

Life in a Day

“Life in a Day” is a gimmick, but an intriguing one: producers/brothers Ridley and Tony Scott put a call out to regular folks around the world to film something on one specific day—July 24, 2010—and send in the results via YouTube. Out of this welter of raw material, director Kevin McDonald (“State of Play,” “The Last King of Scotland”), along with editor Joe Walker, compiled a kaleidoscopic glimpse of our world. This is the updated, cinematic version of the classic 1955 photography exhibit and book, “The Family of Man” (fathered by photographer Edward Steichen), which was another earnest attempt to link us as all one big human tribe.

One must admire the sheer volume of the editing job. Some 4,500 mini-films were submitted to the producers from 192 countries, and all were winnowed down to about an hour-and-a-half. The film begins by mimicking a 24-hour day: people are shown in the wee hours, then waking up, slipping out of bed, hitting the bathroom, smelling the coffee, etc. Then there is a going-to-work montage. However, this time-of-day pattern is gradually abandoned as the filmmakers simply present different clip clusters on birthings, food preparation, modes of transportation, weddings, varieties of sleep—even what’s in people’s pockets! To help with coherence, at times a rhetorical sign is flashed “What Do You Love?” or “What Do You Fear?” so appropriate shots can be incorporated. These generic questions, along with “What’s in Your Pocket?” were asked of the prospective clip contributors.

Some clips are amusing or intriguing. One poignant sequence shows a gay man coming “out” on the phone to his grandma. Some sweet moments are spent with a shoeshine boy in Lima, Peru. Some sections are thrilling, like a vertiginous skydiver’s plunge. Be forewarned, however, there are other segments that are shocking, even grisly: a matter-of-fact slaughterhouse scene and a concert panic resulting in trampling deaths. Still, too many bits are simply tossed off and random. Plus, the film often doesn’t tell you where you are when you want to know. Who is that woman making offerings (it looks like Bali); where is that sunset? While subtitles are used for foreign languages, there are no titles indicating locales of the shots. Hey, curious people want to know.

“Life in a Day” is an experiment, a cinematic potpourri that achieves a number of funny, striking, and touching moments as well as plenty of puzzling or routine ones. It’s one big mélange of who we are as humans. And, hey, if you don’t like one sequence, just wait a minute, because something more interesting might turn up...

(Running 95 minutes, the film is rated “PG-13” for some mildly sensitive subject matter)