

**Once A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor
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Once (written and directed by John Carney) is a modern day musical. Guy (Glen Hansard) is a street busker who is gently prodded into pursuing his musical dreams by the grace of Girl (Marketa Irglova).

Once is held together by the symmetry of these two characters. Both are single, pained by previous relationships and responsibly caring for single parents. While both love music, one plays guitar and the other piano. While both are chasing migrant dreams, one will be leaving Ireland, while the other is trying to settle in Ireland. The unfolding symmetry advances the plot and rewards the viewer.

The performance of a range of original, and powerful, songs enriches the movie. Hansard has a warmly appealing voice, while Irglova is made gorgeous by her strength of character and generosity of life.

Set in Ireland, *Once* demonstrates a mature film industry, sensitive to the cultural issues that mark contemporary European life. The use of modern technology - CD players, video cameras, laptop computers as recording studios - add moments of cinematic variety and poignancy. In the midst of the financial pressures, compressed housing and language barriers faced by migrants, we witness relationships of generosity and warmth. The dragging, like a dog on a leash, of a broken down vacuum cleaner through the shopping malls of Ireland, is an unforgettable scene.

Once is a hopeful and redemptive portrayal of modern life. The main characters become increasingly attracted to each other and we witness their growing affection and trust. Their relationship moves to the inevitable crossroad.

“If I came to your place, we would do hanky panky. It would be nice. It would be interesting. It would be worthless.”

It is a pleasing contrast to so many contemporary movies which end with sexual pleasure.

Instead of sex, Guy and Girl explore other ways to give to each other. Girl gives her talents - in organisation and optimism and risk taking - to make possible Guy's musical dreams. And Guy gives her a working vacuum cleaner and a piano, to sustain her musical needs. Through their giving, both in turn find redemption from their previous painful past. Hence their relationship echoes the well known words of Jesus in John 15:13 “Greater love has no one, than they lay down their life for their friends.”

Go to *Once* if you enjoy music. Go to *Once* if you want to enjoy a refreshingly hopeful reflection on modern urban life. Go to *Once* if you needed to be reminded of the redemption that can be possible when relationships are marked by maturity, generosity and gift-giving.

Once was showing in New Zealand as part of the Telecom 2007 New Zealand International Film Festival.

Rev Dr Steve Taylor is Senior Pastor at Opawa Baptist Church and Lecturer in Gospel and Film at Bible College of New Zealand. He is the author of The Out of Bounds Church?(Zondervan, 2005) and writes regularly at www.emergentkiwi.org.nz.