

# Sing Street

Sing Street is a 2016 Irish musical comedy-drama film **directed by John Carney**, which tells the story of a young boy named Conor, who forms a band to impress a girl and escape his troubled family life in 1980s Dublin. The film is not only a coming-of-age story but also a celebration of music, friendship, and the power of self-expression.

## Synopsis:

It is 1985 and all over Dublin there is a spirit of optimism: Young people with high hopes for their future are drawn to London, where they hope to find a more exciting life and better career prospects than on the island. Even Raphina, who smokes on the steps outside Conor's new school every day, wants to go there with her older boyfriend.

Conor is immediately taken with the hip girl. To attract her attention, he pretends to be in a band that needs Raphina for a video shoot. However, the problem is that he doesn't play an instrument and that he doesn't have any friends in the new school who could become band members. So he rounds up a handful of other outsiders from the school and writes his first song. Luckily, Conor has a big brother, Brendan, who is well versed in music and does not hold back with criticism. Every night Brendan introduces him to the records of new bands: Duran Duran, The Cure, Depeche Mode, who are soon imitated by Conor and his band "Sing Street", named after the road where his new school is located.

From now on, Conor calls himself a futurist. With a recording of their first song on tape, he once again tries his luck with Raphina. Amazingly, she likes the music and also turns up for the video shoot. She quickly realises that this band is anything but professional, but she somehow likes them, and she somehow likes Conor too. However, her plan to travel to London with her boyfriend remains, even though Conor tries his best to stop her.

One day, Raphina is gone. But the music of "Sing Street" is getting better and better and the band project is proving to be great fun for the boys. Conor develops ambition and self-esteem and stands up to Barry, the school bully, and to the authoritarian Headmaster. Conor's parents split up and sell the house he grew up in. Then suddenly Raphina is back, who was dumped by her boyfriend in Lon- don.

The film ends in a grand finale: "Sing Street" have their first concert in the school hall, where they openly criticise the authoritarian Headmaster with the song "Brown Shoes". After the concert, Conor and Raphina set off for London in a little boat that used to belong to Conor's grandfather.

The film is a tribute to the music of the 1980s and youth dreams. The songs of the fictional band "Sing Street" are almost always played in full length in the film and were written by the director.

## Key Moments:

### Key Moment 1 - Opening Scene of the Film

Black screen, guitar strumming. First shot is close up of protagonist, Conor, with his guitar. Camera zooms out, we see that he is sitting on his bed in his room. We see a poster on the wall behind him, exam papers lying beside him on the bed. We hear muffled voices of adults having an argument. The protagonist slams his bedroom door shut. The camera zooms in on the protagonist as he begins to use the insults he hears as lyrics for an imaginary song. Cut to black screen with the words 'Dublin 1984' written on it and a voiceover of a news anchor explaining the emigration of young Irish people for a better life in London. Ireland is in the midst of a deep recession. Camera zooms out to reveal a television screen and a half empty glass of wine on top of the TV set. Panning then and our protagonist is sitting at the kitchen table. We see empty dinner plates, a bottle of wine, a bottle of spirits, and everyone is wearing extra clothes. Conor's older brother, Brendan, arrives and is the first to speak; 'This meeting has been called to order'. Conor's father is sitting at the head of the table, smoking. Close up of Dad as he explains Conor's new school arrangements – the family are in extreme financial distress and can no longer afford to send Conor to a private school. He will start in the Christian Brothers, a local public school, founded on the motto, Act Manly. Everyone leaves, Conor is alone at the table, looking miserable.

Cut to school crest on the side of a building; 'Singe Street'; it's Conor's first day at his new school, dolly shot follows Conor as he makes his way in. There's rock and roll music, and the camera captures the business of the environment from Conor's point of view. There's a lot of unruly activity including school yard fighting and the fast paced music adds to the chaotic atmosphere with the lyrics 'stay clean'. It's hectic and crowded. There is a low angle shot of Brother Baxter overseeing all that is going on.

Cut to a classroom, Conor is sitting at the top of the class, he obviously stands out as the only student not misbehaving. We see everything from Conor's point of view – nobody is paying attention to the teacher who has his back to the class – students are smoking etc. Brother Baxter enters the classroom and instantly there is order as the students stand to greet him.

Cut to film title on screen: 'Sing Street' in white letters on a black background. All of this gives us vivid impressions of our protagonist in the opening scene of the film.

## Key Moment 2 – Starting the Band

Before: Conor quickly comes to the attention of headmaster Br. Baxter, with his incorrect school uniform (brown shoes instead of black). He then encounters the school bully, Barry, during a disturbing homophobic and violent scene where Conor stands up for himself.

At home we see the positive relationship Conor has with older brother Brendan through their shared love of music. We learn more about life at home for Conor as his parents openly drink alcohol and there isn't enough money to put the heating on.

Tension grows in school over Conor's shoes and we see close up shots of him wearing just his socks as he has been forced to leave his shoes with the headmaster while he is in school, song 'I Fought the Law' by punk rock group The Clash plays in the background. There is another disturbing encounter with Barry then Conor meets Darren and then, Raphina.

To get Raphina's phone number Conor pretends he's in a band. This scene is shot using low angles of her (powerful) and high angles of Conor (vulnerable). The Dolly Shot of Conor returning to Darren captures his excitement before he excitedly states, 'we need to form a band'.

During: Darren and Conor call to Eamonn's house and recruit him with Conor exclaiming, 'I'm a futurist...no nostalgia, no looking backwards, just forward.'. Eamonn is clearly very talented and we see his difficult home life situation – his father is a violent alcoholic who is in rehab.

The next member to be recruited is Nigig and we see elements of racism here as Darren states 'he'll be able to play something, he's black!'. Ariel shots of the boys going to Nigig's house show the setting as a run down block of flats in inner city Dublin.

The remaining members, bassist Larry and drummer Garry, are recruited when they respond to a poster in school seeking musicians for a 'Futurist band'. They all meet in Eamonn's backyard shed and the band 'Sing Street' is formed. Slow motion camera shot used to show each member exiting the shed suggests power and the start of good things for these boys.

### **Key Moment 3 - Conor and Raphina (39 minutes)**

Conor has written a song called "She Lights Me Up" which is clearly all about Raphina and how much he loves her. The song is uplifting and hopeful about a new relationship. The song's lyrics are as follows: "I think I'm back in the dream/ I think I'm back on the ceiling/ It's such a beautiful feeling/ Going up/She lights me up/She breaks me up/She lifts me up."

We see the band playing this song together and it cements the audience's trust and belief in the band. They are all able to play well and are performing the song with lots of energy and enthusiasm.

We see Conor cycling to Raphina's house to deliver the tapes of music through the letterbox. We then see Raphina listening to the music when she's alone in her room. She has taken off her make-up and appears younger, more vulnerable. She has stripped away all her bravado and we see her as a young girl who has had her heartbroken before. She seems to really like the song and appears to be flattered that they've written this piece about her. We see that Raphina is nearly crying while listening to the song.

It then cuts to Eamon's mother coming into the room with cups of tea for the boys. She starts dancing along to the song, indicating to the audience that it must be good.

### **Key Moment 4 - Brother Baxter Attacks (42 minutes)**

**Before:** Throughout the film, Conor and Brother Baxter have clashed with each other. When Conor first begins in Synge Street, he is given out to for not wearing the correct shoes. Conor tries to reason with him, saying that his family cannot afford to buy another pair of shoes for school. Brother Baxter then insists that he takes off his brown shoes and until he gets himself a pair of black shoes, he has to walk around all day wearing only his socks. It is clear that Brother Baxter is a stringent, strict and intimidating character who most of the boys in the school are afraid of.

**During:** Conor gets into trouble for wearing make-up into school. Brother Baxter tells him "You're a man. Men don't wear make-up." Conor reasons that lots of famous musicians wore makeup, such as Mozart. Brother Baxter mocks Conor, scoffing at the suggestion that he is anything like Mozart. He tells Conor to wash off the make-up before he goes back to class. The scene takes a sinister direction when Baxter says to Conor "You've a fine face. Pretty enough without make-up. Take it off. You can use my bathroom if you like." There's a suggestion that Brother Baxter is making a sexual advance towards Conor at this moment. Conor is clearly uncomfortable and so decides to leave.

While on his way back to class, Brother Baxter grabs him and drags him to the bathroom. Using a bar of soap, he forcibly scrubs the makeup off Conor's face and holds his head down into the sink of cold water. Conor is shocked and horrified at the violence used. There is a suggestion that Brother Baxter is particularly annoyed that Conor didn't decide to use Baxter's own personal bathroom and left the office abruptly. Conor realises that he is quite powerless in Synge Street and that he will be forced to fit in and be like everyone else so long as he stays in this school.

### **Key Moment 5 - Parents' Split (1 hour 5 minutes)**

Before: Conor's parents have been continually fighting throughout the film. Brendan has previously told Conor that he thinks that their mother is having an affair with a man in work.

During: The family are all called down into the kitchen to have a family meeting.

We see Brendan, Anne, Conor, his mother and father all anxiously sitting at the table. The atmosphere is tense and awkward. Conor initially thinks that he is in trouble about his exam results and his mother reassures him that it's not. "Your father and I are splitting up." Conor's mother is blunt and delivers this news in a frank and abrupt manner. It's clear that Brendan is annoyed and reacts in a sarcastic manner "Thank you! Finally! I'll go get the bags."

Conor's mother has fallen in love with another man called Tony and she will move into his home. The family house will be sold and Conor's dad will get himself an apartment. The children will live between these two places. The audience finds out that people in Ireland during this time cannot get a divorce so the couple will just be separated. Conor is angry and says plainly "This is bullshit."

### **Key Moment 6 – Brendan's Breakdown (1 hour 6 minutes)**

Conor is upset about his parent's separation. He had hoped that they would go see him play at the school dance. Brendan criticises Conor's hopefulness saying that they're still the same people, only wrapped up in themselves. He says they've more things to do than go to Conor's "stupid" gig. Conor immediately gets defensive, as Brendan had been his biggest supporter when it came to music.

Brendan then says that he's in withdrawal because he's trying to give up smoking cannabis. He wants to do something with his life, he doesn't constantly want to fit the stereotype of a stoner brother. He talks about how he was talented at music and how he had been physically fit.

Brendan talks about how he was alone with his parents for years before Conor came along. "You just moved in my jet stream. People laugh at me, the stoner, the college dropout. But once, I was a fucking jet engine!"

He then starts looking at the records on the shelf and begins throwing them on the ground, smashing them all up. This is deeply upsetting for Conor seeing as though he knows how much Brendan loves these records. Conor awkwardly leaves the room, clearly in shock. He goes to wash his face in the sink and it's clear that he has been crying. He's trying to catch his breath from the shock of everything.

## Key Moment 7 - Drive It Like You Stole It

This is the band's most popular song. Conor has imagined the music video in his head and it's inspired by the film "Back to the Future." He organises back-ground dancers and is going to shoot the video in the school hall. One of his teachers is there to supervise. He invited Raphina to be in the video but she doesn't turn up. This worries him and he's bitterly disappointed that she doesn't come to shoot the video. He tries to teach the other young people how to do "fifties dancing" but begins to realise that they are not co-ordinated and wonders if this will look as good as he wants.

We then cut to a dream-like sequence where Conor tries to imagine what this video would ideally look like. This tells us a lot about Conor's character and what he really wants. The hall is decorated with bright colours and everyone is wearing old-fashioned, 1950s style clothing. The band is wearing smart suits and they are performing with the audience cheering and dancing along. It feels very Americanised and joyful. Raphina enters the dance, looking glamorous. It is clear from the way that she looks at Conor that she is impressed.

Brother Baxter also enters the dance by completely backflips. He is jovial and ready to socialise. It is completely different from the Brother Baxter that we have met earlier on in the film. As the song continues, Raphina's boyfriend begins to hassle her. We see Brendan arrive on motorbike to the dance, looking like James Dean in "Rebel Without a Cause." He looks healthy, happy and has cut his hair. He sticks up for Raphina and himself and Raphina's boyfriend engage in a knife battle, similar to something out of "West Side Story." The fight gets resolved peacefully without any bloodshed.

Conor's parents walk into the dance, hand in hand. They are smiling and happy, clearly in love with each other. This is in sharp contrast to their previous fighting and arguing throughout the film.

Everyone in the hall gets together for a choreographed dance sequence and it's clear that Sing Street are playing to an audience that loves them.

Conor then begins to snap out of his daydream and we realise that all that has happened on screen for the past few moments has been simply just a fantasy. It tells us that Conor wants Raphina to love him, for Brother Baxter to stop giving him a hard time, for Brendan to succeed and do well and for his parents to reconcile.

### **Key Moment 8 - The Dance**

During the dance, the band has played well. They've gotten the crowd on their side and despite being mocked initially, the audience has reacted well. They decide to play a slow song, a ballad, in the middle of their set which causes a lot of the audience to clear out, however they return for the final song.

Conor informs other members of the band to give out masks with Brother Baxter's face on it. They sing the song "Brown Shoes" despite Brother Baxter's

warnings that they will be expelled if they say anything negative. While playing, everyone wears these masks and eventually Brother Baxter leaves in a furious rage. Conor knows that he will probably be expelled from school for doing this, but he doesn't care.

Raphina watches this final dance happen and she looks up at Conor admiringly. Herself and Conor run out of the school hall, hand in hand when the final song is played.

### **Key Moment 9 - End Scene**

The ending presents the audience once again with the main themes of the film; young love and escapism. Conor has performed at the end of year disco with his band and is celebrating its success. This is happening at the same time that his life at home continues to be difficult for him. The concert and his music continues to offer him an escape from his sad reality. Raphina comes to his concert and it is clear to audiences that she has fallen in love with Conor.

The young couple decide that there is nothing left for them in Ireland. They are going to run away together to London and try and forge a career as a model and a musician. This idea presents audiences with a very romantic, almost fairy-tale version of young love. The music used in the soundtrack at this point in the film is upbeat and exciting to match the action of the characters on screen. Conor returns home to collect his stuff and say one final goodbye to his mum, as he gets set to leave his old life behind. Conor's older brother, Brendan gives them a lift to the harbour. This part of the film is emotional, as Conor must say goodbye to his brother, whom he loves dearly. The closing scene of the movie is symbolic of Brendan's comment of being a 'jet stream' – Conor and Raphina have decided to follow their dream, they are unsure what their future holds, but are happy to be together, against all odds.

## Characters:

The characters in the film are dynamic, complex, and well-crafted, each with their own unique strengths, weaknesses, and struggles.

- **Conor** Lawlor is the main protagonist of the film. He is a 14-year-old boy who is struggling to adjust to his new school, Synge Street CBS, after his family's financial troubles force him to leave his private school. Conor is a creative and passionate musician who dreams of starting a band and becoming a rock star. His love for music is inspired by his older brother Brendan, who introduces him to the music of The Cure, Duran Duran, and other new wave bands. Conor's musical talents are evident from the beginning of the film when he composes a song for the girl he likes, Raphina. Conor's character undergoes a significant transformation throughout the film as he discovers his voice and learns to stand up for himself. He becomes more confident, courageous, and independent, and his journey is a testament to the transformative power of music.
- **Raphina** is the beautiful and mysterious girl who captures Conor's heart. She is a model who dreams of moving to London and becoming a famous actress. Raphina's character is enigmatic, and her motives are not always clear, but her presence in the film adds an element of glamour and intrigue.
- **Brendan** is Conor's older brother, who drops out of college to pursue his own dreams of becoming a musician. Brendan is a charismatic and rebellious character who becomes Conor's mentor and confidant. He teaches Conor about the music industry, encourages him to start his own band, and helps him to find his unique voice as a songwriter. Brendan's character is flawed, but his love for his brother is evident throughout the film, and his influence on Conor is profound.
- **Eamon** is Conor's best friend and bandmate. He is a multi-talented musician who plays several instruments and helps Conor to write and record their songs. Eamon's character is a loyal and supportive friend who encourages Conor to pursue his dreams and stands by him through thick and thin.
- **Brother Baxter** is a strict and humorless priest who works as a teacher at the Catholic school that the main character, Conor Lalor, attends. He is feared and disliked by most of the students at the school, who see him as an oppressive authority figure. Throughout the film, Br. Baxter is a source of tension and conflict for Conor. His character serves as a reminder of the challenges that Conor must overcome in order to pursue his dreams.



## Themes:

Through Conor's journey, the film explores a number of themes that are relevant to young people today.

- One of the main themes in "Sing Street" is **the power of music** to bring people together and to help individuals express themselves. Conor's love of music is what inspires him to start a band and to pursue his dreams. The film shows how music can be a source of comfort and escape for young people who are dealing with difficult family situations, bullying, or other challenges. The music in "Sing Street" is not just a background soundtrack, but rather an integral part of the story that helps to define the characters and their relationships.
- Another theme in "Sing Street" is the **importance of friendship and support**. Conor's bandmates become his closest friends, and together they navigate the ups and downs of being in a band, dealing with school, and dealing with personal issues. The film shows how the band members' different personalities and talents complement each other, and how their friendship helps them to grow and develop as individuals. In addition to his bandmates, Conor also finds support from his older brother, who encourages him to pursue his dreams and helps him to learn about music.
- The theme of **self-discovery** is also explored in "Sing Street." Through his experiences in the band and his relationship with the girl he likes, Conor learns about himself and what he wants from life. He discovers his own creativity and talent, and gains confidence in himself and his abilities. The film shows how important it is for young people to explore their passions and interests, and to take risks in order to find out what they are truly capable of.
- Finally, "Sing Street" also explores the theme of **family dynamics** and the challenges that can arise when families are struggling. Conor's parents are on the brink of divorce, and he and his older brother are caught in the middle. The film shows how Conor's love of music helps him to cope with the difficulties at home, but also how these difficulties can have a negative impact on his life and relationships. The movie also highlights the importance of communication and understanding within families, and the need for parents to support their children's dreams and aspirations.
- In conclusion, "Sing Street" is a movie that explores a number of themes that are relevant to young people today. Through its portrayal of the power of music, the importance of friendship and support, the theme of self-discovery, and the challenges of family dynamics, the film offers valuable insights into

## Key Quotes:

<u>Quote:</u>	<u>Spoken by:</u>
'John Taylor is one of the most proficient bass players in the UK at the moment.'	Brendan
'You need to learn how NOT to play ... that is rock'n'roll.'	Brendan
"Once, I was a fucking jet engine."	Brendan
'Look after that brother of mine' 'Wish I'd done this'	Brendan
"I don't go to school. I'm a model"	Raphina
"I really liked [the song]. It's the only reason I'm here"	Raphina
"For our art Cosmo. You can never do anything by half. Do you understand that?"	Raphina
"Did he hit you?"	Conor
"Yeah, but I totally deserved it."	Raphina
"She lights me up"	Conor
"I'm a futurist, like no nostalgia"	Conor
"Will you help me write a song?" "Always."	Conor to Eamon
"You only have the power to stop things, but not to create."	Conor
"No, Brendan, it doesn't. It means "act manly."	Robert
"Sometimes I just wanna cry lookin' at her."	Conor

## Sample Qns:

### 1. Outline an important relationship in your studied film.

One of the most important relationships in the film is the one between Conor and his older brother, Brendan.

At the beginning of the film, Conor is struggling to fit in at his new school, Synge Street CBS. He is constantly bullied and his parents' relationship is falling apart. However, he finds solace in music and starts a band with some of his classmates. Conor is inspired by the music his older brother Brendan listens to, and he seeks his advice on how to write songs and how to win over Raphina.

Brendan is an important figure in Conor's life because he is the only one who truly understands him. Brendan is the black sheep of the family and dropped out of college to pursue his dreams of becoming a musician. Despite his struggles, he encourages Conor to follow his dreams and not be afraid to take risks. Brendan is the one who introduces Conor to The Cure, Duran Duran, and other bands that inspire him to start his own band.

Throughout the film, Brendan provides Conor with valuable advice on music, love, and life. He teaches Conor that the key to success is not to be afraid of failure and to keep pursuing your dreams no matter what. Brendan also helps Conor to develop his own unique style and identity as a musician.

However, their relationship is not without its ups and downs. There are times when Brendan is too hard on Conor and makes him feel inadequate. Despite these conflicts, their bond remains strong, and Conor learns valuable life lessons from his brother.

In conclusion, the relationship between Conor and Brendan is one of the most important and complex relationships in the film 'Sing Street.' Brendan's guidance and support help Conor to find his identity, pursue his dreams, and ultimately become a successful musician. Their relationship is a testament to the power of brotherhood and the importance of having someone who believes in you.