

Film Review: *La La Land*

*La La Land*, written and directed by Damien Chazelle, tells the story of two California dreamers who meet and ultimately become each other's saving grace. This film enlightens audiences about the willpower it takes to have a career as an artist, actor, or musician in the most glamorous way possible. Fabulous musical composition by Justin Hurwitz adds a sophisticated dimension to this film. Cinematography by Linus Sandgren captures every blissful detail in Chazelle's vision while bringing his own flare to the picture. The film is chocked-full of imaginative spirit which is undeniable by first scene. *La La Land* blends modern filmmaking technology with the style and tone of old-fashioned movies which is one of this film's richest qualities. Chazelle and Sandgren teamed up to catapult viewers into this old-fashioned, musical-like modern romance and simply did a spectacular job.

MUSICAL NERDS BEWARE: For those who plan to watch this movie because musicals fill their heart, soul, and body with energy... I advise to prepare for disappointment. This film, although very sufficient in its music, does not fall under the 'musical' genre in my opinion. I say all of this in reference to classic musicals like *Grease*, *Hairspray*, *Phantom*, *Hello Dolly*, *My Fair Lady* etc.

Instead of categories (because who likes labels anyway?), I would like to describe *La la land* as follows: a music-filled romance that is whimsically realistic, and an important educational document for modern-day dreamers. I chose this description because the love between the two stars is so strong, even words cannot say what they feel - so instrumental music is used in replacement. Throughout the duration of their love story only one song, "City of Stars," expresses their true love for each other through lyrics; therefore, a 'music-filled romance.' The movie is 'whimsically realistic' because even though there are aspects that may not transpire in real life, the story watches in a relatable manner (more on this later). It is an 'important educational document for modern-day dreamers' in the sense that this story can open a struggling artist's mind to new ways of approaching their craft while also understanding they are not alone in the journey of becoming something great.

Emma Stone stars as Mia, an aspiring actor of six years. Mia is riding this never-ending train of dead-end auditions when she bumps into Sebastian who is a velvety charismatic individual who is passionate for jazz and dedicated to open his own club. Despite the aggressive first impression they share in dreadful LA traffic, the two reacquaint at a party Sebastian is gigging and begin playful banter. From this point on, they are connected to each other even after performing an entire musical number dedicated to the denial of their attraction in Hurwitz's song, 'A Lovely Night.' Mia and Sebastian grow stronger every day which we see modeled through a beautifully crafted montage of their adventures together. This story unfolds the truth about how difficult it is for people to 'make it big' even with indisputable talent. Hardships are thrown at Mia and Sebastian which leads to a surprising yet fitting end to this film.

Cinematically, *La La Land* is astounding. There is not a moment of boredom in this piece for even the scenes that are standstill have this serenity of charm and elegance. The colors reflect the

emotion of each element in the story- specifically Mia's presence. She has this bright spirit which is highlighted in her clothing and when she goes home to a fluorescent pink bathroom, enormous mural in her bedroom, and 50's style couch with pink and white stripes. Before Sebastian meets Mia, we see his apartment unpacked with no decoration and his clothes are of muted tones. When the two come together, his colors are brighter reintroducing a hope that Sebastian seemed to have lost. In the same way Mia brings color into Sebastian's world, he restores Mia's esteem in the films she wants to create. Sandgren and Chazelle model this beautifully in a movie theater scene where Emma and Ryan resemble star-like quality (similar to Audrey Hepburn and George Peppard in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*). Each frame of their love story is shot like a classic (*Casablanca*, *Rebel Without a Cause* etc.) which fits perfectly into Mia's aesthetic. It truly is an incredible picture.

Emma and Ryan were the only choice for these two characters – but maybe not at first glance. Casting could have chosen more sufficient performers for their roles because they are not the most talented singers and dancers in the industry, but that is what makes them perfect. As I mention above, this film is not the traditional musical one would expect. Emma and Ryan's down-to-earth approach to the script, each other, and their individual character is relatable to audiences. Therefore, no other candidates would have been able to do this piece justice. I believe this is what Chazelle was trying to accomplish. Even though there are aspects of the film that are simply unrealistic (like floating around the Griffith Observatory) Emma and Ryan's performance evokes viewers to think about their own experiences with dreams, love, and passion because the two stars bring such a beacon of truth to this movie.

For me, this film is perfect for anyone who appreciates seeing others bring excellence to the table. The acting is amazing, the costumes are appealing, the editing is fantastic, and the director is the master of puppets behind it all. Chazelle being only 31 at the time made not one mistake in the construction of this film. Film is a challenging industry to shine in, but there is no denying the gifts this team of creatives possess after *La La Land* surfaced.

Whether it is romance, drama, sci-fi, alternative, or some other genre that floats an audience's boat, this movie is worth watching at least once. *La La Land* was released in 2016 and took home 6 Academy awards just one year later.

Overall, this is a movie that I have added to my yearly watchlist and recommend for anyone else to do the same.