

Considering Sore Subject Matter of ‘Chapter 27,’ ‘Why?’ is Only Plausible Reaction

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CHICAGO – As a contemporary of the John Lennon assassination in 1980 and an ardent admirer of the late Beatle, I had a hard time figuring out the reasons for making the film “Chapter 27”.

Over the years, it has been difficult if not impossible to forgive Mark David Chapman for his wasteful act of murdering Lennon. So why relive the agony through an oblique film exercise and reference to “The Catcher in the Rye,” which is the novel Chapman was reading when captured by police after the shooting?



Chapman is portrayed by Jared Leto. The film begins with the journey from his home in Hawaii to New York City. He’s there because he harbors a delusion that he is John Lennon and the real individual has no business still roaming the Earth.

He seems a man without a country or a functioning brain cell. He sets himself up outside The Dakota, which is a famously gothic and upscale residence complex where John Lennon and Yoko Ono live.

There are several groupies and hanger-ons milling about including Jude (Lindsay Lohan). For some ungodly reason, Jude takes a shine to Chapman and together they wait for Lennon to make an appearance.





Lindsay Lohan in “Chapter 27”.
Photo credit: Peace Arch Entertainment

This goes on into the next day after Chapman changes hotels and hires a prostitute on the premise that he will be “going away” for what he’s about to do. He also purchases Lennon’s new album, “Double Fantasy,” and the paperback of “The Catcher in the Rye”.

This famous J.D. Salinger novel has 26 chapters and Mark David Chapman is about to create chapter No. 27. On Dec. 8, 1980, Chapman succeeds in meeting John Lennon, getting his album signed and taking a picture with the ex-Beatle. Several hours later, he fires five shots at Lennon and kills him.

Jared Leto gives it his all in channeling the lunatic fringe of Chapman. In a Robert DeNiro-like move from “Raging Bull,” Leto packed on about 60 pounds to portray the rotund assassin. He’s consistent in the whiny narration of the thoughts inside Chapman’s head.

It is a spastic portrayal – frighteningly close to a mental illness – and almost too much so. It’s a valiant attempt to add some depth to an individual without any. Despite the subject, though, the script is flat.

Unfortunately, it plays cute by throwing in some Beatle and Lennon references. Lohan’s character gets a “Hey Jude” thrown at her and Chapman himself uses the line “Somewhere in New York City” (a Lennon album title). Though it doesn’t really matter, the decision to strip Chapman of any humanity makes the narrative decidedly one note.

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Despite using the real locations, the production looked cheesy. The sidewalk in front of The Dakota is public property and Yoko Ono has no control over it. The extras outside The Dakota, though, are self-conscious hippies out of central casting. This distracts from the proceedings.

The creep factor of Leto as Chapman meeting a 5-year-old Sean Lennon (even though it was true) just came off as cheap exploitation.

You will probably be disgusted by the whole thing – as was yours truly – and wishing for the millionth time that the course of events never happened. It’s like a bad dream reliving the nightmare.

“Chapter 27” opens on April 25, 2008. In Chicago, the film will show at Landmark’s Century Centre Cinema.

Note: The actor who portrays John Lennon in the film – Mark Lindsay Chapman – had almost played another Lennon role in 1985 in the TV

movie “John & Yoko: A Love Story”. However, because his name was so close to Mark David Chapman, he lost the part. It’s strange that he would again revisit the role and stranger still that it would involve a Mark David Chapman-centered subject.

Disclosure: The poodle owned by HollywoodChicago.com critic Patrick McDonald is named Yoko.



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