



KinoFest

THE GERMAN FILM FESTIVAL



FILM REVIEW: The Ordinaries

By Princess Kinoc

The Ordinaries (2022) review: ‘Lights, Camera, Revolution’

There’s something about Sophie Linnenbaum’s debut film that takes your breath away. It’s probably the way it takes this meta-cinema “film within a film” trope to higher concepts with ease and awe. You will never leave the cinema after watching *The Ordinaries* without dry eyes for sure.

Linnenbaum, along with her co-writer Michael Fetter Nathansky, takes the concept of world-building in a cleverly ingenious way. She literally builds a world filled with three cinematic caste system: Main Characters that live at the top of the food chain in bright pastel colored outfits and never losing that Hollywood musical charm; Supporting Characters that are in the middle but are always looking up at the elites, never really breaking into anything than as one-dimensional characters; and then the Outcasts that live beyond the walls, censored, forgotten, often reduced to black and white.

Paula (Fine Sendel) is a simple Supporting Character who was always inspired by her backstory: her father, a Main Character with important scenes and dramatic music; and her mother (Jule Bowe), a Supporting Character, who is used to being in backgrounds with either clipped dialogue or less-than-a-second scenes. Their marriage proved fatal, and her father was murdered in the Great Massacre, perhaps due to the differences in their social statuses. Hence, it was her life’s mission, at fifteen, to graduate as a Main Character at the Institute. For her to accomplish this, she must perform well with her chosen piece. During rehearsal, she takes a good look at her life and begins to research about her father. When she realizes that her father’s records are missing at the Archives, her distraction ends up ruining her Heart Monitor, an aid that randomly plays music depending on the emotions a character feels at the time.

Her discovery of her family’s history forces her to step out of her comfort zone, and she incidentally befriends a miscast maid, an outcast who wouldn’t stop jump cutting, and a group of black and white misfits that lead her to find out her own back story.

There are many layers and subdued contexts that Linnenbaum has utilized so well here. It’s often whimsical and highly entertaining at times, and perhaps the only flaw this film has are moments that could have been skipped. Oftentimes the duration it takes for her to get to the point (the film is at 1hr and 59mins) is a bit too so-so. Her jab at the societal differences makes up for this,

as she cleverly deploys different film techniques within the plot, such as using Exterior, Night to RSVP a meet up; the use of cuts to stop an Outcast from running away, and so much more. It's so delectably cinephile you'll probably forgive its longevity.

Sophie Linnenbaum's fine understanding of the capacity of film as a medium for social discourse makes *The Ordinaries* a great satire that tackles why there are some of us who continue to conform to that divide. You can easily rewatch this too when you're losing hope in film school, when you're in the need for a kick of creativity. At times it feels like it belongs to the same universe as *The Truman Show* and *Pleasantville* but not really... and yeah, it could be. I fear that this will be remade into a Hollywood movie and would completely lose the point. I hope not.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Princess Kinoc is a freelance writer, and the current Editor-in-Chief for Film Police Reviews. She is also a member of the Society of Filipino Film Reviewers (SFFR) and the Society of Filipino Archivists for Film (SoFIA). Outside FPR, she has also written reviews and essays for *New Durian Cinema* and *Pelikula Journal*, and she co-hosts the Filipino film podcast, *Third World Cinema Club*. She is a black coffee drinker, and she's not so sure if that matters.