

La La Land

(2016)

COMPONENT 1

SECTION B GROUP 1: MAINSTREAM FILM
(AMERICAN FILM SINCE 2005)



Chaos at the 2017 Academy Awards (Oscars): Do you know why?

VF See Moonlight Beat La La Land x +

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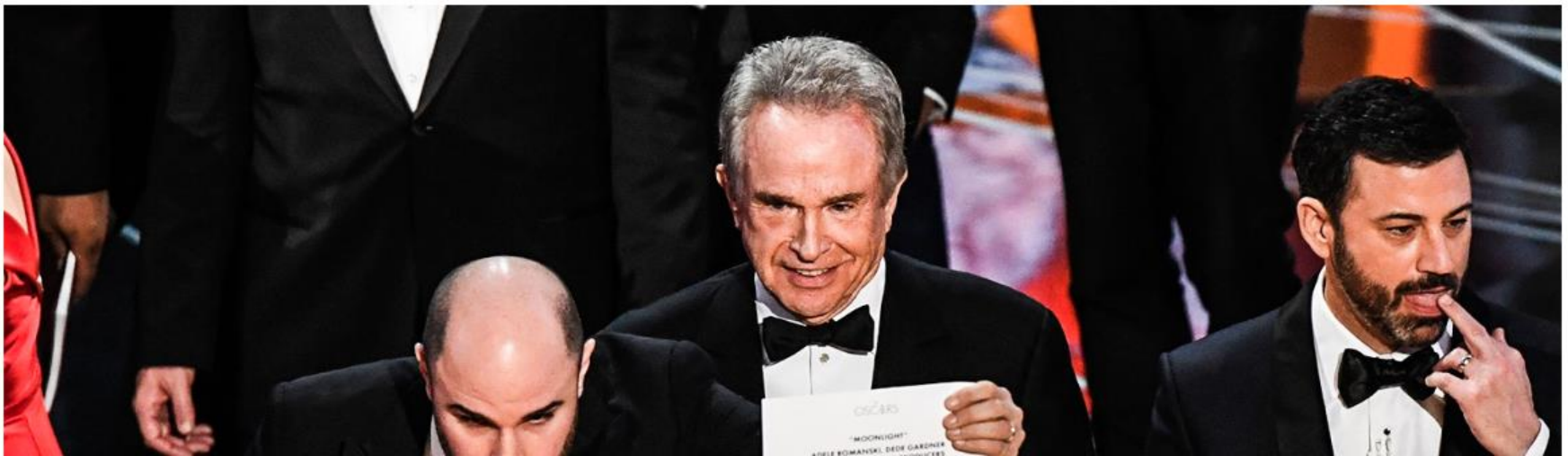


See *Moonlight* Beat *La La Land* for Best Picture as Oscars End in Chaos

After a surprise mix-up, the Barry Jenkins drama picked up the night's biggest award.

BY YOHANA DESTA

FEBRUARY 27, 2017



Why were Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway presenting?

VF See Moonlight Beat La La Land x +

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MARK RALSTON

After a shocking mix-up by **Warren Beatty** and **Faye Dunaway**, *Moonlight* picked up the award for best picture at the Academy Awards Sunday night. The stars were on hand to present the evening's final prize—but in the process, they accidentally named *La La Land* as best picture winner. The producers of that film were in the midst of accepting their apparent award when, in the middle of their speech, an Oscars producer and host **Jimmy Kimmel** appeared onstage to reveal that *La La Land* was not in fact the night's best picture winner.



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WATCH: The moment Warren Beatty gave what appeared to be a second look while opening the Best Picture envelope. #Oscars



50th anniversary of Bonnie & Clyde



Research, but *think why* socio-political context was given as one of the reasons why Moonlight won?



La La Land v Moonlight context

- ◆ Moonlight is an important film that **challenges cultural stereotypes of race and sexuality**
- ◆ The academy had received criticism for a **lack of diversity** in recent years – criticism of La La Land included its ‘glossing over’ of racial conflict in LA and ignoring relevant black community issues
- ◆ La La Land was a much bigger budget, a more mainstream ‘**safe genre film**’ – the academy has been moving towards rewarding more the independent sector (see *Avatar* losing against *The Hurt Locker* in 2010)

Two film study, 40 marks

- ◆ FILM FORM
- ◆ MEANING AND RESPONSE/IDEOLOGY
- ◆ CONTEXTS
- ◆ SPECTATORSHIP

Clips

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CVfTd-qbc> - another day of sun

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmkZeTX5fq0> - someone in the crowd

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVqCU0iW1FM> - you're fired

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8w9rOpV3gc> - night scene

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSYQD1BBx7I> - maybe I'm not good enough

What makes it mainstream film?



Production/Cultural Context

La La Land as mainstream film

- ◆ **Star marketing** – Gosling/Stone but also established reputation of Director Damien Chazelle (*Whiplash*, 2014)
- ◆ **Safe genre** – romantic comedy-dramas can be ‘easily’ marketed to an existing, and wider demographic
- ◆ **Simplistic, single stranded narrative** as selling point (following your dreams/set in LA/American Dream Ideology)
- ◆ **Wide distribution** by Lionsgate (mini major)
- ◆ **Mainstream values** within an entertainment based, emotive narrative (see social context). **Critical/commercial success**

Write 5 bullet points you would use as the basis of a critical review of the film



Socio-Political Context

- ◆ Slow burn/**Twitter backlash** reaction after multiple awards
- ◆ Suggestion of the **marginalisation of certain social groups** – African Americans, gender stereotypes, even jazz (Chazelle had similar criticism from the jazz community for *Whiplash*)
- ◆ **Art v politics in binary opposition** – nostalgic homage to past times (intertextual references to ‘grand’ musicals like *Singin’ in the Rain*) but for many a **white dominated discourse**
- ◆ Almost a divorce of jazz from black history. “*There lies a profound irony in liberal white folks heading to La La Land to repair after a political season overflowing with the nostalgia of white supremacy.*” (Geoff Nelson, Paste Magazine referencing Trump)

Meaning and Response/Ideology 1

- ◆ The concept of jazz as a genre lies at the heart of the film – yes a romance but yes a **debate on jazz as a genre**
- ◆ Chazelle accused of ‘ideological snobbery’ (most jazz fans agree with Keith that **traditionalism** is not the best way to revive the genre)
- ◆ **Oppositional readings** using Hall however that this is primarily **mediated entertainment**, a nod to Hollywood within an escapist, high concept ‘Oscar wanting’ diegesis
- ◆ **American Dream Ideology** evident through both protagonists – Sebastian gets his club in the end

How do you think gender is represented in La La Land?



Meaning and Response/Ideology 2

- ◆ Gendered analysis has also been critical – **Mia is framed for the male gaze** and her struggle is secondary to Sebastian's
- ◆ **Sebastian is more physically active** but also more 'emotionally driven' to achieve his goals. Mia is in no sense lacking drive and aspiration but arguably at times is 'acted off screen'
- ◆ Sebastian constantly 'explains' things to her 'introduces' her to new experiences (another Hollywood homage is the cinema trip to see *Rebel Without a Cause*)

Meaning and Response/Ideology 3

- ◆ Mia has significantly less dialogue – she is framed as reliant on Sebastian (he advises *her* on acting, despite it not being *his* profession)
- ◆ “In Chazelle’s cinema, it is consistently men who are teachers, guides, and owners of knowledge, while women are their students – vessels whose own personalities and histories are often ill-defined or relatively insubstantial”
Morgan Davies, LA Review)
- ◆ Again, a **negotiated reading** has placed La La Land withing a cathartic framework (an antidote to Trump and right wing politics in America)

Offer a range of readings on La La Land –
how is the spectator positioned?



Spectatorship 1

- ◆ **This film can be placed within a contemporary framework –** La La Land is nostalgic within a conservative social context
- ◆ **‘The Gaze’ is crucial** in positioning the spectator – both Stone and Gosling are physically attractive, white, well known actors who provide gloss and escapism, even at ‘difficult’ narrative moments
- ◆ **A secondary older demographic are more likely to aspire to these nostalgic representations** while a younger, educated spectator may question the intertextual framework, but also the representations

Notions of spectatorship



Spectatorship 2

- ◆ La Land Land, in terms of dominant preferred reading encodes upbeat, **emotive mainstream entertainment** through a safe genre lens
- ◆ A **saturated colour palette**, high key lighting and musical score ensure an **upbeat mode of address** along with rhythmical editing
- ◆ Academic critique resonated more as a result of the critical and commercial success of the film – arguably **its status as a mainstream production opened the film up to this examination** (as a independent production it would not have achieved such publicity)

Symmetry and cinematography



Micro analysis 1

- ◆ A wide cinematic two shot (one of many in the film) establishes character relationships
- ◆ Shot/reverse/shot positions male hierarchy plus body language and facial expressions
- ◆ Long take on Mia encodes vulnerability
- ◆ Soft top car with sporty V6 engine anchors Sebastian's hyper real masculinity
- ◆ Dissolve to the morning creates an upbeat, optimistic mode of address

Micro analysis 2

- ◆ House on street corner – Americana (iconic imagery linked to nostalgic representations)
- ◆ Close up of Sebastian behind the wheel and ECU of watch creates an aspirational representations
- ◆ “I got coffee” again reinforces stereotypical links to American culture
- ◆ Sebastian is active while Mia is passive (he driving, in control while she has ‘agreed’ to his demands)