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for [Advanced Comp](#)

East TN State U

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Donnie Darko: A Film Review

Film: *Donnie Darko*

Rating: 9.3/10

Director: Richard Kelly

Release Date: January 19th, 2001

Genre: Science Fiction

Run Time on Film: 113 minutes

Budget: 4.5 Million USD

Box Office: 7.5 Million USD

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An Avid Movie Watchers View Point

Rating Scale: (Scale of 1-10)

1 – Hot Garbage

2 – Garbage

3 – Bad

4 – Sort of Bad

5 – Meh

6 – Okay

7 – Good

8 – Great

9 – Fantastic

10 – Perfect

← These can become 10's while watching under the influence of alcohol and in the presence of friends as you make fun of the film for being horrible. Stay away at all costs unless you're trying to laugh at bad acting.

← If a score falls within the range it will vary person to person, but typically stays within this category. If it leans on the higher end of the scale its suitable for a niche crowd.

← Enjoyable films. Feel as if you've got your moneys worth at the movie theatre.

← MUST SEE FILM. THE UNICORN OF FILMS. IS ANYTHING REALLY PEERFECT? NOT SURE

Appendix:

Categories the Film is being Rated on

Dialogue

Flow

Story

Cinematography

Categories the Film is being Rated on:

Dialogue – In movies there is a style of talking where it just doesn't seem to be practical or feels forced. *Donnie Darko* isn't one of those films that falls into this trap of falsehood. The film presents a followable dialogue that has a good flow throughout the cast of character and resonated with me in creating believable characters. The film earns a score of 9/10

Flow – Also known as “pace” this is the speed in which the story unfolds. Richard Kelly, the director pushes the film in such a way that the story unfolds very fast, but at the same is very comprehensible. The main action of the film occurs very early on and then it just focuses on the story telling leaving a path of bread crumbs to what you the viewer may think the climax of the film is going to be. I'm not sure if the film could have been any better in this aspect 10/10

Story – Arguable the most important category, as this is what compels people to go watch a film. This is the core of movie crafting and *Donnie Darko* breaks down barriers in this film with its creative approach on story telling and the manipulation of time. *Donnie Darko* is though

provoking and compelling and like any good film will be stuck in your mind days or even weeks after you've watched the movie. The film receives a 9.5/10 in this category.

Cinematography – How does the film look? Well the film was created in 2001 and to say the least that this date didn't hold back in any way is stunning. 17 years later and it still holds its own in terms of how the film was shot, not a single scene shot in the film was by accident.

Details are the key in *Donnie Darko* and the film doesn't hold back. 9.5/10

Movie Break-Down

A film that portrays the Classic Hollywood Narrative typically follows the same pattern. This process can be simplified down into three basic categories: the setup, the development, and the resolution. In Richard Kelly's film *Donnie Darko*, it is evident that he decides to break this trend by modernizing the film and bringing to a life a new form of storytelling through the usage of time manipulation. It isn't always a good thing to break the norm as typically something becomes a norm because its widely accepted as a good thing or something that is easily palatable. Richard Kelly doesn't care, though, and presents a thought-provoking story that breaks the rules and does it in amazing fashion.

Breaking these boundaries of time as the story unfolds, you follow a character by the name of Donnie, a high school kid who is struggling with a mental disorder that causes him to hallucinate. I found myself almost feeling bad for Donnie because he is a smart kid who is just thrust into a terrible position in life. The character is visibly depressed and amongst other things is destined to be doomed it feels. Even now when I watch the film 17 years after its original release date, I could relate to some of the subtle bureaucratic bull shit that Donnie had to go

through during school. For example, the scene where he is in school and they're going over what is fear and love, and how they feel about the issues that are presented within the classroom. In this scene you have Kitty Farmer who is the strict gym-teacher who becomes obsessed with a Jim Cunningham, a self-help guru. Kitty takes what she learns from her self-help DVD's and tries to apply them in, in classroom lessons. For Example:

Cherita is just a random student inside of Donnie's class.

Kitty Farmer: *"As you can see, the Life Line is divided into two polar extremes. Fear and love. Fear is in the negative energy spectrum. And love is in the positive energy spectrum"*.

Kitty Farmer: *"... Thank you. Please read each character dilemma aloud, and place an "X" on the Life Line in the appropriate place. Cherita?"*

<Cherita gets up, stands by the blackboard, and reads from the card>

Cherita Chen: *"Juanita has an important math test today. She's known about the test for several weeks but has not studied. In order to keep from failing her class Juanita decides that she will cheat on the math test."*

<Cherita marks an X next to Fear>

Kitty Farmer: *"Good, good. Very good. Mr. Darko"*

<Donnie gets up, stands by the blackboard, and reads from the card>

Donnie Darko: *"Ling Ling finds a wallet on the ground filled with money. She takes the wallet to the address on the driver's license but keeps the money inside the wallet. <Scoffs> I-I'm sorry Mrs. Farmer. I don't get this."*

Kitty Farmer: *"Just place an X on the Life Line in the appropriate place."*

Donnie Darko: *"No, I mean I know what to do, I just don't get this. You can't just lump things into two categories. Things aren't that simple."*

Kitty Farmer: *"The Life Line is divided that way."*

Donnie Darko: *"Life isn't that simple. I mean who cares if Ling Ling returns the wallet and keeps the money? It has nothing to do with either fear or love."*

Kitty Farmer: *"Fear and love are the deepest of human emotions."*

Donnie Darko: *"Okay. But you're not listening to me. There are other things that need to be taken into account. Like the whole spectrum of human emotion. You can't just lump everything into these two categories and then just deny everything else."*

Kitty Farmer: *"If you don't complete the assignment you'll get a zero for the day"*

Donnie Darko: *<deep breath>...*



The issue that Donnie brings up is that the questioning that it doesn't able to be broken down into either of these categories to any of the character dilemmas that are being presented. Darko then gets threatened with the possibility of hurting his grade because he isn't participating in an activity that holds any value. Therefore, presenting you with an assignment that is detrimental to your grade but logically holds no value in your life. Something a lot of people can relate to especially if they've attended a public Highschool.

At the beginning of the film you're immediately introduced to the main character who wakes up in a daze by the mountain side, where he promptly rides his bike home while passing major plot points unbeknownst to the viewer. This opening scene sets-up the whole film for the story it's about to tell. Firstly, "The Killing Moon" by Echo and the Bunnymen gives an ominous form while also giving hits that there may be a mystery involved within the film. As he is riding

home on his bike the mise-en-scene sets up a lot, none of the props are an accident in these shots. You've one of the main characters red firebird, the Halloween sign, the crazed gym teacher walking, and you've the book "IT" by Stephen King being read by the mother. Take note that everything in the opening scene is shot only with sound playing and no dialogue is actually exchanged until the bike ride is over and Donnie arrives home. All of these things that are in the opening sequence tell a major story within the story but are subtly dropped in not to give too much away.

The resolution of the film is that of Donnie having to fulfill the prophecy that "some people are born doomed" a common phrase said throughout the film, a play on phrase referencing Donnie's depression and how he believes the world would be better off without him. The film uses this to help better portray some of the dark humor spread throughout the film, as seen from the scene above on the fear versus love spectrum. The film itself isn't a comedy though, it's a science fiction story as elements that are impossible occur, such as an axe piercing a bronze statue.

The movie is shot in a reverse form of story-telling, but this isn't revealed until the end of the movie. Donnie and the other main plot points are revealed within the first five minutes of the film, and then methodically brings them to life the longer the film is shared on the screen, leading to lots of those "Ah-Ha" moments. The film is almost shot in realism. Realism meaning that it could be believable but has very few exceptions in which it breaks the realism mold and brings you back to the idea that it is actually a science fiction story dealing with scientific themes. Such themes as when Donnie is hallucinating that there is a giant black bunny

in his mirror and when he reaches out to touch the bunny the mirror ripples like a pool of water.

Final Thoughts

The film all in all is wonderful. The way they approached the story telling is different than the conventional way as it leads the viewer with questions instead of the cut and dry option of facts. As the viewer you get the option of watching it and being able to ponder over what would or could occur if you found yourself in Donnie's shoes. The best part about the film is that there really isn't a true protagonist or antagonist. The argument can be made for any number of characters, but there truly isn't a stand-alone character, this is what sets the film apart from a classic film that typically will have a distinguishable hero and villain. Overall, I would rate the film 9.3/10 overall, and if you haven't seen it, I would recommend setting some time away in your day and watching it as its very impactful. There is a reason that people often refer to the film as a cult classic, and that reason should be shared across your television screen.

Works Cited

Donnie Darko, Dir. Richard Kelly. Perf. Jake Gyllenhaal, Jena Malone, Drew Barrymore, and Maggie Gyllenhaal. Sundance, 2002.