

FILM REVIEW: 'The Man Who Invented Christmas' Credits a Compassionate Charles Dickens for the Way We Celebrate

By Kam Williams
For The Skanner News

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is considered the preeminent novelist of the Victorian Era because of his touching and timeless tales that shed light on the plight of the poor. He probably began developing an empathy for the less fortunate at an early age. That's because he had to drop out of school to work in a factory to support the family after his bankrupt father (Jonathan Pryce) went to a debtors' prison.

Charles' challenging childhood ostensibly served as the source of inspiration for such coming-of-age classics as "The Adventures of Oliver Twist," "Great Expectations" and "David Copperfield." But the book which has had the most profound effect on Western culture is "A Christmas Carol," since it irreversibly altered how we celebrate the holiday.

That notion is the genesis of "The Man Who Invented Christmas," Les Standiford's historical narrative recounting the events in December of 1843 leading up to Dickens' publishing "A Christmas Carol." Now, that opus has been adapted to the big screen by Bharat Nalluri (MI-5) as



'The Man Who Invented Christmas'

a sentimental tale of redemption.

As the film unfolds, we find a cash-strapped Dickens (Dan Stevens) living beyond his means and struggling to support his family. Truth be told, he didn't even marry his wife, Kate (Morfydd Clark), and have the first of their 10 kids until 1836. That anachronism makes one wonder to what extent the picture conveniently takes further license with the facts in order to spin a heartwarming yarn.

Anyhow, with debt collectors closing in, we see Dickens fighting writer's block to crank out another

best seller after releasing three bombs in a row. Luckily, key elements of "A Christmas Carol," like the characters Ebenezer Scrooge (Christopher Plummer) and "The Ghost of Christmas Past" (Anna Murphy) come to him in a variety of ways, ranging from dreams to an offhand observation made by his humble, Irish housekeeper (Donna Marie Sludds). He proceeds to pub-

lish the novella on Dec. 19, and the first edition sells out before Christmas. More importantly, the manuscript's moving message about catching the spirit of the season made a lasting impact that still shapes the way we observe the holiday.

Merry Capitalism!
Very Good ★★★
Rated PG for mature themes and mild epithets
Running time: 104 min.

Film

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serves all the accolades she's getting for exhibiting an enviable range in a very demanding role as a tormented teen constantly in crisis.

Life is an emotional roller coaster for this college-bound high

and trying out for a role in the school's musical revue. Plus, her hormones are raging, and she's a little boy crazy, too. So, excuse her for not being able to keep her eyes on the university prize.

The plot thickens in a variety of surprising ways it would be almost evil to spoil here. Suffice to say that "Lady

“Lady Bird” is a fantastic, female-centric, instant classic

school senior. And as the film unfolds, it's easy to see why. Christine "Lady Bird" McPherson is an iconoclast who refuses to conform, whether she's rebelling from her overbearing mother (Laurie Metcalf) or breaking the rules at her Catholic high school. She dyes her hair a bizarre blend of red and pink, and insists on being addressed as Lady Bird by everyone.

Despite being an academic underachiever, she's banking on college as her ticket out of town. She hates boring Sacramento, and won't settle for a school anywhere but in New York City. But instead of studying to pick up her grades, she indulges her impulses by running for class president

Bird" is a fantastic, female-centric, instant classic reminiscent of both "Juno" (2007) and "Bridesmaids" (2011). Written and directed by "mumblecore" movement maven Greta Gerwig, the picture is also ostensibly semi-autobiographical, since the Sacramento native attended an all-girls Catholic school before moving to Manhattan to attend Barnard College.

A delightful crowd pleaser well deserving of Oscar nominations for Best Picture, Best Actress, Best Director and Best Original Screenplay!

Excellent ★★★★★

Rated R for profanity, sexuality, teen partying and brief graphic nudity

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