

Cannes 2015: Irrational Man (Woody Allen, 2015)



Ahh, Woody Allen. Fond lover of the sardonic and inquisitive female lead and renowned director of seemingly interesting, everyday people. It goes without saying that films from his heyday, such as *Manhattan* and *Annie Hall* are justified classics. Even *Blue Jasmine*, which was released just two years ago deserves that ever-so-thrown-about title of 'future classic'. He's an exquisite filmmaker, but ever more commonly, this statement has a second half: 'every so often'. This dangerous suffix is disappointingly relevant when it comes to the director's latest effort: the drab, uninspired 'Irrational Man'.

Widely admired and yet criticised by many for his theories, Professor Abe Lucas is in the middle of an existential crisis when he arrives at Braylin College. Torn between what path to take in life, his possibilities change when he meets young student Jill and discovers a dangerous way to re-kick start his life by becoming a questionable Good Samaritan.

The theories of Kant and Heidegger are thrown about here as if we are to believe these characters know what they're discussing. It is through this frivolous, aching scripted chit chat that we see these actors for what they are: actors. Almost every syllable from the professor, his students or even the student's parents, feel like a sore work of fiction. As if Allen wants people to know how much he knows.

Boozy teacher Phoenix does his best to come across the broken intellect, but with such frivolous source material he sort of struggles. The same can be said for Emma Stone. Now being seen as the new found muse of the acclaimed director, this is her

second feature in which she plays the female lead for Allen. The issue lies within the fact that Stone is still very much seen as a teen-comedy queen. Her turns in Easy A and the Spider-Man movies remain her most recognisable. With Birdman being her first fully fledged and respected step out of hyper-mainstream Hollywood, there lies a need for a better segway. In Irrational Man, she seems lost. Strong, performing well but lacking the characteristics traits to become a great Allen character.

That being said, the silly first half of the film gives way from a fluttering, tacky romance to a smarter, mysterious whodunnit that maintains the element of surprise even when you know who's responsible. It is here that Phoenix and Stone are allowed to display their brilliance, and admittedly to a lesser but still respected extent, Allen.

We'll let Woody Allen claim responsibility for its ever-shifting, well done conclusion, but prior to that Irrational Man relies on its superfluous and jaded understanding of philosophy to become entertaining. It fails.

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Irrational Man had its World Premiere at the Festival de Cannes on May 15th