

“La La Land” has its critics singing praise

Catchy songs and a captivating plot have audiences falling in love

by Joe Borushek

Damien Chazelle’s sophomore movie “La La Land” tells the tale of two aspiring performers. Mia (Emma Stone) is a young actress struggling with the audition circuit. Sebastian (Ryan Gosling) is a young jazz musician trying to breathe new life in a “dying” genre.

As you could have guessed by the plethora of trailers and posters, “La La Land” is a musical. The movie, as a whole, is reminiscent of the golden age of Hollywood, and it has enough cliches for it to be familiar, but with originality to make it fresh.

It’s a musical for the new generation, with familiarity for older crowds to enjoy but with a different tone and story for a younger audiences.

The music is fantastic. Even those who dislike musicals will find themselves tapping their feet to a few songs.

The movie opens strong with “Another Day of Sun,” an upbeat tune set in a traffic jam describing the bitterness of trying to make it in Hollywood.

It ends with Mia’s tearful soliloquy called “The Ones Who Dream,” which gives hope to those who have felt discouraged in pursuing a dream.

The weakest song would have to be “City of Stars,” mainly because of

Sebastian’s uninteresting voice.

While the writing is also wonderful, the story itself is predictable. By the end of the first quarter of the movie, you get a clear picture of what will happen to the main characters.

There are moments that will make you laugh out loud, but also moments that will make you cry. Stone and Gosling each give some of the best performances of their careers.

Cameos by like John Legend and J.K. Simmons, feel like a good fit rather than an afterthought.

If you have seen Chazelle’s previous film, “Whiplash,” you’ll be in for a peasant surprise as the two movies are nearly polar opposite.

While “Whiplash” sets the scene in a darker way, “La La Land” is peppy, upbeat, and lighthearted.

There isn’t anything quite as intense as “Whiplash” in “La La Land,” but there are some moments that make you feel for the characters, particularly towards the end of the film.

The story really begins shortly after “Another Day of Sun” where the characters from the opening number dissipate and the audience is left with a Los Angeles traffic jam.

We see Mia rehearsing a monologue in her car and Sebastian listening to Jazz music in his car, singing along to the tune. Mia is distracted by her own work and doesn’t notice traffic moving along.

Sebastian keeps beeping his horn but she refuses to move. We see Sebastian drive up beside her and beep his horn to antagonize Mia, who gives him a nice “how do you do” by way of the middle finger and he

speeds off. This is the first interaction between the two characters.

After the opening scene, the story dives right into Mia and Sebastian’s career struggles. Mia goes to an audition where she is almost instantly rejected. Defeated, but not done, she goes through several other auditions and is rejected from each one.

After this sequence, we are introduced to Sebastian. He’s buying coffee and staking out a small club. It cuts to him in his barebones apartment. Not much furniture but a lot of music memorabilia.

The movie cuts to Mia getting ready and leaving for party. When she is on her way to her car she finds that it has been towed.

We then see Sebastian trying to make ends meet by playing at a small restaurant. He talks to the manager (J.K. Simmons) for a bit where the manager tells him to “not play anything off of the playlist.”

Sebastian with a fake smile starts playing festive songs like “Jingle Bells” and “Santa Claus is Coming to Town.”

Later, we hear him go off the playlist and play freestyle jazz on the piano.

Coincidentally, Mia is walking by and stops because she loves the music she is hearing. She walks in right after he finishes and not too long after the manager fires him. He brushes off her attempt to tell him how beautiful his playing was, not even acknowledging her presence.

The story heats up from there as the couple meets a second time, this time with Sebastian playing with an 80’s cover band at a party that Mia is attending. Sebastian is clearly miserable and Mia heckles



Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling co-star in the new musical | Lionsgate.com

him as a way to push back after what happened at the restaurant. The two start talking and they acknowledge the coincidences (almost fourth walleque) that they keep running into each other.

Without spoiling the plot further, I’ll just leave you with this: the pros of the movie far outweigh the little cons that it has. If you haven’t seen the movie already, I highly suggest you see it soon.

Gap Year Fair gives students alternative options

Some seniors consider taking a gap year before attending college

by Mimi Cassato

The annual Gap Fair took place on Jan. 28 at New Trier High School giving seniors the chance to explore alternative post high school plans.

For students like Mia Solberg, Colin Richards, and Sophie Chevalier, taking a gap year was the perfect opportunity for a challenging experience before jumping into college.

According to Gap Year coordinator Gretchen Stauder, 95 percent of New Trier seniors will go off to four years of college.

This includes the 16 graduates from 2016 who chose to take a gap year.

“More people are considering it as an option,” Stauder explained. And not only at New Trier. At MIT there were double the amount of gap year students from 2009 - 2010.

Although taking a gap year does not always pop into everyone’s mind while meeting with their post high school advisor, when Mrs. Thorngren mentioned the idea to Solberg (who graduated in 2016), it seemed to be the perfect fit.

“I instantly fell in love and started researching the idea more. The difficult part was making a decision on which program to sign

up for considering there are endless opportunities offered for gap years,” Solberg said.

She ended up traveling first semester to Patagonia with the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) program, one of the 53 programs presented at this year’s fair.

Richards’ gap year was more local than Solberg’s, and was spent working at the Wilmette Harbor along with an internship at a new technology company in Chicago.

Like Solberg and Chevalier, Richards was accepted into many universities, but realized staying home and saving money would make the most sense.

“I couldn’t decide the direction I wanted to go once at school. I decided to stay at home and work full time, earning money and gaining life experience,” Richards explained.

Stauder acknowledged the fact that many parents worry their kids will not return to school after their gap year, however, “studies show they perform much better” and receive higher GPAs, according to a study at Middlebury College.

As for returning to school, Stauder adds that almost all gap year students return after one year or semester.

In fact, Richards is currently at the University of Vermont, Solberg will be attending Colorado College this fall, and Chevalier heads to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

The other large academic advantage that Solberg, Richards, and Chevalier received was clarity on



Gap Year Fair gathers more than 600 students interested in alternatives to the traditional college path | Stauder

their majors. All three said they didn’t exactly what they wanted to pursue in college, but their time off gave them more guidance to their passions.

“A large portion of these students enter college without having a clue of what they want to do, which is perfectly fine, but why not give them a chance to experience the world.

before they have to decide how they want to partake in it,” said Chevalier, who traveled to Ecuador, Bolivia, and Nicaragua.

Solberg agreed with the importance of learning more about oneself before ‘committing to a major.’

In addition to the academic guidance their gap years provided,

all three felt passionate on the social benefits gained as well.

“I’ve made some of my best friends during this year. I have so many connections across the globe now which is really special,” Chevalier explained.

Richards also commented on the friendships he’s made at work, and Solberg is even planning a trip to Europe with one of her NOLS friends.

What was most evident to these students was the change they saw in themselves during and after their time off.

Richards explained, “[what] I see in myself after my gap year is that I approach life in a much more mature and methodical manner.”

Stauder commented that a gap year gives students time to reflect and changes their perspective. “Eventually, when they do go on, they have a deeper level of insight.”

Although Solberg and Richards described themselves as eager to follow the different path of a gap year, Chevalier recognized that her initial fears turned into gratitude.

“There’s no better time in life to do this and college is still going to be there for you after.”

Although all three students have plans to attend college, their passion for traveling continues, as Solberg said, “I don’t like to make many plans for the future. [It’s] more fun to see where life takes me.”