

## DON'T THINK TWICE REVIEW

What would it be like if you were an integral piece to a much larger picture and then suddenly you went missing right before the puzzle was completed? No one would be able to admire the final product in all its glory. Perhaps there would be a sense of emptiness. Dejection would eventually overtake the other pieces of the puzzle from being so close yet so far away from accomplishing what they originally set out to do. When skimming the surface, we get the impression these pieces want to be connected and presented to the masses as a whole. But when delving into the true intricacy of this puzzle, we learn that's far from the truth, as every piece of the puzzle yearns for its own spotlight. Learning how to suddenly deal with that missing piece to the larger picture is what Mike Birbiglia's feature film *Don't Think Twice* ultimately explores.

The Commune, a fictional and tightly-knit group of improv comedians in New York City find themselves in disarray when two members of the troupe, Jack Mercer (Keegan-Michael Key) and coincidentally his girlfriend, Samantha (Gillian Jacobs) receives auditions for one of the most prominent platforms for any aspiring comedian: the infinitely popular TV show Weekend Live. Weekend Live is comedy's version of sports as Miles (Mike Birbiglia) a member of The Commune, so eloquently puts it. It's fast-paced, it's exciting, and it's what every true comedian strives to be a part of. When it comes time for the much anticipated auditions for the TV show, Samantha ends up flubbing her opportunity from a deeply rooted fear of performing on stage alone instead of with a group like she's accustomed to, while Jack ends up excelling and earns his rightful spot on the TV show. All of this excitement is unfortunately happening in the wake of a car accident of Bill's (Chris Gethard) father, another member of The Commune.

Tragedy striking in one corner and opportunity presenting itself in another seems to be a common occurrence throughout the duration of the film which ends up giving the flick an impeccable balance between happiness and sadness amongst the characters. An important thing to keep in mind is that the comedy factor stems from both of these realms. We as the audience are not only laughing when the characters are performing on stage and doing what they do best as comedians, but we're also finding a way to laugh at situations and predicaments that are rooted within the darkest corners of these characters' lives. When it all boils down to it, sadness has the ability to draw some of the biggest laughs when you remove yourself from the scenario and examine it from afar. And the most brilliant and beautiful thing about *Don't Think Twice* is that we as the audience are not only laughing at the sad predicaments, but the characters inhabiting the story are laughing right along with us at their own sorrow and doing their best to make light of their own lack of success.

A perfect example of this is when Jack Mercer is no longer with The Commune and the group is finally doing sketches and performances without him for the first time in their routine

venue. Jack's girlfriend Samantha, typically always starts off their show by asking the audience if anyone in attendance has had a particularly bad day and encourages that person to elaborate on it. The Commune then proceeds to use this "bad day" as a vehicle to drive their performance. One of the first things that an audience member shouts when Samantha inquires about their day is that they wish Jack was still a part of The Commune. Mind you, at this point of the film, every member of The Commune has shown clear signs of envy towards Jack's success on Weekend Live. As soon as this audience member alludes to the fact that the show isn't as good without their former counterpart who is now on the rise to superstardom, the group quickly and cleverly latches onto this by summoning their jealousy and putting a creative twist on it in the heat of the moment. A few of the members of the group make the cross with their hand across their chest, as if they're praying. The group then proceeds to mourn Jack's loss at a funeral and the group weeps for him, begging for him to come back to them. We immediately get a sense the group is poking fun at themselves in a really morbid way but ultimately they're doing a superlative job at removing themselves from the scenario, examining it from afar, and simply trying to make themselves feel better or at the very least making peace and accepting the fact that they may never make it to the big-time like their fellow comedian, Jack.

The most interesting thing about *Don't Think Twice* is that instead of the focal point being this massive success story coming to fruition for this one lucky comedian, the film instead chooses to focus on how that success story is affecting those around him and how to deal with the backlash and jealousy of people you've known and have been close to for years. While Jack Mercer is attaining everything he's worked so hard for, the foundation that he's built with The Commune along his journey of discovery is crumbling before his very eyes. Jack is then forced with the decision of either picking up the pieces and putting them back together or leaving them entirely for his new life in the spotlight.

*Don't Think Twice* is a wonderful compilation of friendship, love, heartbreak and the cost of chasing dreams that is driven by an immeasurably talented ensemble of unknown actors and comedians. It's undoubtedly going to be one of these "easy to overlook" flicks from this year. But, I'm here, standing on the highest pedestal possible, shouting to the masses and letting its existence be known. It's naturally funny with a lot of spirit that has the potential to pull on your heart strings, especially for aspiring artists of any kind. Not just comedians.

Don't think twice about seeing *Don't Think Twice*.

Written by Guthrie Roy Hartford