

REVIEW: Her (Spike Jonze, 2013)



Spike Jonze has a really wonderful talent as a filmmaker. He has the ability to paste a whimsical, light overcoat on his films and make them not feel contrived nor child like. In his latest feature, *Her*, he combines a believable science fiction future with a traditional love tale, and the result is exquisite.

It tells the story of Theodore, a lonely recent divorcee whose life rarely exists outside of work and the home. In order to fill the ever growing void, he invests in an operating system. Her name is Samantha, and her charm, wit and humour makes Theodore feel something he hasn't felt in a long time.

The premise for *Her* on paper is parody-like: the kind of thing that would be scoffed at by cinema and quickly picked up as a sort of unfunny SNL sketch. The film's charm is owed almost entirely to Spike Jonze's fantastic script. His words make something that's totally unbelievable entirely natural: a love story between man and machine. His directorial style creates this almost fantasy like location. Filmed significantly in Shanghai skyscrapers and Los Angeles, *Her*'s warm, comical script paired with its beautiful cinematography makes you feel like you are in a tall skyscraper, engulfed in a duvet and watching the sun rise over the buildings – much like Theodore.

The casting is on form, too. As Theodore, Joaquin Phoenix has one of his most high profile roles since the staged descent from fame. He is natural, sympathetic and engages with an invisible cast member more than many true actors have. Scarlett Johansson gives one of the most convincing and beautiful performances of the year as the voice of Samantha. A

beautiful and fine actress in the flesh, her voice melts into your ears like honey. This is one of the most divine roles of her career.

Whilst the awards season this year is filled with stereotypically epic cinema, *Her* succeeds as a small film with enough gusto and heart to win over anyone who watches it. For me, it's my favourite of the bunch.

On its Valentine's Day release in the UK, you'd be idiotic to see anything but **Her**.

Her is playing at Edinburgh's Filmhouse, Lothian Road from February 14th – March 13th