

LA LA LAND: That Rare Musical I Didn't Hate

KARIM WAHEED

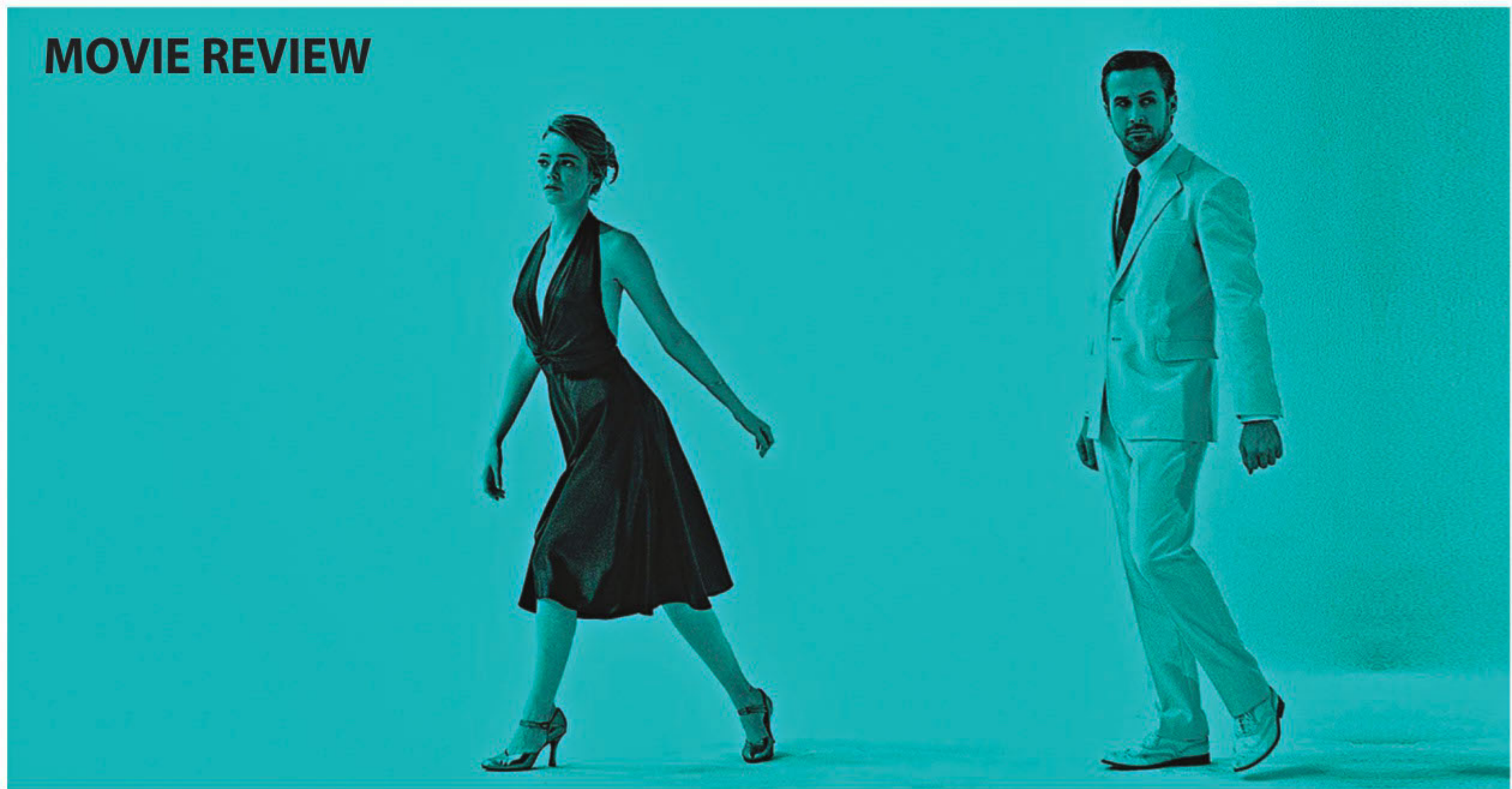
I suppose that title needs clarification. I love music; I eat, breathe, sleep movies – just not characters breaking into a song and dance routine every 15/20 minutes [reason why I'm not a fan of the traditional Bollywood storytelling format]. I went to Blockbuster Cinemas at Jamuna Future Park hesitantly but with an open mind.

Spoiler-free synopsis: A struggling actress-barista Mia [played by Emma Stone] and aspiring, purist jazz pianist Sebastian [Ryan Gosling] don't meet cute. In between having their dreams crushed, mutilated and nuked by the heartless muse that is the City of Angels, they find time to fall in love. Will they find their happy ending though?

When I said I went to the movie theatre with an open mind, I wasn't kidding; I didn't do any background check. Not knowing that *La La Land* was directed by Damien Chazelle [who also directed *Whiplash*] prior to the viewing was a good thing. There was no expectation, hence no bias. I wouldn't say it blew my mind. No, *La La Land* didn't offer anything new as far as the storyline is concerned but it changed the "just another musical" lane with its storytelling. I would describe it as "old Hollywood grandeur meets Broadway soul meets indie sensibilities".

Why did someone who is allergic to "song and dance movies" get bowled over by this one? For starters, the music directed by Justin Hurwitz. My biggest complaint with the typical Hollywood musical is that the songs are used as dialogues and independently – in most cases – they are not great music [in Bollywood's case, it's the opposite but then

MOVIE REVIEW



the songs have as much connection to the narrative as the current "leader of the free world" has to sanity]. For me, *La La Land* excelled on both grounds – the story struck a chord and I left the theatre humming "City of Stars".

More importantly though, this movie hits you hard in the feels. When Sebastian's popular vocalist friend [played by singer John Legend] mocks the former's purist attitude towards jazz and tries to convince him to soften up and be more "pop", you see how a musician with integrity breaks. When Mia goes to an

audition, is interrupted after delivering the first line with a rude "Thank you", you see how brutal show business is.

La La Land will break your heart, even if your heart is made of coal [like yours truly]. It's not the ending that will leave you broken though; it's what could have been that's played out in a few seconds before the movie ends that will leave a dent.

Karim Waheed is the man responsible for SHOUT. Send your complaints to karim.w.25@gmail.com

Nothing Matters in SHERLOCK

ZOHEB MASHIUR

The Sherlock Holmes stories are simple enough in subject matter: a detective, his friend, and the cases they solve and an arch-nemesis hovering in the background. Retain these elements and you can even set the stories in space. *Sherlock's* 21st century take was fresh but worked because at its core the show told Sherlock Holmes stories.

From 2014's Series Three and onwards, the core elements lost the writers' respect. *Sherlock* went from a show about characters solving puzzles to being a show about *Sherlock* the show. Intentional self-reference, in turn, then turned towards unintentional self-parody.

I liked Series Three a lot at the time. I re-watched it recently and it still holds up, but you can now clearly see where it really went wrong. I didn't mind that the first episode didn't offer a real resolution to Series Two's final cliffhanger: meta-mocking fan theories is a move that is cruel however you look at it but it was carried off in style and the show seemed to have earned it. And really, the reconciliation between Sherlock and John was poignant and fun. That this episode was followed by unabashed fan service was also a surprise but it was, also, a lot of fun and they even solved a decent case during the wedding. Looking back, it's obvious that the show had then decided to primar-

ily be about the relationships between John and Sherlock but at the time I was satisfied.

It helped that the series finale was so spectacular, with Lars Mikkelsen's take on Charles Magnussen being in its own way

these new introductions to the plot and they were handled in the most bizarre ways possible: they were at once erased out of existence as actual drivers of the plot and yet constantly called back to in a way that killed the show's forward

relationships with those around him, particularly John. The trouble was that we didn't learn anything that we didn't already know. Of the new puzzles the series presented only episode two's actually worked, though again it hinged on calling back Mary to provide the final resolution. There was much revealed at the end of the series but it was a series of inconsequential plot twists that did not properly resolve what came before and did not have consequence for the future. The problem of the recent events being incredible (read: without credibility) is nothing next to this complaint.

This is a show where something seemingly earth-shattering can happen and then get subsequently erased or ignored in the rush to move to the next twist or quip. Without consequence a show has no tension and cannot be taken seriously as a story. *Sherlock* has become a beautifully-shot, brilliantly-performed series of set pieces, a film editor's dream, whose plot endlessly explores the same tired relationships and produces events that ultimately mean nothing even within the world of the show.

Why should it then mean anything to us?

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TV SERIES REVIEW



as, uhm, *memorable* as Andrew Scott's Moriarty. However this same finale introduced the ridiculous premise of Mary as former gun-for-hire, and ended on an even stranger cliffhanger.

It took three years to finally resolve

momentum.

The obsession with these resolved character arcs double-downed on the show's already present desire to look into itself for new plot ideas. Series Four was ultimately an exploration of Sherlock's