

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY

Written and directed by Mike Leigh, 2008, 119 minutes

Reviewed by Carl Marsak

Spoiler Alert: This review contains the outline of the entire movie.

Director Mike Leigh's *Happy-Go-Lucky* (2008) is a highly enjoyable and useful character study of the path of development of a young Type Seven. The movie takes place in London, and centers around the life and maturation of a 30-year-old British school teacher named Poppy (played by Sally Hawkins, herself a likely Seven). Poppy's roommate Zoe (Alexis Zegerman) is probably a Four, and her driving instructor Scott (Eddie Marsan) most likely a One.

The movie opens with Poppy bicycling down the streets of London and then entering a bookstore. She wanders around, browsing with no goal in mind. The first book she picks up is titled, "The Road to Reality," and she quips "don't want to be going there!" The second book she looks at is in the children's section and is called "The Kingdom of the Sun," which is of course exactly where an average Seven wants to live all the time. She buys nothing, and as she leaves tells the clerk to "Stay happy!" When she finds her bicycle stolen she pauses, but then instead of staying with her feelings for very long, she makes a poignant joke about it, saying brightly, "I didn't even get a chance to say goodbye!"

At the beginning, Poppy is, in the words of the director himself (see the "bonus features" on the dvd), "nutty, zany, unfocused, uncentered." She is also enthusiastic and endlessly optimistic. Early on, we see her partying (of course) in her flat with her sister and her roommate Zoe. The next scene finds her preparing for her class lessons. She is great with children, as are many Sevens. At one point she says with characteristic type bias, "it would be amazing to fly, wouldn't it?" Also, in a later symbolic scene, we see her at trampoline class, bouncing high above the ground. About twenty minutes into the movie, we see her with some of her fellow teachers in conversation. In this scene, we see that she does have a "secret serious side," and that she is capable, in the right adult situations, of having and expressing emotional seriousness, depth, and even empathy.

Relatively early on, Poppy finally books her first driving lesson, as she has been planning to do for a while, but has been putting off. This represents, in more ways than one, her willingness to begin growing up. A central set of interactions in the movie begin a bit later when Poppy meets her driving instructor, Scott, who is a very troubled, uptight, and even racist Type One. Most of the comedy and drama emerge from their numerous misunderstandings and miscommunications. In fact, one of the best things about this film, from an Enneagram perspective, is that it graphically demonstrates what can

happen when a person of one type who is not very integrated and evolved, encounters another person who embodies his or her Heart or Security Point. In short, Poppy becomes Scott's worst nightmare. He starts off by telling her that he wants her to "focus and concentrate." She will have to "listen and take responsibility." Of course, the more he tries to direct and control this slightly out-of-control Seven the more she rebels and makes jokes, resists his orders, flirts and teases, and in general tries to make the experience enjoyable rather than a dreary chore. The viewer begins to sense that this is not going to end well.

Next we find Poppy trampolining again, which leads to her throwing her back out. Zoe has to take her to a clinic to see a physiotherapist. Now she is literally grounded for awhile. And we do see many Sevens only slowing down and getting sober after an accident or illness. Later she is back driving with Scott and at one point he tells her that, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions!" Poppy replies, "Sound like fun!" In a subsequent scene, she goes to Flamenco dance lessons with a friend, and we can see just how extraverted and externalized she is most of the time. Here director Leigh shows us Poppy's high side, as we notice her curiosity and adventurousness, her willingness to try new activities, and her openness to meeting new people and entertaining new ideas.

The turning point in the movie comes when Poppy witnesses a child being abused and hit by a classmate in the schoolyard. The first time she observes this interaction she does nothing, but the experience has clearly moved her from a relatively superficial stance to a much deeper and emotional place.

Another driving lesson has Scott telling her that she is too distracted, a common problem for average Sevens. Suddenly he yells: "You have no respect for order, you're arrogant, you're disruptive, and you celebrate chaos!" Poppy thinks this a compliment and laughs it off. Again, we see the friction that results from a meeting of opposites.

Next she witnesses the same student being abusive and now Poppy decides to intervene. She has a one-on-one chat with the boy who is doing the hitting. In this delicate interaction, we see one of the gifts of the Seven -- equalizing authority in order to develop rapport and trust. She gently draws out the troubled boy, telling him that they're "mates" and that he can talk with her about what is really going on, "cause I'm your mate, and that's what mates do!"

The path of development for a Seven always includes confronting pain and darkness, sadness and depression, and loneliness and alienation. In the next scene Poppy is walking home at night and runs into a crazy, homeless man in a dark and frightening area of town. In many ways this figure and his environment represents, in a Jungian sense, part of her own repressed shadow. She approaches him and initiates a conversation, showing curiosity and compassion, as well as recklessness and naivete. In the end she is unable to really help him and is lucky to escape unharmed, but this is yet another deepening, darkening, sobering experience for our heroine.

The school assesses the situation of the wounded bully, and a social worker named Tim arrives to help with counseling the child. As they work together to discover the abuse at home that has been motivating the boy's violence, Poppy becomes attracted to Tim, the kind and attractive social worker.

The next driving lesson with Scott makes it obvious that he is deeply troubled—angry, prejudiced, and paranoid. At one point he screams, “All I ask is that you behave like an adult!” “What, like you Scott?” replies Poppy. This relationship is clearly not developing harmoniously. However, by now Poppy is becoming ever more empathic and at one point really sees and feels Scott's pain. She asks him, “Were you an only child, Scott?”

After this, Poppy, Zoe, and Poppy's sister go to visit their other, very pregnant sibling, Helen. Helen exhorts Poppy to get real and grow up, as she need to mature and have a family. As in the interactions with Scott, the scene ends badly. But after the family blow-up we see Poppy by herself, contained, calm, and capable of noticing the “beautiful sky.”

Poppy then has her first date with Tim. After spending some time with him she asks, “Are you happy in your life?” “That's a big question,” he responds. “Isn't it just!” says Poppy. This is in many ways the most important question in the entire movie, and for Sevens in general. What is real happiness? Are we being honest with ourselves about our genuine level of happiness or fulfillment?

This leads us to Poppy's final driving lesson with Scott, where, after seeing her kiss Tim goodbye, he finally explodes in rage and they both call each other on their respective neuroses. This dramatic scene is a marvelous example of how accurate perception can be mixed with reactivity, including transferences and projection. At the end they separate, with Poppy giving him back his car keys, profoundly apologizing for her share of the misunderstandings and miscommunications, and saying with compassion and firmness that she can no longer take lessons from him. She succeeds in making a boundary with someone who is clearly more troubled than she, but in doing this she shows both strength and empathy. Now she's deep, real, and subdued.

Spiritual teacher Angeles Arrien has said that, “healing of consequence will always leave the person in a stunned, still and silent place,” and after this storm we see our heroine on a step by herself, self-reflective and contemplative. In the final scene she is rowing with Zoe on a beautiful, calm lake, symbolic of her own state of consciousness. She is the same person, yet very different after the events of the past weeks. “You can give up trying to make everyone happy,” says Zoe. “There's no harm in trying, is there?” says Poppy. “It's a lot of work being a grown-up!” “Yeah, it's a long trip...”

In this movie we see an arc of positive character development that is, in the opinion of this reviewer, totally believable. Poppy grows beautifully and naturally during the course of normal, daily life events. She is not in any sort of psychotherapy, not doing California-style workshops, seminars, or conferences,

and not ingesting mind-expanding plant medicines. She's not self-consciously trying to grow and change. Yet by being open and receptive to what life has to offer, showing up for some challenging human interactions, and hearing feedback and advice from friends, family, and acquaintances, she does become a more whole and better person. There is an interview with Sally Hawkins in the "bonus features," where she says that her character "sees the humor in things, even in the darkest situations... she's incredibly curious about the world and life." Mike Leigh remarks that, "It's a film about openness and generosity of Spirit." These qualities and behaviors are some of the many gifts that Sevens offer to the world.