

La La Land



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Written and directed by Damien Chazelle. Produced by Fred Berger, Gary Gilbert, Jordan Horowitz and Marc Platt. Production Design by David Wasco. Cinematography by Linus Sandgren. Art Direction by Austin Gorg. Original Music by Justin Horowitz. Edited by Tom Cross. Costume Design: Mary Zophres.

Cinematic length: 128 minutes. Distributed by Summit Entertainment. Companies: Black Label Media, TIK Films, Impostor Pictures, Gilbert Films and Marc Platt Productions. Cinematic release August 2016: Check for ratings. Rating 90%.

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Written Without Prejudice

Cast

- Ryan Gosling as Sebastian Wilder
- Emma Stone as Mia Dolan
- John Legend as Keith
- Rosemarie DeWitt as Laura Wilder
- Finn Wittrock as Greg Earnest
- Jessica Rothe as Alexis
- Sonoya Mizuno as Caitlin
- Callie Hernandez as Tracy
- J. K. Simmons as Bill, the club manager
- Terry Walters as Linda, the coffee shop manager
- Tom Everett Scott as David
- Meagen Fay as Mia's Mom
- Damon Gupton as Harry
- Jason Fuchs as Carlo
- Josh Pence as Josh

Review

Only *Titanic* (1997) and *All About Eve* (1950) have got as many academy award nominations as *La La Land*. Even *Gone with the Wind* only managed thirteen. *La La Land* won six Oscars, has swept the Golden Globe and BAFTA awards, brought in just under four hundred million dollars before its cinema run has ended and gained almost universal critical acclaim. It is good, but can any film be *that* good? All this reminds me of the furore over *All About*

Eve, *Saturday Night Fever* (1978) *Rocky* (1976) and *The Colour Of Money* (1986). They were also about ambitious American battlers with dreams of fame. All four were essentially very good films, being well made and enjoyable to watch, even engrossing – if you have not heard them praised to the skies before seeing them. Publicity might get the people in, but it can sometimes lead them into negative over reactions. *La La Land* has been praised for its originality but it bears many resemblances to Jacques Remy's *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964). Both are musicals about young lovers in a city setting battling against social pressures that threaten to tear them apart. In both films colour appears as extraordinarily bright. Both films have an epilogue that comes “five years later.” This being after the split. In both films the epilogue says that lost love is not the end of life or even a permanent depressant. Life continues and by making adjustments people can be happy. However the differences are wide. The twenty-first century setting for *La La Land* is a world away from Cherbourg 1957 and the young lovers there are not wannabes in the entertainment world, they just want to survive together.

The plot to *La La Land* is simple, but the telling is not, mercifully. Director Damien Chazelle manages the extraordinarily difficult task of mixing exuberant fantasy and grim reality in one film seamlessly. Mia Dolan (Emma Stone) being bored in a Los Angeles traffic jam, gets distracted and misses her cue to move, leading to road rage from stranger Sebastian Wilder (Ryan Gosling). After brief mutual insults they drive off and we then see their separate wannabe lives. Before they meet again and the romance begins Sebastian manages to stay just ahead of the bills as a musician, with his dream of revitalizing traditional jazz, which he thinks will happen through his own club, when he owns one. The reality is that he gets sacked from his pianist's job by his friend Bill (J.K. Simmons) for playing cool jazz when Bill told him to play Christmas carols. Mia does not get sacked by her wearied vexed boss (Terry Walters) from her job as a waitress in a Hollywood backlot coffee shop when she leaves early, for yet another audition. As usual she gets around thirty seconds before being curtly thanked.



Emma Stone as Mia

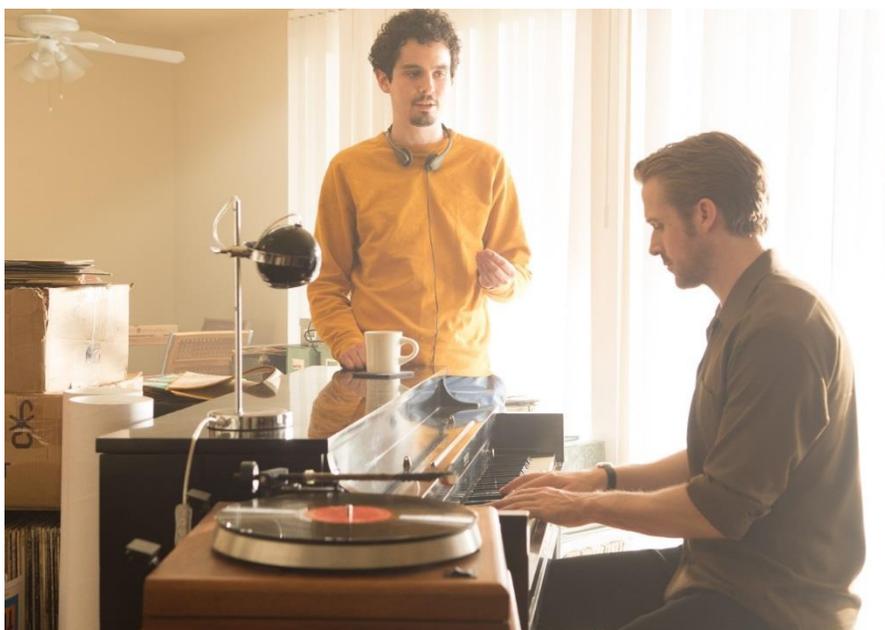


Ryan Gosling as Sebastian



Singer and composer and one of the film's executive producers, John Legend stars as Keith, Sebastian's friend and band leader

Mia and Sebastian represent America's wannabe stars. Such people must be a sizeable proportion of the population of 318 million, so if only a few hundred or at most a thousand or two succeed what would be their chances of success? Deduct the relatives of the already established stars and film people who get first bite and even that proportion drops to miniscule levels. And yet in reality in their many unknown thousands they keep trying, sacrificing comfort, security and relationships for the dream. Is it worth it? This film quite rightly if implicitly asks that question.



Writer-director Damien Chazelle with Ryan Gosling on the set

Differing meanings within the title suggests dreams are balanced by realities. La la land is a foolish dreamland and Los Angeles is a competitive place and la la is also the beginnings of a song – the world of music? *La La Land* has had too many descriptions of it as a feel good movie. Yes there are feel good moments but consider other scenes. Mia battling in the coffee shop, going through endless auditions that lead nowhere. Sebastian plays music he holds in contempt to pay the bills. He has to listen to his band leader Keith (John Legend) pityingly explain that nobody now likes the music he wants to revive. Mia works relentlessly to stage a one night performance that attracts a dozen people. Then in the dinner scene Mia and Sebastian take turns ripping into each other. These are not feel good scenes and the film ultimately gives a choice between two types of love – for a

person or for a chance at success. Making such a choice or watching others make it does not feel good.

Even so, this film has a love of life, an exuberance that starts in the traffic jam when one person gets out and starts singing exuberantly and others take it up until the road is full of happy people singing the celebratory 'Another day in the Sun.' Then when they meet for the third time Mia and Sebastian do their extraordinarily beautiful dancing singing duet 'City of Stars' against the night backdrop of Los Angeles. Before investigating, this looked inspired by the Fred Astaire –Ginger Rogers musicals and subsequent similar 1950s efforts and it turns out that this was the director's intended and successful effect. The exactly right acting, use of locales, extraordinarily beautiful cinema photography, new music and successful use of older tunes all make for a very well done film that deserves to be listed with the classic Hollywood films. By avoiding the schmaltzy and the predictable which marred many a Hollywood musical, it should be considered better than many of the old classics. The last scenes are extraordinarily effective, getting away from the idea so prevalent in peras and Hollywood musicals, that the moment of commitment between a couple freezes life in time. By showing that life in all its successes, failures and possibilities goes on beyond romance, Damien Chazelle has made a welcomingly unpredictable and true to life film.

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