

“Celebrating Differences: A Review of The Greatest Showman” by Gracie Boyce

The commercials for “The Greatest Showman,” directed by Michael Gracey, made it seem like an entertaining way to spend a couple of hours. The story appeared to be original and relevant, given the recent closing of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus, and the music flashing through the commercials was catchy. What I did not anticipate from “The Greatest Showman” was its resonance with today’s society. This film, although set in 19th century America, echoed many modern controversies.

Starring Hugh Jackman as P.T. Barnum, “The Greatest Showman” told the story of Barnum and his wife Charity (played by Michelle Williams) as they opened the first circus. This circus featured performers considered by most of society to be misfits, from the bearded lady Lettie Lutz (played by Kaela Settle) to the African American trapeze artist Anne Wheeler (Zendaya). The movie celebrated each of these individuals, emphasizing the importance of originality in the song, “This Is Me,” which won the Academy Award for Best Original Song.

The award was well deserved. The music for the movie, written by “Dear Evan Hansen’s” Justin Paul and Ben Pasek, was compelling and emotional from start to finish. I did not expect the emotional depth present in the storyline and the soundtrack, so the beautifully written lyrics were a pleasant surprise. The songs also moved the plot along and were placed purposefully; “A Million Dreams” showed Barnum’s early life and background, while “The Other Side” used lyrics as an exchange between Barnum and Phillip Carlyle, who was hired to work with the circus and became a valuable business asset. The dance numbers were striking and made the music even more enjoyable.

Despite the high quality musical numbers, “The Greatest Showman’s” best attribute was its message of acceptance. The lack of diverse thought 150 years ago was more severe than it is today, but there remain a lot of people who are undervalued by society. There is still a need for people to embrace others through all of our differences, and “The Greatest Showman” reflected that profoundly. All of the misfits Barnum hired were real people who deserved respect just like all others, and their stories in the film showed that they were more than their perceived flaws. I found that this movie, which had appeared to be merely a nice story, actually had an inspiring quality, and people today could learn from it if they are only willing to listen.

The story of P.T. Barnum and his circus is a great movie choice for anyone, from a family looking for something to watch on Friday night to any worn-down person wanting an uplifting story. “The Greatest Showman” is both entertaining and instructive to anyone in today’s society, and it is worth watching.