

Nine Days (2020)



Will is inspired by Emma.
(c) Sony Pictures Classics

Director/writer Edson Oda's film at first seems to be about a busy man conducting interviews over a nine day period. But as it unfolds we realize this is a metaphysical tale about birth and the appreciation of and celebration of life in all its details.

Will (Winston Duke) lives in a one-story Craftsman style house way out somewhere in a salt flat desert. The house is crammed with file cabinets, and in the room where Will spends most of his time there is a bank of over a dozen TV sets with POV shots of ordinary life playing across the screens. Those file cabinets are stuffed with VHS tapes on which the activities of Earth's inhabitants have been recorded. Will inserts tapes and takes notes as he studies the scenes that are taking place on Earth, though where he is we do not know—Heaven, Limbo? At one time, we learn, he had lived on our planet. Certainly not that fiery place. He watches alone, but often he is assisted by Kyo (Benedict Wong).

Of the many lives he watches, he especially is fond of Amanda, a violin prodigy. However, she dies unexpectedly in a car crash, and so Will must fill the vacancy she leaves behind. Thus the series of visitors who come to the little house. They are freshly minted souls who contend for that vacancy. Strangely, they are not infants but seeming-adults with

distinct personalities. But only one of them will enter into life on Earth. The rest will fade back into oblivion—which we see in the case of several initial rejects. Before going off Will tries to lend comfort by giving each of them one pleasant memory of an experience.

The most promising candidates include Anne (Perry Smith), Kane (Bill Skarsgard), Maria (Arianna Ortiz), Mike (David Rysdahl), Alexander (Tony Hale) and Emma (Zazie Beetz). They are told to watch the previously chosen subjects on the TV screens. As he grills them he says “there is no wrong answer,” though some of his questions call for difficult choices.

He narrows the field down to Emma and Kane. During this time he wrestles with the discovery that Amanda had written a suicide note, a process during which Emma displays her deep sympathy. Kane, on the other hand, is pessimistic, seeing more evil in the world and the necessity in fighting it. Whom, and why, Will chooses ought to lead to a good discussion. Some films can be enjoyed alone, but this one is best seen with a group, there are so many puzzling scenes. Poetry lovers will appreciate Will's declamation of lines from Walt Whitman's “Song of Myself.” Up to this point he has never smiled, presenting a somber countenance to one and all, as if his responsibility for choosing who is to be born is too heavy a burden for any display of levity. This makes us enjoy the Whitman quotes all the more. By close-up shots of the various candidates enjoying the ordinary acts and small things of life, the filmmaker inspires us to celebrate the quotidian aspects of our own seemingly unimportant experiences. Moments of joy can be triggered by just about any aspect of living—if we have eyes that see.

This review will be in the July issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store.

