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OKAY! (The ASD Band Film)

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Abstract

This is a film review of *OKAY! (The ASD Band Film)* (2022) directed by Mark Bone.

Keywords

Autism Spectrum Disorder, Music

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Author Notes

Michele Marie Desmarais was raised and educated in Vancouver, British Columbia on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. She is a Canadian scholar and poet of Métis, Dakota and European ancestry. She is Associate Professor in Religious Studies and a teaching faculty member in Native American Studies and Medical Humanities at University of Nebraska at Omaha, and a former editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*.



OKAY! (The ASD Band Film) (2022), dir. Mark Bone

There is something magical, even spiritual, about being in a band—individuals connecting in a way that creates something from nothing. Being in a band can give a sense of community, of meaning and purpose in life. *OKAY!* is a quintessential band film, a documentary following a group of musicians who go from practicing in garages, to writing songs, gelling as a band, and becoming friends. Along the way, they record an album, load gear, perform their first gig, share the milestone of placing a band sticker alongside those of other bands at a venue and, as fortune has it, attract media attention. It is quite a story and one that is often told. But this story is also different. “Our world is a spectrum, with every colour in between,” sings Rawan Tuffaha in their song, *Fireflies*, “we’re different but not less.”

While catchy songs and extraordinary musical talent distinguish the band, Jackson Begley (guitar, vocals) also succinctly explains, “We’re all autistic and we’re all in a band, ASD Band, and that’s the general gist of it.” ASD is Autism spectrum disorder, and the members of ASD Band

originally came together as a fund-raising project for Jake's House, whose mission is to provide meaningful support for families in Canada living with autism. Along with Rawan and Jackson, Ron Adea (keyboards) and Spenser Murray (drums) are joined by musical director and bass player Maury LaFoy, who is the only band member who is not on the spectrum.

Through their songs, the musicians of ASD Band share with us the multidimensional nature of their non-neurotypical lives. In interviews they also share what their lives are like. Rawan talks of using WikiHow so that she could learn how to act as, "I didn't understand social cues or jokes," she says. "I wanted to not be seen as something wrong." Jackson describes his life on the spectrum in terms of theatre: "From my personal experience, having autism is sort of like you're an actor in a play and it's opening night and everyone else has the script and you don't. And so you just have to fake your way through, putting a lot of effort into trying not to make a fool out of yourself." These interviews with the musicians, alongside interviews with their families, help steer this documentary away from being mere "Inspiration Porn." The film shows the highs of creation and performance. It also provides glimpses of what daily life is like for the musicians as well as for their parents and siblings.

OKAY! (The ASD Band Film) ends, as it began, not with the triumph of the band's first gig, but with a band of, as Jackson says, "really cool folks," in a garage. "I'm glad I met them," he adds, "and I call them friends." A band documentary with a difference, this is a gem of a film. Great film, great band, great songs.

Fireflies, ASD Band's first album, is available at: <https://songwhip.com/asdband/fireflies>