

Redemptive & Emotional Journey Dances in 'Moonlight'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on October 29, 2016 - 1:10pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – We are all victims of our own circumstances. How we interact with this circumstance, given our DNA, social nurturing, family and relationship ties are thrown in the air like organic confetti, landing here and there, and often in smaller and smaller pieces. “Moonlight” is a film full of this absolution.

Told in three acts, and following a man – portrayed by three different actors – from boyhood to young adulthood, “Moonlight” creates circumstances and victims all along the main character’s path, but also allows him to find his own redemption. It involves being gay in an atmosphere where acceptance of that is virtually nil, yet still we are what we are. The story is specifically acted and deliberately told, including a virtual one act play as the third act. By the end, the man in the middle finds something, providing that we’re all looking for a seed that often has already been planted, and just waiting to break the soil.

A young African American boy, nicknamed Little (Alex Hibbert), is growing up in a tough and poverty-stricken Miami neighborhood. He is being raised by Paula (Naomie Harris), a downtrodden crack addict. His only friend is Kevin (Jaden Piner), until he meets a local drug dealer named Juan (Mahershala Ali).



Little (Alex Hibbert) is Uplifted by Juan (Mahershala Ali) in 'Moonlight'

Photo credit: A24

In high school, the same boy – whose name we find out is Chiron (Ashton Sanders) – is struggling mightily with his emerging sexual preference. Kevin (Jharrel Jerome) is still there for him, but in the jungle law of high school politics, is ready to walk away as well. Their connection in this point in life comes together again later, when their adult versions (Trevante Rhodes as Black, and André Holland as the adult Kevin) work out one more sense of their own humanity.

The essence of the film lies in its tendency toward discovery, the performers and the audience alike. The main salvation is trust in the story, and the more the characters start to practice that energy, the more their discovery comes to light. The power in observing this three part tale is that the two main travelers are well known from their youth and teenage years, when we arrive at the third part. What capacity they have for peace and happiness are rooted in their previous life adventures.

The film's three superstars in the performance realm are Mahershala Ali, Ashton Sanders and André Holland. On each of their shoulders was the yoke of fate for Little/Chiron/Black. Ali was stoic magnificence as Juan, a magical character born of the streets and adapting the power of survival into a kind of external success – meeting Little was the key to the rest of it. Ashton Sanders is so in-depth as Chiron (high school-aged Little) that all the glimpses of his soul are encapsulated into his eventual future, and the encounter with André Holland as the adult Kevin. Holland ("42," "The Knick") is an underrated gem of an actor, and embraces Kevin as if they've known each other for years.



Paula (Naomie Harris) is Conflicted in 'Moonlight'
Photo credit: A24

Naomie Harris as Paula was a bit more showy. The depiction of a crack addict is always a difficult archetype, for the perception is automatically visceral, and there isn't much subtlety in the main character – until Black meets his mother as an adult at a rehab center. This is the preliminary for his encounter with adult Kevin, and both Trevante Rhodes and Harris connect profoundly in the mess of their disconnection. The film is laced with encounters like this, heightening each of Little/Chiron/Black's "circumstances."

This is a righteous film debut for director Barry Jenkins. He injects a passion within the soul of the story that is like a bolt of lightning reflected through a prism. The flash of bright light and thunderous fury diffuses, expressing illumination for lives in desperate need of stepping into the radiance.

"Moonlight" continued its nationwide release in Chicago on October 28th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring André Holland, Naomie Harris, Mahershala Ali, Alex Hibbert, Janelle Monae, Ashton Sanders and Trevante Rhodes. Screenplay by Barry Jenkins, from a story by Tarell McCraney. Directed by Barry Jenkins. Rated "R"



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [16]

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