

Film Review: Strange, Beguiling Sean Penn in ‘This Must Be the Place’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 18, 2012 - 2:10am

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CHICAGO – Sean Penn picks his roles carefully, and famously said he didn’t know what the story meant in “Tree of Life.” His attachment to “This Must Be the Place” continues the vague journey through movieland, as he plays a bizarre and aging rock star whose life is about to get interesting.



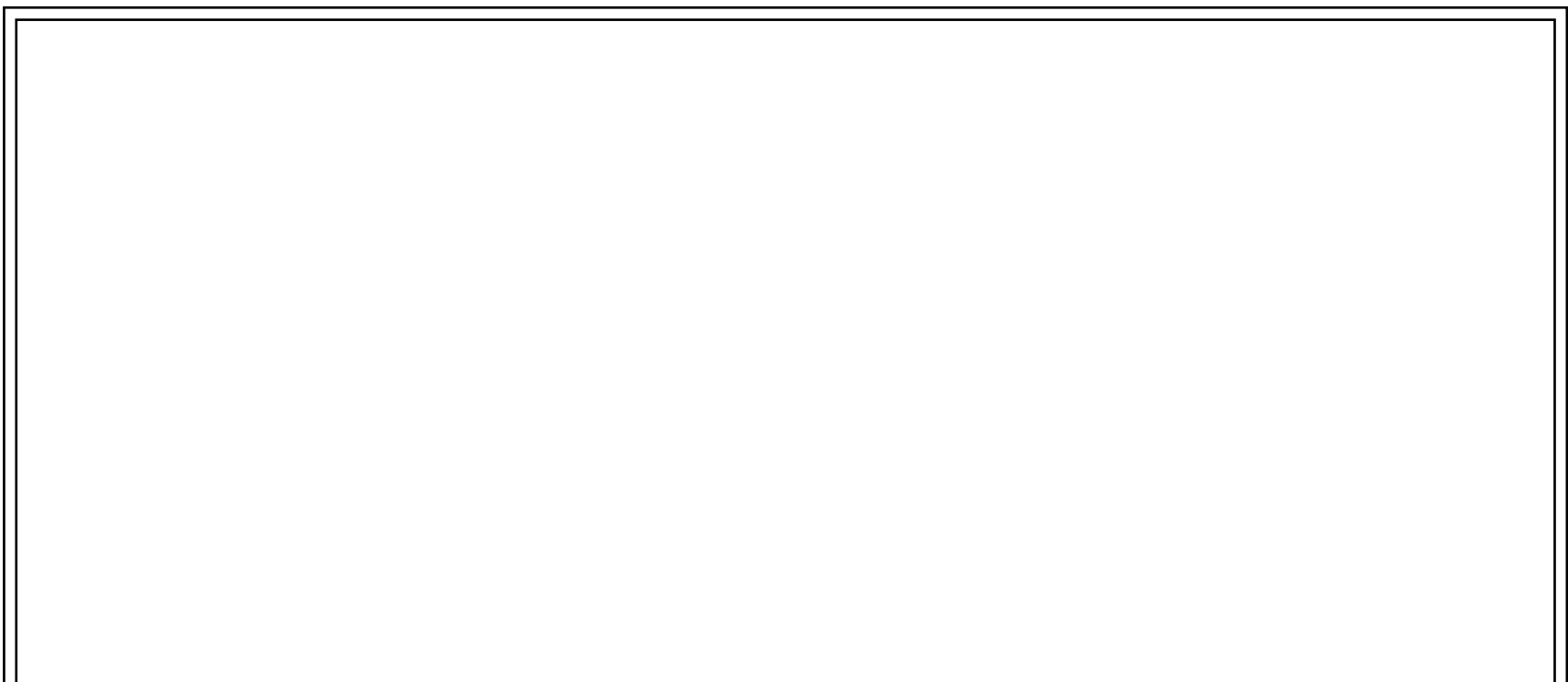
This movie doesn’t make a lot of sense – at a lot of points – but it does push the envelope as far as deconstructing narrative and opening up some scenic vistas. It is a reminder of Michelangelo Antonioni’s “The Passenger,” and somehow manages to be as vague as that famously soft storyline. Penn’s performance is exasperating, it’s bothersome from beginning to nearly the end, but damn if he doesn’t reel us in...again. His attention to character is stunning, the ticks and turns of his older rock star persona has many bad decisions, but Sean Penn loves to be interpretively creative and in this film he has free reign.

Cheyenne (Penn) is a 1980s rocker who was on the dark side. After two kids commit suicide listening to his records, he goes into exile in Dublin, Ireland. He lives with his devoted wife Jane (Frances McDormand), and wiles away the hours obsessing on his stock market portfolio and seemingly in a permanent funk. He has a buddy named Mary (Eve Hewson), whose mother Mary (Olwen Fouéré) is pining over a lost boy named Tony.

Cheyenne is called back to the United States, as his father is near death. The old man passes away by the time he gets there, and the son is surprised to find that the father – who survived the Holocaust – has spent his life trying to find his tormentor at Auschwitz. After consulting David Byrne (playing himself), Cheyenne decides to take up the Nazi hunt. He consults with expert pursuer Mordecai Midler (Judd Hirsch) and begins the quest. What and who he encounters will change the fabric of his life, maybe literally.

“This Must Be the Place” had a limited release, including Chicago, on November 16th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Sean Penn, Frances McDormand, Judd Hirsch, Eve Hewson, Harry Dean Stanton, Joyce Van Patten, Olwen Fouéré and David Byrne. Written by Paolo Sorrentino and Umberto Contarello. Directed by Paolo Sorrentino. Rated “R”

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On the Road: Cheyenne (Sean Penn) on the Road in ‘This Must Be the Place’
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company



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