's hinted that this grows into something more serious.

Sometimes, we box love in by tying it to conventional means. By doing that, we miss out on something special. A love story about destiny is not new. Many of the character and story pillars that are found within a romantic movie are present here as well. However, it's great that black actors, actresses, and directors can aspire to tell stories like this. Much like a photograph, if you take care of love, it will always be present. The Photograph shows that even though the universe might pull you in different directions, the heart will eventually win if you allow it.

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