

MOVIE REVIEW

Belfast - a fork in the road

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Directed and written by Kenneth Branagh, "Belfast" is produced by Focus Pictures and distributed by Universal Pictures. Released in November of 2021, it has garnered a positive reception, has won the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, and it has made a little under \$50 million in the box office.

The film's writing can and will grip the viewer from the very first moments of the film. The story follows a young boy named Buddy, who is caught up in the Troubles of Northern Ireland and how he lives through it with his family. Throughout the film, Buddy tries to contextualize his immediate circumstances, like the riots, religious prejudice, and questioning his own identity, all while having to deal with his family going through financial debt. The plot is mainly conveyed through the slice-of-life aspect of this Irish neighborhood, which does benefit with the characters' perspectives of the Troubles.

The use of symbolism and motifs is strong in this film. Of course, the most prominent motif in the film is the road. Not only is it used in a literal context, as the citizens of Belfast occupy it, it is also used in a metaphorical context in terms of symbolizing the characters' destiny. The mobs of the Troubles only go one way on the road, while every other citizen of Belfast goes in their own direction. In spite of it somewhat being on the nose at times, this use of symbolism does help reinforce the ideas of questioning one's identity and determining one's own destiny.

Entertainment is also used as a motif, as one of the very few conduits of escape for the characters. The scenes referencing movies and even a performance of "A Christmas Carol" are shown in color. This juxtaposition against the black-and-white footage may be somewhat candy-coated to some, this contrast does work in favor of providing a sense of joy in an otherwise bleak world. There are also moments where TV shows are refer-

enced, some of which reflect the characters' current situation. Given that the film is somewhat autobiographical of Kenneth Branagh, these symbols do perfectly show off his perspective of the Troubles and compliments the film's themes.

Jude Hill plays Buddy, an imaginative and curious kid who lives through the Struggles. Jude Hill manages to put his best foot forward with his performance, and there wasn't a moment where I felt it was lacking in any way. Judi Dench's performance as Buddy's grandmother is another highlight of the film. She provides quite a few witty quips while still acting like a loving relative. In addition, she does play off well with Buddy's equally witty grandfather, played by Ciarán Hinds. While there is more to talk about with the other performances, these performances are some of the best in the entire film.

In terms of style, the film does establish it clearly. While the film generally sticks with a black-and-white color palette, it occasionally provides

a few scenes in color, particularly in shots of modern-day Belfast and in some of the moments that the film references. The score and songs by Van Morrison do compliment the film's general somber tone, while providing a few moments of levity at times. The film's Oscar-nominated original song, "Down to Joy", does partially establish the tone at the beginning of the film. All of these elements work together to help the film stand on its own.

"Belfast" is an emotional, moving film with a clear message of questioning identity in the face of prejudice. This film's writing and symbolism, performances, and production quality some of what makes this film unique and worthy of its Oscar nominations. If you're looking for something that will give you plenty of emotions, I can definitely recommend this film.

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