

MOVIES

SING SING

A story of the transformative power of art

RAIAN ABEDIN

In the United States, the Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA) programme exists to create a space for humanity and compassion to exist within maximum and medium-security "correctional facilities" across the country. To live in prison is to forego all of your humanness and accept dehumanisation as common practice. This is the world within which the story of *Sing Sing* happens. It is a story of a group of prisoners setting up stage plays through the RTA programme as a means to escape the cruelty that permeates their lives, find joy, and realise the healing that comes through art.

The narrative of *Sing Sing* follows the growing friendship between Divine G and Clarence 'Divine Eye' Maclin. At the start of the story, Divine G (played by Colman Domingo) has already established himself as a confident and collected member of the RTA. This already established dynamic is the space in which Divine Eye breaks in, with his rugged attitude and hunched shoulders. It is clear that Divine Eye is shaped by the soulless prison — a system that has nothing to offer



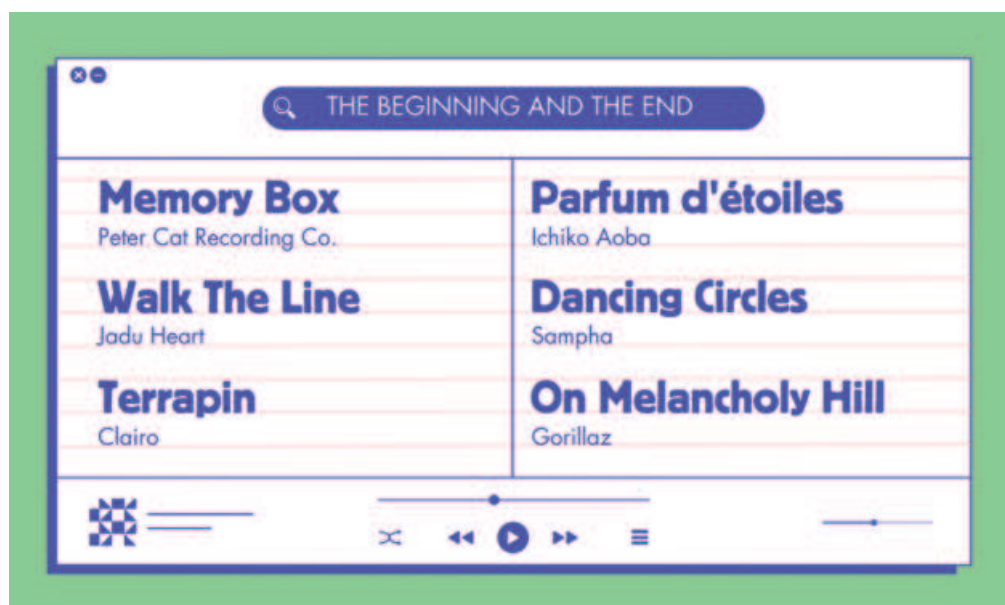
but misery and false promises hidden behind layers of bureaucracy.

Aching and inspiring, much of what the story offers feels grounded in reality and not just because it's a well-written tale, but because the stories are drawn from the lived experiences of the real-life Divine G — who also takes charge of playing his younger version in the movie. The film doesn't just showcase a fictionalised version of the lives of these incarcerated people; it brings them in and allows them to shine.

It's hard to tell just how much of the movie was fictionalised and how much was

completely rooted in reality. But that only goes to show how carefully, and tenderly, the film was written. More than just an inspiring tale, *Sing Sing* works on multiple levels as a filmmaking achievement. Its cinematography, grainy and warm, creates a visual language for the film seeped in emotional maturity. The music, too, is fantastic, albeit sparsely used.

Emotionally devastating, and never really shying away from depicting vulnerability as something essential for humans to be humans, *Sing Sing's* very existence is celebratory and, yet, born out of a tremendous amount of pain.



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