

## Movie Review: Once

Written by {ga=mitch}

Wednesday, March 05 2008 7:00 PM -

---

Normally all of Mitch's movie reviews for us are new films, that he sees during opening weekend and reports on shortly afterwards for our readers. In reviewing the film "Once", he's bucked that tradition by going back and reviewing a film for us that is already on DVD. A small budget Irish independent film that recieved some love at the Oscars, Mitch says this flick is an absolute hidden gem. And he tells us about it tonight here on The Cleveland Fan.



Two weeks ago during the Oscar ceremony, four big orchestrated, splashy songs were presented for consideration for Best Original Song...three of them coming from the Disney big budget film "Enchanted". And then there was the underdog, a song performed by an Irish guitar player and a pianist from the Czech Republic from a little known movie named "Once". Simplistic, heartfelt, and stirring, the song received the loudest ovation from the audience, and a few minutes later, Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova were announced as the winners, leading to the most incredible moment of the night.

Hansard was floored by the win, stating "What are we doing here? This is mad!". But after his short, humble speech, his writing partner was cut off by the orchestra before she had a chance to say a word. Appalled, the producer of the show quickly got with host Jon Stewart, and right after the commercial break, Irglova was brought back onstage to give what might have been the best speech of the night.

## Movie Review: Once

Written by {ga=mitch}

Wednesday, March 05 2008 7:00 PM -

---

From this little story that seems more like a fairy-tale, we go into the movie itself, which is also a fairy-tale on so many levels. Hansard and Irglova are not just musicians, they are the stars of the movie "Once", a film written and directed by John Carney, who once played bass in Hansard's popular Irish band The Frames.

The movie was supposed to star Cillian Murphy in the lead role, but after tasting success in "Batman Begins" and "Red Eye" he no longer had a desire to work on a small Irish independent film. When he left, so did most of the financing. But rather than give up, Carney decided to go with his friend Hansard, who had originally signed on just to write the music. Hansard was a little reluctant, as his only other film experience was as the guitarist Outspan in the cult hit "The Commitments", and he wasn't sure he wanted to get back into that.

Carney was insistent that he could do it, and stated that he'd rather "have singers who could half-act" than "actors who could half sing". What he found was two people who could do both, and have incredible chemistry doing so. So with his budget of around \$150,000, he made a little film that ended up being released in 2006 in Europe and 2007 here in the States, and wound up grossing almost \$17 million at the box office...and is now a huge hit as a DVD, along with the soundtrack being the hottest seller on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

The film itself is breathtakingly simple. The characters are not called by name at any point in this short, 86 minute movie...they are just called "Guy" and "Girl" in the credits. It opens with the Guy working as a busker (street musician), playing his extremely worn guitar on the streets of Dublin for a few dollars a day.

At night, he sings different songs from the familiar ones the crowds want to hear. It attracts the attention of the "Girl". She wonders who it was that broke his heart enough to cause him to write that song. They chat. He had a girlfriend that left him to live in London, and now he lives back at home, helping

## Movie Review: Once

Written by {ga=mitch}

Wednesday, March 05 2008 7:00 PM -

---

his father in their vacuum repair shop. She has a vacuum that needs fixed...and through that coincidence, their conversations can continue.

The Girl is also a pianist, although since she had moved to Dublin from the Czech Republic, she can only play at lunch at a local music shop. They go together and there they play the song that won them the Oscar, "Falling Slowly";. They work on songs together, but when they go back to her home, the Guy discovers that the Girl has a young daughter living with her and her mother.

In essence, you could say this is a romantic story, but it doesn't play out like anything you'd come to expect. These two people have just met, and have conflicted feelings about their former lovers, and where they want to go in life. So they just talk about whatever comes to mind, most of it being music.

Almost half of the film is music, but Carney varies how it is used. Some of it is the two of them performing songs with or to each other, others are done in the background in sort of a music video format; songs playing while video clips are shown advancing the story. And then the climactic scene is in a small recording studio where they put together a demo album.

The music is excellent, assuming you have an appreciation of folk/light pop music. If you'd rather hear a car grinding gears than to listen to the sounds put out by an acoustic guitar, a piano, and two people's voices, then this is not going to be a movie you want to watch, no matter what. But if you are not in that category, you will find it a pleasure. What I liked most about it was that unlike most films, they don't continually reuse the same song over and over again (see also; "That Thing You Do!"). It's all original music, sometimes light and playful, other times soulful and introspective...but always moving.

The acting and directing are also quite unexpected. Hansard's awkwardness at acting actually works well with his character. The Guy is coming out of a devastating break-up of a ten year relationship, and he doesn't quite know what

## Movie Review: Once

Written by {ga=mitch}

Wednesday, March 05 2008 7:00 PM -

---

he should be doing. His flirting is clumsy, but sweet. Irglova was only 17 when filming started, but she projects a much higher maturity level. The Girl is much more grounded and much more sure of herself, but that doesn't mean that she is without doubt and confusion in her life as well.

The greatest joy in this movie was just being able to sit back and watch the story unfold without concerns of oncoming doom or convoluted plot twists in the form of a devastating disease, car crash, or a psycho ex showing up to make a big scene. The story only covers a week in these two peoples lives as they meet, get to know each other, and write and perform music. And then it ends in a way that I can only describe as the most honest, intelligent, and satisfactory manner possible.

It is a film that I've seen three times now...and I still cannot point out a single flaw in it.

Therefore, "Once" gets a rating of: **Bernie Kosar (4 footballs).**