

Happy-Go-Lucky

A Review by Heather Craig

"I've never heard her say a bad word about anyone." This is how a co-worker once described a mutual acquaintance to me, and I was particularly struck by this succinct assessment of a person's character. It does say a lot in its very rarity. How many times do we hear *that* said about anyone?

A similar rarity of the human spirit is captured in **Happy-Go-Lucky** in which heroine Poppy is buoyantly upbeat and optimistic about virtually anything and everything. We first meet Poppy as she bicycles joyously in London, a Cheshire cat grin on her face. After attempting to cheer up a sour bookstore clerk, Poppy finds her bicycle has been stolen. "Didn't even get a chance to say goodbye," she mutters as she rises above this disappointment. She's soon taking the bus with a big grin on her face.

I will admit that while I'm considered a fairly upbeat, optimistic person myself, at first I found Poppy's relentless cheerfulness a bit jarring. She never let up, and I didn't think I was going to be able to stomach such unbroken delight in life. "Is she on something?" asked the person with whom I saw the movie. One might well wonder, but Poppy is simply high on life.

However, soon I was swept up into Poppy's life and I genuinely liked her. This is important in such a complete character-study. There is no plot to speak of. The film follows Poppy through the highs and lows of her everyday existence, the many small moments that make up a person's life. Primary school teacher Poppy is played with amazing vivacity by Sally Hawkins, last seen as oppressed Anne in BBC's **Persuasion**. Hawkins plays Poppy with a radiating joy, never false, and it must have been a challenge to give such a happy person some layers.

And Poppy has layers. She isn't a fool. She knows life isn't all sweetness and light, whether she is learning to drive from the angry Scott, listening to a homeless man babble, questioning a student she fears is being abused, or trying to soothe an argumentative sibling who refuses to be soothed. She is just aware of being fortunate in her life and she truly enjoys the little things that most people take for granted. Her happiness is not just for show, as we see when she is horrified to realize how her friendliness has been completely misinterpreted by Scott (Eddie Marsan, practically frothing at the mouth for the entire movie). Her trembling distress is obvious, but she is still kind and apologetic when she has every right to be angry. It was this moment that most impressed me.

Happy-Go-Lucky is written and directed by Mike Leigh, who can be serious (**Vera Drake**) or a bit whimsical (**Topsy Turvy**). Here he is seriously whimsical, with a character about whom someone might say, "I've never heard her say a bad word about anyone."