

## A Meditation on Moonlight | by David Ramirez

The stars have to align for a movie like Moonlight to be made.

On a budget just north of \$1 million dollars, (La La Land was made with \$30 million for comparison), Moonlight managed to be one of the most anticipated films of the fall from one trailer and word of mouth. It was also shot in 25 days with a single camera, features a gay black protagonist and an unlikely drug dealing father figure.

Movies like this aren't just made, they're birthed through a careful faith that *this* story deserves to be told. Moonlight is a miracle among movies just having gotten made in the first place.

But the real miracle here is the movie itself, written and adapted by director Barry Jenkins from a short play by Tarell McCraney. Anyone who considers themselves a fan of cinema, or even storytelling, won't want to miss this story of a lifetime.

Moonlight tells the story of Chiron, a young black man discovering himself and his sexuality in the drug ridden streets of Liberty Square in Florida. In three parts, all crucial moments and experiences to shaping the person we see unfold, we experience life through Chiron as a wandering boy, a troubled teen, and a man hardened by trauma and systematic failure.

The key to understanding the performances from all three actors lies in their eyes. Newcomer Alex Hibbert plays Chiron at 10. Hibbert, who makes his acting debut, never fails to capture the joy and pain in innocence and struggle. Ashton Sanders, who plays Chiron at 17, gives new life to what social isolation really looks like and steals every moment he's on screen. Trevonte Rhodes' performance as a man who rebuilt himself to cope with the past, (brought on by a heartbreaking bullying scene), is quietly commanding, and an emotional spectacle to behold.

All three actors performances are marked by a single feat, their ability to own a scene with silence. Other performances include Mahershala Ali as Juan, the softened and conflicted drug dealer who serves as a guardian for Chiron. Ali's performance only lasts through the first section of the movie, but he becomes the heart and soul of a movie that digs deep and doesn't let go. Naomi Harris is tragically wonderful as Chiron's mother, and worth noting is Andre Holland's turn as the adult Kevin, a companion to Chiron, and a character whose impact throughout the movie is felt deeply and suddenly. This cast will blow you away with the kind of passionate, restrained soul you might expect from a silent film; and if that kind of sincerity doesn't resonate with you, nothing will.

If this write up seems vague on plot details it's because this is a movie I'm not prepared to spoil. Although it's not a story dependent on twists and turns, it *is* a story you need to experience for yourself. No amount of endorsements would justify skipping out on this movie because you think you've seen it all before. Moonlight is a movie that deserves your viewing. It transcends expectations of what people have come to expect from movies that deal with sexuality, self-discovery and what it means to be human. It's tragic, beautiful, and deeply moving. Moonlight is a movie that demands to be seen.