

Once in a lifetime, indeed: David Byrne concert film offers cultural transcendence

BARRY HERTZ

David Byrne's American Utopia
CLASSIFICATION: N/A; 105 MINUTES

Directed by Spike Lee
★★★★½

By capturing a 2019 performance of David Byrne's Broadway show with grace and style to spare, Spike Lee delivers a film that transcends a simple cast recording, à la this past summer's Disney+-fied *Hamilton*. From its joyful and exuberant opening half to a late-game moment of deep and sombre introspection, Lee's version of *American Utopia* is thoughtful pop performance art captured with the propulsive power of cinema. When it premiered at a drive-in during last month's Toronto International Film Festival, I just about thought 2020 might be saved after all.

As a grey-suited and impressively lithe Byrne tiptoes around the stage, a group of similarly clad dancers and musicians behind him executing a choreography best described as "ironic," the concert-slash-film deftly shifts in mood and purpose. A house party, then a science lesson, then a cultural essay, then a political protest. But always – always – with a fierce rhythm and energy unique to the 68-year-old, eternally impossible-to-classify Byrne.

It is tempting to compare and contrast Lee's work here with Jonathan Demme's iconic 1984 Byrne chronicle *Stop Making Sense*, but any time spent doing so will be wasted. These are two different visions for two different Byrnes in two different eras.

Both burn down the house, in their own way.

David Byrne's American Utopia is available to stream on Crave starting Oct. 17.

I am Greta fails to move the mercury on climate cinema

BARRY HERTZ

REVIEW

I Am Greta
CLASSIFICATION: PG; 97 MINUTES

Directed by Nathan Grossman
★★★

Sometimes, documentary filmmakers' instincts pan out. Swedish director Nathan Grossman got close to the Thunberg family long before teenage daughter Greta became a worldwide star on the climate-advocacy circuit, which enabled him to trace her astounding cultural rise. But just because you get in on the ground floor doesn't mean you enjoy a free ride to the top, and the longer *I Am Greta* goes on, the more clear it becomes that Grossman is content to just tag along for the ride, adding little cinematic depth or insight to the environmentalist's trajectory.

If Grossman's goal was to paint a portrait of just who Greta Thunberg is – where she came from, how her politics were shaped – then this can be mostly considered a squandered opportunity. With the exception of her father's handful of appearances, we never find out much about how Greta was brought up, what led her to this moment. Instead, Grossman provides a whole lot of footage from her rallies and meet-and-greets with world leaders and famous friendly faces, and precious little behind-the-podium context.

"I want you to panic," Greta tells politicians at one moment. But *I Am Greta* is bereft of urgency.

I Am Greta opens Oct. 16 in select theatres across Canada.

2 Hearts learns from Nicholas Sparks school of romance

ANNE T. DONAHUE

REVIEW

2 Hearts
CLASSIFICATION: PG; 100 MINUTES

Directed by Lance Hool
Written by Veronica Hool and Robin U. Russin
Starring Radha Mitchell, Jacob Elordi and Adan Canto
★★★★

There's a sentiment that's repeated several times over the course of this movie – that life can either happen for us, or to us. And reader, *2 Hearts* is certainly something that happens. Whether or not that's a good thing, I'm still not sure.

Based on a true story in which two families are brought together in the wake of heartbreak and hope following an unforeseen circumstance, *2 Hearts* is a tale rooted in love, family, dreams and the belief in something more.

Unfortunately, while at times compelling (*Riverdale's* Tiera Skovbye gives it her all), director Lance Hool's film quickly aligns itself with the Nicholas Sparks school of romance, where a very specific type of relationship (see: one of the Hallmark variety) incites all instances of character development. As a result, this tethers each character to their significant other without giving us a chance to know who they really are and forces us to see them not as an actual flawed and complex person, but a saviour figure whose role is to define a partner.

Not to mention the pseudo time travel. Each story begins in an era far from where they end up, but as the two get closer, there's a distinctive *Jumanji* feel to the formula – mainly, as I kept watching the movie, I began shouting, "What year is it?" like Robin Williams. (I'm still not sure.)

But alas, this type of chaos suits 2020, a year in which time no longer exists and has left us roaming our homes like *Sims* characters, hoping somebody will feed us. Frankly, *2 Hearts* is the drama this year deserves. One that starts with promise before descending into madness.

Special to The Globe and Mail

2 Hearts opens in select theatres across Canada starting Oct. 16

FIRST PERSON

WHEN PUPPY LOVE GROWS OLD

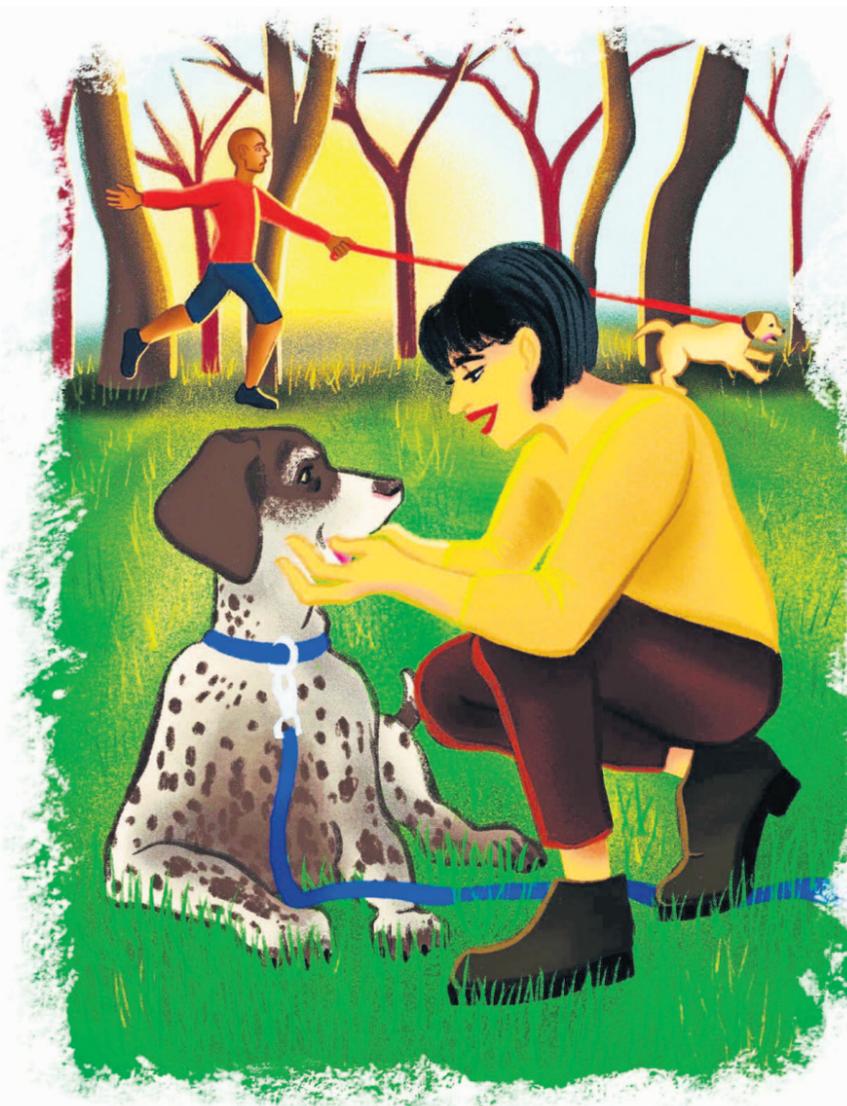


ILLUSTRATION BY CHELSEA CHARLES

Affection for our four-legged pals only grows deeper with time, even if watching them age is hard, **Abigail Cukier** writes

The pandemic puppy craze has come at a peculiar time for me. As so many people are seeking the comfort and companionship of a young dog, mine has just turned 15.

We recently had a backyard visit to meet another family's new puppy. He was utterly adorable. He pranced and played, nipped and licked. Our friends beamed as they told us about his first days at home and how he was already sleeping through the night. It was truly puppy love.

Later that night, as I walked behind my dog to give her a boost as she climbed the stairs, and the next morning, when I heated up the homemade food that helps control her kidney disease, I thought about how you don't consider this level of extra care when you bring home a furry new family member. But that is often what that puppy love turns into.

I am lucky to know this more "mature" love. To love, and to be loved, by an old dog, is truly a privilege.

For a long time, I denied it. My husband would remark on how Skyler, our German short-haired pointer, wasn't running as much at the park or was a bit slower on the stairs, and I told him he was imagining it. For the longest time, I really didn't see that my high-jumping, fast-running girl was getting older. But these days, there is no denying it.

The chocolate fur on her face is flecked with white and her wise, dark eyes are hooded by grey brows. Sometimes, she will fall while eating from her bowl and wait patiently for someone to help her up. On our daily walks, one of my favourite times of day, I sometimes have to stop and let her rest or pick up her hind legs if she starts to fall. But still we walk.

When we got Skyler, my husband and I had only been married a few years and we had no kids. She learned commands and was house-trained in no time. At home, she always needed to be beside someone, with at least one part of her touching one part of you (and that's when she didn't just sit right on your lap). We took her on walks and hikes and marvelled at her speed. At the park, if we took off running toward the end of a field, she would catch us before we even made it halfway. If we put up a gate, she would jump over it. On hikes, she would scale rock walls and then happily hop up and down from trail to rock and back.

At 15, Skyler still needs to be right beside you on the couch or to follow you into the next room. She still gets excited when we even come in the proximity of a hiking trail. On walks, even if she has been

slow, when we turn the corner onto our street, she runs and pulls hard on her leash to race toward home. She will nap for most of the day, but when she gets her midday burst of energy, Skyler prances through the house, bringing a toy or shoe or sock that she wants thrown. She has made us laugh endlessly with her antics, comforted me countless times and been my constant companion while I worked from home.

But it is hard. It is sad to see this once fast, strong dog struggle to walk up the front step or to see her pleading eyes when she needs help to get on the couch. The past few years, we have had to forgo family trips because no one else can take care of her anymore. We holiday at a cottage or go camping so we can take Skyler with us. My husband spends more than an hour each week making her the special food that helps control her kidney disease, which roughly consists of rice, hard-boiled eggs, beef and shredded carrots.

Though I lament some of the things we can't do because of Skyler or the extra work her care adds to our day, I know this has taught our children about sacrifice and unconditional love. It's taught me the same. Dogs give us unconditional, abiding love. The least we can do is give it back.

There is real love in carrying a dog up the stairs and sitting in the back of the minivan because she needs help to get comfortable, even though you get carsick.

At a beach recently, I saw an old Labrador retriever going for a swim near the shore. Her owners told me how she used to be able to swim so far and for so long. They saw Skyler struggling to walk in the sand and marvelled at how good she looked for her age. Then we gave each other that knowing look. The same one dog owners give me when they ask how old she is.

When I had our kids' old red wagon for sale online, I had an inquiry from a buyer who wanted it so he could take his dog, who could no longer walk very well, on neighbourhood outings because he loved them so much. This is what it's like to love an old dog.

Our friends with puppies are not thinking about this stuff. Nor should they. They have a whole life of walks, cuddles and laughter to enjoy. If they were, though, I would tell them that puppy love will only grow. I would say there will likely be sadness. I would tell them how lucky they will feel.

Abigail Cukier lives in Stoney Creek, Ont.

First Person is a daily personal piece submitted by readers

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TODAY'S SUDOKU SOLUTION

8	3	2	5	9	1	7	4	6
6	9	1	2	4	7	8	3	5
7	4	5	6	8	3	9	2	1
2	8	3	7	1	9	5	6	4
5	7	9	3	6	4	2	1	8
1	6	4	8	2	5	3	9	7
3	1	7	9	5	6	4	8	2
9	2	6	4	7	8	1	5	3
4	5	8	1	3	2	6	7	9

TODAY'S KENKEN SOLUTION

3+	1	2	6	5	4	3
40x	4	5	1	2	3	6
	2	1	3	6	5	4
13+	3	4	2	1	6	5
90x	5	6	4	3	2	1
	6	3	5	4	1	2