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Happy-Go-Lucky - DVD

Will this bring sunshine into your summer?

by Neil Queen published on 15 August 2008

Happiness, eh? Are any of us really happy? Is other people's happiness any of our business? Is it wrong to impose our ideas of happiness on others? That's what director Mike Leigh seems to be pondering in his latest effort, one that sees him departing from the grey sky template that had served him so well.

Primary school teacher Poppy (Sally Hawkins) breezes through life with an unshakeable sunny disposition, seemingly unable to take anything too seriously, refusing to let any setbacks shake her belief in the goodness of man and the power of the human spirit. Sharing a flat with fellow teacher pal Zoe, the pair try to enjoy what life has to offer while looking for love and a good time.

After her bike is stolen, the free-spirited Poppy decides to learn to drive, only to be paired up with her polar opposite, Scott, an angry curmudgeon of an instructor with an ever so dodgy world view and a need for strict discipline and order. Both are determined to rein in the other's excessive moods, thinking they both know which is best for the other, creating the movie's tension. What in another pair of hands could become a kitchen sink buddy movie, here becomes a dramatic analysis of how we cope individually with adversity and the strain of modern life.

A concerted effort by Leigh to make something a touch sunnier in disposition, it's an enjoyably refreshing affair. The cast helps forge Leigh's naturalistic tone, one that he strives to maintain throughout. The script has an ear for the everyday, while the story evolves, rather than following a traditional structural course.

Starting out as frivolous, it has a relaxed structure that allows it to switch tone with ease. This is a canny trick that is pulled off sublimely, as its a tightly constructed thesis on personal happiness,



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personal liberty and the responsibility we all have towards each other, whether you're someone paid to guide others or not. Differing personal approaches to life and happiness are pitched against one another, each in its own way flawed.

VERDICT

Hawkins as Poppy is on the whole wonderful - though frequently annoying and veering on many an occasion towards a Catherine Tate caricature, she's able to give the character enough tonal depth to effortlessly show how life's knocks chip away at her, testing her raison d'etre.

Leigh's ability to tell deep, humanistic stories makes this a true heartstring-twanging gem.

Rating: 15

Starring: Sally Hawkins, Alexis Zegerman, Eddie Marsan

Directed by: Mike Leigh

Extras: Trailer, featurettes

At a glance

What is it?

Drama comedy

Good

Deft filmmaking that amuses while causing you to give your chin a good rub

Bad

Even though she's meant to be irritating, the character of Poppy still tests your patience

Verdict

Leigh's ability to tell deep, humanistic stories makes this a true heartstring-twanging gem

Price 19.99 (DVD)

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10