

Mike Leigh Finds Heartbreak in Humanity of ‘Another Year’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 14, 2011 - 10:12am

- [Another Year](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Jim Broadbent](#) [4]
- [Lesley Manville](#) [5]
- [Mike Leigh](#) [6]
- [Movie Review](#) [7]
- [Ruth Sheen](#) [8]
- [Sony Pictures Classics](#) [9]



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Mike Leigh (“Happy-Go-Lucky,” “Vera Drake”) has long ago been correctly-labeled as one of our most remarkably-attuned writer/directors when it comes to capturing the tragedy of the everyday human condition on film. His latest work, “Another Year,” may seem like just another slice of life and it’s certainly not the drama to see if you need fancy hooks with your popcorn, but realistically presenting the highs and sadness of an unfulfilled life is much harder than it looks. Driven by yet-another fantastic acting performance by Lesley Manville, Leigh has made another must-see for art house film goers. He simply does every time he gets behind the camera.

Split into four chapters defined by the seasons, “Another Year” basically tells of key events in the life of the sweet Tom (Jim Broadbent) and Gerri (Ruth Sheen), perhaps the most “average,” “nice” characters you’ll see in a movie all year. These are the two that have kept not only their circle of friends together for decades but often been the support structure for the people in their lives who have needed a shoulder or more.



Another Year

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

One such person is Mary (Lesley Manville), a colleague of Gerri’s with a drinking problem and a palpable sense of loneliness. After a “prologue” involving a depressed patient (Imelda Staunton) of Gerri’s (who may be Leigh’s vision of where Mary is headed), we meet Tom and Gerri’s memorable friend and their son Joe (Oliver Maltman), a young man who has often flirted with the older Mary. The sense that perhaps Mary has taken their flirtations too seriously starts to creep in and when Joe introduces everyone to his girlfriend later in the year, it’s almost a slap in the face. It’s not like Mary actually thought she and Joe would someday wed, but the realization that even the flirtation is now over has taken one of the few remaining elements of joy from her life.

In the Summer, we meet a potential mate for Mary in another friend of Tom and Gerri's, the portly but gentle Ken (Peter Wight). As Mary is a friend of Gerri's, Ken is a friend of Tom's. Like Mary, he gets drunk and his loneliness becomes more prominently a part of his demeanor. Despite his attempts, Mary has not yet reached the point where she's willing to give up on a boy like Joe for a sad man like Ken. Autumn features the aforementioned introduction of Joe's new love while Winter features the grief of a death in the family.

Mike Leigh expertly walks the difficult line of trying to portray the realism of a relatively mundane existence while also providing enough drama for a feature film. He sets up the idea that this is just “Another Year” through his title but also is required to present enough character and “action” to keep the audience interested. It's a matter of perspective. Most years could be looked at as just another in our lives or as the one where things changed forever. Is it just another year for Mary? Or is the year that transpires in Leigh's film the one where she loses her last chance at happiness?



Another Year

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Broadbent and Sheen are spectacular in subtle, believable roles, but “Another Year” belongs to Lesley Manville. It's such a strong performance that most critics groups have ignored that it's really a supporting one and not quite a lead. Mary comes and goes in the life of the lead characters – Tom and Gerri. She is largely absent from one of the film's seasons (Winter) and viewers are left to wonder if she'll even return. Manville is spectacular but she should have been considered in Best Supporting Actress, where I believe she had a better chance of being nominated for an Oscar anyway. Now she's unlikely to be nominated anywhere.

And she deserves recognition. Working from the same improvisational process that he always has, Leigh has crafted yet another remarkably believable female character. Unlike most writers, he seems to craft from character instead of plot. In an era increasingly-driven by not just the story but the hook over the characters, Leigh is a treasure. It's the people that matter most to him and what happens comes naturally once those characters have been fully-realized. Manville's Mary is one of his most notable creations.

As much as I adore Mike Leigh, “Another Year” is not quite up to par with the best of his work, but still better than many 2010 films. The best Leigh films stuck with me for days, as little things in the real world reminded me of their characters. I felt “Another Year” was a bit cold in that I left Mary, Tom, Gerri, Ken, and Joe in the movie and moved along instead of allowing them to emotionally resonate. However, the fact that I believed every minute of their on-screen existence is the kind of movie miracle I wish we had every year.

‘Another Year’ stars Jim Broadbent, Ruth Sheen, Lesley Manville, Peter Wight, and Oliver Maltman. It was written and directed by Mike Leigh. It opens in Chicago on January 14th, 2011. It is rated PG-13.



[10]

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [11]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [10]

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/13097/mike-leigh-finds-heartbreak-in-humanity-of-another-year>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/another-year>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/brian-tallerico>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/jim-broadbent>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/lesley-manville>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/mike-leigh>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/ruth-sheen>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/sony-pictures-classics>
- [10] <mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#BRIAN>