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La La Land Review

by [Jean-Luc Botbyl](#)



Director: Damien Chazelle

Writer: Damien Chazelle

Starring: Emma Stone, Ryan Gosling

Genre: Musical/Drama

I don't think any movie – ever – has made me feel things in the way that *La La Land* did.

Actually, I don't know that I've ever had a real life experience that's done what *La La Land* has to me, which is, frankly, astonishing.

It's rare that I see a movie that, in retrospect, makes every other movie I've seen seem just a tiny bit worse. But *La La Land* is one of those films. It's a film brimming with life and energy unlike anything I've ever seen. Watching the film unfold before my eyes – it was an experience. One that I will likely never be able to replicate, but I will desperately try to whenever I can. It's akin to coming out of a concert, and desperately listening to music by that band for weeks after, hoping to capture even a shred of the emotions felt in the moment.

La La Land is a film that is successful on almost every axis, and it really had to, to sell what it's doing. This applies especially to the performs, and, surprising no one, both Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling were outstanding. The duo share an incredible chemistry from their first, speechless, interaction with one another.

For a film that is ostensibly a musical, *La La Land* often relies on quieter moments, free of dialogue or singing. Fortunately, the two leads are adept at handling such roles. Their control over their bodies and facial expressions is even more impressive than their ability to deliver their lines. The wide range of performance types in this movie really hammers home just how incredibly talented Stone and Gosling are.

They go from conversing to singing and dancing as if it's nothing, and the bombastic, often over the top musical numbers are a pleasure to watch. The choreography and cinematography are both excellent, capturing the vibrant emotions conveyed by the slightest movements of the performers.

And to be perfectly clear, I'm not a huge fan of musical numbers in films. I generally find them distracting and immersion-breaking, but here, they were a treat. Whenever one began, I found myself becoming giddy with excitement.

My enjoyment of them here stems partially from them being an important element of the film – it is, after all, about an actress and a pianist. It's kind of what they do, and expressing themselves to one another, through their art, is more powerful than any scrap of dialogue could have been.

That being said, I likely could be convinced otherwise, considering the quality of *La La Land's* script. It's compacted to the point where every uttered word feels absolutely necessary. It never gets bogged down in explaining things or overlong conversations padded out to add to the run time. No, this is a film in which very little actually *feels* scripted. It's a story about two humans, and those characters act, speak, and dream like real people.

And it's this element of the film that explains my emotional reaction to it. I was so engrossed in the story of Mia and Sebastian that it became easy to forget that what I was watching wasn't real. Yeah, that's something that gets tossed around a lot, and I'm certainly guilty of it. What can I say? I'm often prone to hyperbole. But when I apply that phrase to *La La Land*, trust me when I say that there is no hyperbole there

at all.

It isn't just the characters that this applies to – it's the setting as well. While the film takes place in modern day Los Angeles, it manages to also capture an older version of the city. After all, it is an homage to classic films of this genre. There's even a scene, about halfway through, where the film directly acknowledges this. The moment applies to something else that's going on, of course, but it seems difficult to not miss the self-referential nature of the lines.

To be entirely honest, I don't really have much of an affinity for the so-called "Golden Age." I mean, yeah, I can recognize their importance and impact. But I won't be able to point out every little detail about *La La Land* that acts as an homage. However, I know the aesthetic, and I do truly love how that is applied to the modern era.

There's very little – nothing, actually – that didn't impress me about *La La Land*. It's an intricately crafted, beautiful narrative, one that is truly deserving of every last bit of praise. If you haven't already (or can't, due to the film being released on three different dates, depending on where you live), make it your number one priority to see this film.