

Damien Chazelle's La La Land: an Ode To Those Who believe

This is the tenth time I've watched Damien Chazelle's La La Land. It's that good.

Chazelle's modern day musical film recounts the story of two young Hollywood dreamers as they push each other to stay true to their vision. But don;t worry; it's a lot less cheesy than it sounds. Sebastian (Ryan Gosling) and Mia (Emma Stone) are each irresistible in their respective roles. Gosling plays a jazz pianist consumed by the desire to preserve the art of jazz through opening his own jazz club. Stone plays a wannabe actress working at a coffee shop which allows her to tirelessly audition for her big breakthrough. Through an array of vivid colors dancing across the screen (figuratively and literally), the two protagonist's struggle whisks us away into a fantasy of love, devotion and accomplishment, while staying embedded in the bittersweet journey that is reality.

The two fall in love and push each other to pursue their dreams without the sappy sentimentality that one might expect of a musical romance, which in my eyes seems to be one of Chazelle's greatest feats. Nonetheless, his movie has been criticized for the fact that Gosling and Stone are actors, not dancers. But when I watch the movie, I never notice their lack of dance skill. I'm too captivated by the film's aesthetics to notice what dance-experts would call subpar.

Chazelle works in lengthened, continuous shots capturing the love story between Mia and Sebastian through smooth and vibrant cinematography. It allows the film to ebb and flow in intensity. Some scenes are monochromatic, others display complementary colors in complete contrast, and still others parade a multitude of shades. Each scene bursts with intentionality in the way the colors play on human emotions. The first scene makes a rainbow out of dancing LA residents. A kaleidoscope of people with all sorts of dreams and talents dart across the screen,

dancing to a sweet melody, each with a passion so palpable it seeps into our own aspirations.

Their mesh of colors represents a whole host of ambitions, but each character with an individual longing to reach their heart's desire.

Mia is one of those individuals; she dreams of being a famous actress, a dream so strong she faces endless rejection. Her desire represents a beautiful tension between success and disappointment and uncertainty through which Chazelle embraces and exhibits through his excellent use of color. Mia's character becomes inseparably intertwined with deep blues, bright reds, and dull greens. The bleak blues in the coffee shop where she works to pay the bills, a red neon sign which illuminates her whole body as she hears Sebastian's piano, the green light seeping in the window as the two lose their unity in vision. Chazelle uses color to emphasize the inward emotions of the characters, which is no new concept to any artistic use of color; however, the vibrancy of the colors and their success compositionally on the screen is, in my opinion, unparalleled.

Outside of the cinematography, the film's soundtrack is a masterpiece. I became a "La La Land" enthusiast when I learned how both the musical composer, Justin Hurwitz, and Chazelle worked together to produce "La La Land's" music. What distinguishes "La La Land" from other musicals is its emphasis on a mesmerizing piano refrain repeated throughout the film.

The short refrain carries so much emotional weight that its presence, even in the lowest volume, inflicts a sort of beautiful heaviness on the audience. The refrain somehow captures the burden of the painful sacrifices each individual must make to achieve their aspirations while retaining a hopeful quality that those sacrifices will someday be rewarded- all within just a few

notes on a piano. “La La Land” won me over from the anti-musical party because it intertwines the magic of musicals without losing the weight of reality.

Through “La La Land” Chazelle reminds his audience that the enchantment of a musical resides in its ability to weave fantasy into the fabric of reality. He salutes those who chase their dreams with everything they’ve got and stands alongside those who grieve the sorrows and uncertainties that come with a neverending determination. To those dreamers in the audience “La La Land” grabs us by our shoulders, shakes us, and cries, “I believe in you!”