

‘Everything Everywhere All at Once’ is a unique experience

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

out of «««««

Running Time: 139 minutes

This feature from A24 opens at movie theaters in most markets on April 8, 2022.

As a movie critic, I’m often harsh in my evaluations. After all, it is my job to take note of problems and assess what I see for readers. I focus in on minute details and comment about pacing issues, tonal inconsistencies and a lack of clear focus.

But sometimes, a film is just so darn odd and eccentric that one can’t help but give it a pass. “Everything Everywhere All at Once” is a unique experience and one that jarringly throws together outrageous, off-color humor with earnest discourses about the importance of family. It doesn’t all work, but it is well-intentioned and enough of a wild and crazy ride to make up for any shortcomings.

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Evelyn Wang (Michelle Yeoh) is a middle-aged laundromat owner both overwhelmed and disappointed with her life. Focused on her business, she has little time for her genial husband Waymond (Ke Huy Quan) and has a tense relationship with her gay daughter, Joy (Stephanie Hsu).

In addition to the chaotic business, Evelyn is dealing with the arrival of grouchy family patriarch Gong Gong (James Hong) and a tax audit.

After being called in to the IRS to deliver paperwork to Deirdre Beaubeirdra (Jamie Lee Curtis), the lead is approached by a man claiming to be “Alpha” Waymond. He explains that he is a version of her husband from an alternate timeline.

It seems that someone has put the entire universe in danger and is also hunting down various Evelyns in parallel universes. He asks the skeptical protagonist to help him save the world.

There are a lot of amusing moments as various rules about jumping through timelines are explained. It seems that Evelyn has led various different lives in parallel universes, developing skills in almost every one of them.

When threats arise, she attempts to jump to another timeline and instantly gain the abilities necessary to save her in the present world. And some great humor arises from the fact that Waymond believes this Evelyn to be full of unexplored potential (and potentially a savior) because she is the worst and least accomplished version of herself.

The movie also benefits from a few alternate realities with unexpectedly surreal elements.

The movie profits from a strong cast. Michelle Yeoh is famous for her work in Hong Kong action films alongside the likes of Jackie Chan. But she is also a charismatic actress, creating and differentiating different character personalities onscreen, in addition to displaying stupendous martial arts skills.

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The focus here seems to be on comedy even when the star is doing battle, but there are plenty of impressive and elaborate leaps, punches and moves.

Quan also makes a wonderful impression as Waymond. He’s often belittled by those around him for his sweet but simple personality and it’s a real contrast from the Alpha version and other Waymonds who appear over the course of the story. Additionally, his speech towards the close of the picture resonates and makes a strong impact.

The movie is frenetic, attempting to squeeze in exposition, jokes, action and a message at a hyperactive rate. It’s hard to keep up with at times and the pacing becomes exhausting during certain sequences over the extended running time.

There’s so much going on that it even feels like the movie has a few endings as Evelyn resolves issues with family members. And the filmmakers also can’t help but cut away from the central storyline to also provide closure for the ridiculous alternate worlds. Again, some tangents get a laugh, but other gags are puerile and take away from the impact of the resolution.

These issues may only be an initial response to being overloaded during the first viewing and perhaps the tonal shifts are much cleaner and clearer during second showings. There is a lot, and perhaps too much at times, that is going on in this feature.

Still, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” is unlike anything you’re likely to see at the movies this year. The characters are interesting and amidst all of the chaos, there are some great moments. If you’re looking for something a little different at the cinema, this title will certainly fit the bill.

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