

SING STREET REVIEW

John Carney is at it again! The mastermind who brought us the indie delights *Once* and *Begin Again*, is back in the same vein with his third feature film, *Sing Street*. *Sing Street* is undoubtedly in the spirit of Carney's first two films -- an explosive and fun dramedy with a musical edge that explores relationships, love, and all the chaos that comes along with it. But unlike *Begin Again*, which had two main stars in Mark Ruffalo and Keira Knightley driving the movie, Carney goes back to his roots by using no-name actors to fuel the story of *Sing Street* with passion and fury; a similar approach to his debut film, *Once*.

Sing Street is set in Dublin, Ireland and takes us back thirty-one years to 1985 when music videos were emerging for the first time and becoming a main aspect of pop culture while simultaneously dazzling music enthusiasts and artists alike. We find our main protagonist, Connor Lalor, sitting on his couch with his older brother Brendan early on in the film, watching and listening to a flashy and catchy music video called "Rio" by *Duran Duran*. While Connor's parents are unable to grasp the video's pizzazz factor, Connor is enamored by the images that flash by on the TV screen. Connor, who confides in his brother Brendan throughout the film, listens intently as he gives a perfect and concise play-by-play on the elements of the music video. "It's art! It's the perfect mixture of music and visuals. It's short and to the point," he bellows to their father who sits in the corner, continually questioning the merit of music videos in general. "Why can't they just play live? What're they trying to hide?" The father asks. "Music videos last forever! Everyone is making them nowadays!" Brendan fires back, defending the cause. In the midst of the bickering, Connor continues to watch the music video with a newfound vigor in his eyes. In this moment, we as the audience can easily discern that a light within the deep recesses of Connor's mind has been lit.

After being forced into a new school due to his parent's lack of funds, Connor is befriended by Darren, another student who witnesses an altercation between the school bully and Connor. While Darren and Connor head to school one morning, they notice a beautiful girl perched atop a stoop, completely dolled up with a cigarette dangling from her mouth. This immediately triggers a response from Connor. There's something about her that's quite eye-grabbing, just like the women from the "Rio" music video. Darren doesn't seem to know much about her besides the fact that she never talks to any of the boys from their school nor shows much interest. Connor changes that by courageously approaching her, inquiring if she would be interested in being in a music video for his band. A bit reluctant, she makes Connor sing for her, to ensure that he really is in a band. Connor belts out a few lyrics from a popular song on the radio, ultimately impressing the girl, Raphina.

From here, Connor proceeds to start a band in hopes of winning over Raphina. Darren introduces Connor to his friend Eamon, who happens to play every instrument known to man.

After convincing Eamon of their plan, the group sets out to recruit other members for their new “Futurist” Band, as Connor labels it. We don’t particularly know what constitutes a “Futurist” band from the get-go and neither do the characters of the film. But therein lays the beauty and adventure of the film as the band, through much experimentation and continuous guidance from Connor’s brother Brendan, starts to hone in on what they really want to achieve. Ultimately, this new dynamic that’s established between the group, sets into motion an ambitious sequence of events; making music videos together. This endeavor leads to the band’s birth and emergence while Connor simultaneously learns more about himself, how to survive at his new school, his dysfunctional family, Raphina, and the inner workings of love.

The thing that sets *Sing Street* apart from Carney’s other two films is its ability to evoke a deep emotional response. The film presents many different ways to empathize with Connor. Perhaps you had similar feelings for a girl like Connor does for Raphina. Maybe you had trouble dealing with a relentless bully from school and adapting to a new environment. Or maybe you can relate to Connor’s struggle that arises from the dysfunction of his family, specifically his parents. For me personally, the film was able to transport me back to my days of youth when I first discovered the desire of wanting something bad enough and doing everything in my power to attain said desire. In hindsight, when I was Connor’s age, my friends and I did something similar. We didn’t explore music, but did seek refuge in the world of professional wrestling and created a promotion and put on shows for our friends and classmates in the backyard. In that sense, the film has the ability to tap into that teenage angst we felt at one point in our lives. It’s a familiar feeling of wanting to be a part of something large and creative and feeling on top of the world in the process of bringing it all to fruition.

To quote one of my favorite songs by *Against Me*, “Do you remember when you were young and you wanted to set the world on fire?” Connor and his friends will. And I can say with absolute certainty that you will as well after watching *Sing Street*.