

film review: *La La Land* – left feeling empty?

I was very excited about going to see this film – it promised the cinematography and choreography of a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movie crossed with the comedy and ‘feel-good musical romance’ of *Mamma Mia*.

The opening scene did not disappoint, as a frustrating traffic jam turned into an all-singing, all-dancing technicolour song. It painted a vibrant picture of a city where any number of things could happen out of the mundane. We’re introduced to Mia, an aspiring actress who is constantly rejected from auditions, and Sebastian, a jazz pianist who wants to own his own jazz club and bring back jazz in its true meaning.

Despite these two unlikely people being thrust together by a series of unplanned circumstances, the audience is denied the ‘happily ever after’ ending, shaking the well-trodden path of Hollywood musical romance. In its place lies confusion about whether the ending is good or simply disappointingly ‘other’.

Mia and Seb start with unfulfilled dreams, dreams that they believe will give them happiness above all else. At the end of the film, they have both achieved them. But they don’t have each other. Their relationship broke down when things got tough. They have achieved their dreams, which should make them happy, right? But they don’t have each other, which would make them sad, right? I left the cinema feeling puzzled.

As humans we have an innate nature to seek close relationships with those we value, seeing them as more important than the draw of money or achievements. *La La Land*’s ending might tell us that diamonds and the fulfilment of dreams are



enough to outweigh our desire for a deep love for another. However, the Bible tells us we have been designed for relationships – deep committed relationships which are full of sacrifice, service, love, hardship, fun and joy.¹ Similar to how Seb describes jazz: ‘This is the dream. It’s conflict, it’s compromise’.

Unfortunately, as fallen individuals in an imperfect world we often look to the wrong places to meet our need for relationships – be it the Hollywood movie, friends, spouses, pornography, Facebook... temptation presses us to compare what we haven’t got with what we perceive we need. The desire for deep committed relationship is part of how we have been designed in reflection of our trinitarian God. Human relationships are a good gift of God, but true fulfilment of those desires can only be found in Christ. Our earthly relationships can reflect God’s goodness, but ultimately only point us towards our greatest need for an intimate relationship with Christ.²

La La Land is a cinematically beautiful movie which raises many interesting points about ambition, ‘Hollywood romance’, commitment and love. It shows two people who achieve their dreams, yet still yearn for something they don’t have. It serves as a reminder that however great our ambitions or ‘fairy tale’ romances may be, without Jesus they won’t give us true fulfilment. ■

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REFS

1. Genesis 1:27, 2:18, 22-24
2. Ephesians 5:25-33