



ScreenDaily Home > Site Search > Story



Dir/scr: John Carney. Ireland. 2007. 88mins.

### Once

Patrick Z McGavin in Park City

29 Jan 2007 14:21

The revelation of Sundance, John Carney's poetic third feature *Once* is a sublime and beautiful work that mediates feeling and desire. It's lyrical though substantial, beholden to the spirit and manner of the French New Wave, achieving a loose, spontaneous style that impressively binds the immediacy of film with the rapturous first person expression of the musical.

Set in Dublin, the story details the emotionally complicated, unorthodox friendship that develops between an Irish street musician and a beautiful Czech émigré. The leads are played by Glen **Hansard** (of the estimable Irish band The Frames) and Marketa Irglova. The movie has little plot, mirroring Jean-Luc Godard's classic description, a "neo-realist musical," of his own 1961 *A Woman Is A Woman*. The other direct comparison is *The Commitments*, Alan Parker's work about an Irish soul band that also featured **Hansard** as a guitarist.

Shot in two weeks and made for just under \$130,000, this unheralded gem earned adoring praise from critics and ecstatic responses from public crowds at Sundance, winning the coveted audience award in the world dramatic cinema competition. The strong emotional and artistic response from critics, audiences and industry executives suggests a sleeper title for the industrious US distributor that carries the distinct potential for an arthouse breakthrough. The movie has strong ancillary potential in music rights, DVD and cable. Buena Vista is releasing the film in Ireland.

Furthermore, the film has the built in advantage of the two leads synchronising their concert dates with the film's theatrical release. The two have spent much of the last year touring, and the film beautiful employs three songs from *The Swell Season*, their haunting folk rock CD.

### REVIEWS LINKS

-  [Email this story](#)
-  [Print this story](#)
-  [Feedback](#)
- [Click here for further film details](#)



The unnamed protagonists are introduced during one of his evening street sessions and they form an instant bond. He lives with his father (Hodnett), and helps out with his vacuum repair business. She sells flowers in the street, though she tends to be more circumspect and withholding of personal information. Each is burdened by the past, him by the painful break up of his relationship, and her admission that she lives with her mother (Ktrestova), has a two-year old daughter and is estranged from her husband.

From the moment of their first impromptu playing session inside a Dublin piano store, playing an achingly beautiful, overpowering number called *Falling Slowly*, *Once* is electric, suffused with a grace and beauty that is transcendent. Rather than the abstracted stylisation or narrative interruption of the classic Hollywood musical, the work deploys music organically, underlining the themes of longing, pain and recovery.

The two actors' playing styles perfectly mesh, making vivid their easy rapport and shared ecstasy. With the exception of his thrilling rendition of Van Morrison's *And the Healing Has Begun* and her beautiful interpretation of Mendelssohn's *Song Without Words*, the two play their own music.

It radiates with excitement, urgency and passion the emotional authenticity. It translates to a different kind of love affair, one that if it never ignites in the conventional sense, there is no ambiguity about the intensity of their feelings for each other. He asks her to say, in Czech, "I love my husband," and she responds by saying, in her language, "I love you."

Carney is also a former bassist with **Hansard's** band The Frames, and he understands intuitively the rhythm and power of honouring individual expression and animating personal style. Working with cinematographer Tim Fleming, Carney wields the camera expressively, always observant and never intrusive and remaining alert to feeling and action. Paul Mullen's editing is also fluid.

By playing songs in their duration, Carney gives voice, dimension and mystery to the interior consciousness of his performers. She walks down a street, shadowed in darkness, her plaintive piece *If You Want Me*, filling the soundtrack. Like the movie, the moment is lilting and unforgettable.

#### Production companies/backers

Samson Films  
Irish Film Board  
RTE

#### Irish distribution

Buena Vista International

#### Producer

Martina Niland

#### Executive producer

David Collins

#### Cinematographer

Tim Fleming

#### Editor

Paul Mullen

#### Production design

Tamara Conboy

#### Main cast

Glen **Hansard**  
Marketa Irglova



Hugh Walsh  
Gerry Hendrick  
Alastair Foley  
Geoff Minogue  
Bill Hodnett  
Danuse Ktrestova  
Darren Healy

**[Click here for further film details](#)**

 [Email this story](#)

 [Print this story](#)

 [Feedback](#)

 ScreenDaily.com is brought to you by Screen International

 [Terms & Conditions](#)

Copyright Emap Media 2007. Emap Ltd. Registered Office: Greater  
London House, Hampstead Road, London NW1 7EJ. Registered in  
England and Wales, no. 435820 All rights reserved.

 [Back to top](#)