

Save the Last Dance: A Critical Turning Point in the lives of Sara, Malakai and Derek

Saturday night in *Save the Last Dance* is a critical turning point in the lives of Sara, Malakai and Derek. This is because they make choices which may change their entire lives. The film contrasts the ideas of Free Will and Determinism by showing how Malakai feels he has no alternative choices, whilst Sara and Derek feel as if they have choices. Determinism leads Malakai into danger and disaster, whilst Free Will leads Sara and Derek into ambition and success.

Derek represents the power of Free Will because he believes he has the power to make his own choices. In the film, you are able to see that he makes his own decisions because he has no choice to work or not in school, and Derek does work even though everyone else does not. Also, when he goes to the bar, he hears Sara saying, "Whatever", then Derek shows Free Will by saying, "Order the best, never say whatever." When saying this, Derek shows it is important to make your own choice. In the scene where Derek has to make a choice between the two people he cares about most, he makes the equitable choice. He tries to encourage Malakai into making the ethical decision by saying, "I'll go home if you go home." When Derek says this to Malakai, he tries to make him feel as if he has a choice. He also tries to make Malakai re-think his decision by saying, "You don't have to get in this car." From this quote, Derek again tries to make Malakai feel he has a choice to do the right thing. Then he tells Malakai how his future may be if he takes the right path. He does this by saying, "You are so much smarter than this, I know what you can be, I know how smart you can be." When saying this, he says it in a way so that Malakai feels he is able to be as smart, intelligent and as clever as he is. He just needs to try harder and do the right thing. Tension is created in this scene when Malakai pushes Derek. It is also created when Derek has to make a choice between going with Malakai to cause danger or to get to Sara's audition. Also, when Derek runs to try and reach Sara's audition, tension is created because fast music comes on representing that he is running and it makes the audience tense and worried in case he does not make it.

Malakai represents a Deterministic attitude and outlook. This is because he believes he has no alternative and believes that his future is based on his background and environment. Having this attitude ruins his life. Malakai says, "I can't do nothing but what I'm doing." In this quotation, Malakai is saying that he can not do anything else because he feels he is not like Derek. He believes he has no choice. He feels he has only one thing left. He says, "All I have is my respect." When he says this, the film shows evidence that he has respect by showing a gang of friends that respect him. When Malakai says, "I'm not you Derek, I can't do anything like that." When he says this, it shows that he thinks he's not as smart and intelligent as Derek and he thinks that he never will be. When Malakai is saying these lines to Derek, there is a close-up shot of Malakai's face showing how serious he is. While Malakai is arguing with Derek, the camera is panning both of them close-up so that we are able to see their facial expressions. Then, in the background there is a sound of a train going by. The train signals that Malakai has made a choice. After Malakai gets into the car and leaves, there are two trains that pass one another in opposite directions. One of the trains represents Malakai and the decision he made.

The other train represents Sara, who is facing a different choice. Sara has been in the ghetto ever since her mum died and she has been living with her dad. At first she was not thinking about making her own choices until she met Derek. She saw that Derek had the power of Free Will and she realised she needed the power of Free Will to overcome her sadness about her mother and to succeed and fulfil her dreams in life. Just before Sara leaves for her audition with her dad, Sara feels nervous, doesn't have a smile on her face and is very tense about whether it will go well or not. When Sara is on her way to an audition to fulfil her dreams, two trains pass one another in the opposite direction. One of them represents Sara and the decision she has made.

When disaster and success occurs, it is shown as a split scene. In this split scene, Derek is shown running, Sara is shown dancing and Malakai is shown shooting. After the two trains cross one another, Malakai leaves in his car, leading to disaster, Sara is on her way to her audition and is opening the door to success, and Derek is running to be on time for Sara's audition. Then in slow motion, Malakai is in the car and lining his gun up to aim and shoot. We see a close-up of the gun lining up to shoot, and slow, sad music in the background represents that something dangerous but sad is going to happen. Then the scene goes into fast motion and Malakai gets out of control and the car crashes whilst Sara, doing a ballet dance, jumps high and looks as if she is flying, holds her head up high and looks as if she is in complete control and is leading to success.

Derek is still trying to reach Sara's audition by running with fast music. Slow music for Malakai when he is shooting represents sadness, but slow music for Sara while she is dancing represents happiness. Fast music for Derek creates more tension, even for the audience because as the audience we feel he deserves to be there for support and encouragement. Sara feels nervous and wants to do it but is not confident enough. This is where they use a long shot to show where she is. She shows her nerves by not smiling and she shakes her body as if she is shaking the nerves out and so she is able to move her body more easily when she dances. When she dances, there are close-ups of her hands and feet to show her movements. She holds her head high to show confidence and to show she is able to do it. There is a long shot in slow motion of when she jumps high with a middle shot to make her look as if she is flying, to show her success and her freedom.

Malakai is pushed to his knees onto the ground and a high angle shot makes him look small and weak. Malakai has now got the opposite to what he wanted and has lost his respect. When he gets into the police car and the door shuts with him behind it, it represents imprisonment.

Whilst Sara dances, the camera sometimes shows her back instead of her front to show her effort and personality. At first the camera showed the view from where the judges were sitting so that we could see what they could see. The camera angles changed quite a bit for the viewers to enjoy more and see what the judges do not see. Malakai's slow, sad music represents the consequences of his choice. Sara then does a hip-hop dance to show her individuality using fast music, at the same time, Derek is running to the fast music then reaches the audition. When Sara is dancing, the lyrics for her dance sounds as if it tries to encourage her to live her dreams. The lyrics say,

Live your dreams, its not as hard as it may seem,
You got to work hard to get the cream.

Show them how bad you want this,
It is all or nothing, give your everything.

These lyrics are telling us that it may be hard to achieve a dream, but if you give everything you have got, then it is possible to achieve.

The significance of the two trains passing one another in opposite directions means that Malakai is one of the trains leading to disaster and danger, and the other train is Sara leading to ambition and success. The underlying message of this film is that if you take the right path, then you will lead to a great, successful future but if you take the wrong path, and then you will be led to failure.

At first, when Sara does a hip-hop dance, she made a mistake and thought about her mum and how she made a mistake exactly at the point when her mum died. As Derek was watching, he could see that Sara had lost all of her confidence and did not want her to try again. Therefore, he ran up onto the stage and started talking to Sara. Whilst Derek tries making her feel better, the judge was putting pressure on her by saying that he does not have enough time to wait around. Then Derek tries to make her ignore the judge and gives her support and encouragement by saying, "Get back out there." When he says this he implies that she should get back out there and fulfil her dreams. Sara replies, "I messed up, it is too late, and the judge hates me." Sara says this as if she has lost all of her confidence and she is unable to do it. When saying the line, there is a close-up of her face and it looked as if she was about to cry as if she felt that her dreams have gone down the drain. Derek still gives her encouragement by saying,

"It's not too late and forget about him,
you were born to do it."

Derek says this in a way to show Sara that he is supporting her all the way and that he believes in her. Sara then decides to give it another go, gains her confidence back and she gives her everything. While she is dancing, the judges were smiling at one another then focused only on Sara, Derek looked as if he wanted to join Sara in dancing. When Sara ended her dance, she was happy that she tried again and thanked the judge for waiting. To make Sara more calm and happy, the judge said, "We can't say this on the record yet, but, welcome to Juliard." When saying this, it made the judge seem not as bad as he seemed before. When the judge said this, Sara and Derek were extremely happy but flabbergasted that the judge told them even though he did not have to. The message from this scene is, if you try, you may still fail, but if you get up and try again and again, then you will succeed.

This film is about teenage love and it would appeal more to teenagers. It is a romantic genre which represents the power of Free Will.

The director, Thomas Carter, had made the decision to have Sara's audition on Saturday night. This is because Carter wants to show the contrast between Sara who has taken the right path which leads to accomplishment, and Malakai, who has taken the wrong path which leads to catastrophe. Carter used to split scene to show this comparison between the bad and the good. He also chose to show two of Sara's dances to show the two different backgrounds that Sara has been in. The scriptwriter, Duane Aaler, chooses to make Sara fall in this audition because it shows that no matter how hard you work it is

Reema Patel

still possible to make a mistake. But it also shows if you keep trying then you will succeed. I believe that the script dictates that Derek must arrive late so Sara has support and is able to believe in herself and creates the situation where she fails.

The other famous movies that focus on a character who wants to become a dancer are *Billy Elliott*, *Dirty Dancing* and *Strictly Ballroom*. I think that *Save the Last Dance* is better than all of these movies. This is because I feel that *Billy Elliott* is a lot more serious, *Dirty Dancing* is meaningful and *Strictly Ballroom* is also less meaningful. I think that this would appeal a lot more to teenagers because teenagers have many dreams that they want to fulfil but do not have the confidence to do so. I think that this movie would help teenagers live their dreams and to make their own choices.

In conclusion, the movie *Save the Last Dance* represents the power of Free Will. It shows the consequences to the choices that have been made. It tells me that if you take the wrong path, it will lead you to a regretful life but if take the right path, then it will lead you to improved life.