

‘The Banshees of Inisherin’ is one of the best movies of the year

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 114 minutes

This motion picture from Fox Searchlight opened in Los Angeles and New York on Oct. 14, and is expanding week by week into more markets.

“The Banshees of Inisherin” is a very unusual film set in the early 1920s on an island off the coast of Ireland. At one point fairly early in the tale, one of the central characters stares off into the distance, watching soldiers fight in a civil war taking place on the mainland. He wonders aloud how and why his countrymen would possibly want to hurt each other. Unfortunately, a bizarre experience in his own life suddenly begins to reveal just how quickly relationships can sour.

The latest film from writer/director Martin McDonagh (“In Bruges,” “Seven Psychopaths,” “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri”) is a brilliantly written feature that manages to effortlessly shift from an amusing black comedy to something tragic and melancholy.

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Pádraic Súilleabháin (Colin Farrell) is a simple farmer and nice guy who lives modestly with his sister Siobhán (Kerry Condon). Each day, he enjoys going for a drink at the village bar and spending time with his friend Colm Doherty (Brendan Gleeson). That is, until Colm tells him point blank that their friendship is over and that he doesn't want to ever speak with him again.

A baffled Pádraic pushes for answers, infuriating Colm so much that a seemingly fanatical ultimatum is delivered. As each day passes, the two men become further entrenched and unwilling to compromise in getting what they want. Not only does their conflict make their own lives difficult, but it also affects those around them.

The tone is very low-key early on and as mentioned, it's very funny as Pádraic pesters his pal and tries to get to the bottom of what is going on. Of course, others in the bar and around town also have their opinions and advice, leading to plenty of witty banter.

This movie is largely reliant on its stars and the conversation-heavy screenplay. Thankfully, everyone delivers in spades. Both Gleeson and Farrell make powerful impressions in their lead roles.

For this reviewer, Farrell's work is fantastic as a meek farmer who slowly becomes bolder and eventually vengeful. Gleeson also has a lot to work with as his exasperated character becomes fervently determined to exorcise Pádraic from his life.

While the barbs come fast and furious, the script and cast perfectly and subtly manage to smoothly transition into more serious material. Both of these leads are deeply flawed and the movie deals with personal issues like loneliness, as well as feelings of a unique kind of unreclaimable loss. Along the way, Pádraic and Colm are both offered solutions or compromises to their situation, but are so determined to win the struggle that they make things worse for themselves in the process.

There's a feeling of impending doom and irreparable damage that is hard to ignore in the final act. This is another reason to complement the leads, who are all the more impressive for acting out in extreme ways, yet somehow making their concerns relatable enough to keep viewers

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watching.

And props should also go to Kerry Condon as Pádraic’s level-headed sister who tries to serve as a mediator, as well as Barry Keoghan as a troubled young man with a tragic history living a sad life. Additionally, the photography is striking, with the island locations making a stunning backdrop.

And despite the fact that most of the film consists of little more than people talking to one another, the editing is equally skilled. When characters do act out, it feels violent, brutal and disturbing to witness. This is a direct result of the way the movie has been cut.

If you’re comfortable with thick accents, a story more interested in discussions than action and themes which may be open to some interpretation, this film is a gem. In fact, “The Banshees of Inisherin” is one of the year’s best movies. It’s a pitch-black comedy with a lot going on beneath the surface and stands as a distinctive and thought-provoking meditation on the toll of unnecessary conflicts and how personal relationships can crumble with the greatest of ease.

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