

Film Review: Lars Von Trier's Mesmerizing 'Melancholia' Turns Depression Into Art

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 10, 2011 - 12:35pm

- [Alexander Skarsgard](#) [2]
- [Brady Corbet](#) [3]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [4]
- [Charlotte Gainsbourg](#) [5]
- [Charlotte Rampling](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Jesper Christensen](#) [8]
- [John Hurt](#) [9]
- [Kiefer Sutherland](#) [10]
- [Kirsten Dunst](#) [11]
- [Lars von Trier](#) [12]
- [Melancholia](#) [13]
- [Movie Review](#) [14]
- [Stellan Skarsgard](#) [15]

CHICAGO – Lars Von Trier's "Melancholia" is a mesmerizing, haunting portrayal of the world-shattering force of depression from a filmmaker who has first-hand knowledge of the debilitating disease. With career-best work by Kirsten Dunst and some of the most confident filmmaking from its controversial director, this is one of the best films of 2011, a stunningly original examination of that which is completely out of our control.



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Split evenly into two halves, the first fifty percent of "Melancholia" takes place at the wedding of Justine (Dunst) and Michael (Alexander Skarsgard). What should be one of the happiest days of Justine's life is presented not as a total disaster but as the story of someone increasingly aware that one is looming on the horizon. Through dialogue, we learn that Justine has dealt with the darkness of depression in the past and it seems like, even on this wonderful day, it is creeping back into her life, not unlike the planet Melancholia that some fear is on a collision course with Earth.



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At the wedding, we also meet Justine's sister Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg), brother-in-law John (Kiefer Sutherland), father (John Hurt), and mother (Charlotte Rampling). Her family is supportive (in a Von Trier way) but also seems exhausted by their troubled relative. We also meet Claire's boss Jack (Stellan Skarsgard) and his assistant (Brady Corbet) while great characters actors like Udo Kier and Jesper Christensen enhance the background. These wedding scenes are often comedic (especially with Hurt) and feature Von Trier at his most playful in years. Unlike some of his recent dirges ("Antichrist," "Manderlay"), he actually seems to be having a good time telling the saga of Justine & Michael's mostly-disastrous nuptials.

The second half of the film pares back on the characters and ups the dread as the planet Melancholia seems to be headed straight for our planet. Justine is certain that it will wipe out humanity. John is certain that it will not. Claire is mostly just uncertain. The metaphor for depression grows even stronger as the film approaches science fiction. Depression is not merely a minor setback – it destroys humanity. And for everyone who thinks that it will just miss them, there's someone who knows it will forever change them.



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"Melancholia" stars Kirsten Dunst, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Kiefer Sutherland, John Hurt, Stellan Skarsgard, Alexander Skarsgard, Charlotte Rampling, Brady Corbet, Jesper Christensen, and Udo Kier. It was written and directed by Lars Von Trier. It opens in Chicago on November 11th, 2011.



Melancholia

Photo credit: Magnolia

Source URL (retrieved on Sep 25 2024 - 8:24pm):

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brady-corbet>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brian-tallerico>
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- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/john-hurt>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/kiefer-sutherland>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/kirsten-dunst>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/lars-von-trier>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/melancholia>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/movie-review>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/stellan-skarsgard>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/16407/mesmerizing-melancholia-turns-depression-into-art>