



PREVIEW

# Everything Everywhere All at Once

+ Q&A with writer-directors Daniels

Directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, collectively known as Daniels, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is a hilarious and big-hearted sci-fi action adventure about an exhausted Chinese American woman (Michelle Yeoh) who can't seem to finish her taxes.

Sitting on a wall in director Daniel Kwan's back office in Los Angeles's Highland Park is a framed work by the artist Ikeda Manabu, *History of Rise and Fall*, an elaborate pen-and-ink drawing featuring a maelstrom of pagodas, gnarled cherry branches, and railroad tracks – a fittingly abundant example of Manabu's glorious, almost painfully maximalist style.

'He does these things that hurt your brain when you look at them because they're so intricate, so detailed, so dense,' Kwan explains. 'But when you pull back, you're like, oh, that's a tree.'

Kwan and his filmmaking partner, Daniel Scheinert – the auteur duo otherwise known as Daniels – needed to find their tree. This was circa 2016, when they were first outlining what would become *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, a project that was beginning to increasingly resemble the zoomed-in chaos of a Manabu piece. In a photo they took from that time, a headache-inducing diagram on a wall-sized chalkboard contains over a dozen colour-coded storylines, scribbles of percolating ideas, and what may or may not be a phallic doodle (or Chekhov's gun).

At the time, Kwan was worried that the movie he was working on was just too much. It's an entirely predictable issue – one written into the title of the movie – that also happens to be what makes the film feel genuinely singular and even, as its cacophony of elements clarifies into something startlingly simple, rather transcendent. Watching the finished film today, it retains that sense of maximalist, gonzo energy, and even now, having sorted it all out, the directors still chuckle to each other about how to describe exactly what their movie is.

'There's the family drama answer and the sci-fi answer and the philosophy answer,' Scheinert says. Or you could say it's a kung-fu flick that hops around multidimensional universes, with Michelle Yeoh as a reluctant saviour figure at its centre. There's the answer about generational divides and the internet and the latent dread endemic to living in the modern age. There's also the early logline that Daniels wrote themselves: a movie simply about a woman trying to do her taxes.

It's not exactly wrong – it is, after all, where *Everything* begins. When the film opens, we meet Evelyn Wang (Yeoh) as a harried laundromat owner, living above her business in a cramped apartment and facing a mountain of paperwork amid an audit from the IRS. She is stressed about her aging father (James Hong) coming to stay and struggles to listen to both her grown daughter Joy (Stephanie Hsu) and her tender-hearted husband Waymond (Ke Huy Quan). But while meeting with an IRS agent (Jamie Lee Curtis), a strange occurrence involving her own husband pulls her into a multidimensional

adventure that puts the fate of every universe in her hands – and also forces her to confront who she is to herself and her family.

Arriving at that last part is the moment when Daniels took a step back and finally saw the tree. ‘We could say a million things about it, but the most simple, honest thing is it’s about a mom learning to pay attention to her family in the chaos,’ says Kwan.

The film, as with Daniels’ previous work (*Swiss Army Man*, the iconic music video for Lil Jon’s ‘Turn Down for What’), rushes headlong into unruly anarchy: Evelyn is plunged into the metaphysical world of ‘verse-jumping,’ veering from the mundane dreariness of an IRS building to the palatial lair of a nihilistic villain named Jobu Tupaki, from the flashing lights of Hong Kong red carpets to a deserted canyon where sentient rocks manage to have a heart-to-heart. But this sense of an unhinged imagination, of endless mayhem, ultimately serves to transform the universal, or the multi-universal, into something intimate – an earnest meditation on truly seeing those near us in a time when it feels as if the centre will not hold.

‘The biggest seed that drove us through, that felt like a metaphor for what we’re going through right now in society, is just this information overload, this stretching,’ Kwan says. ‘People keep saying “empathy fatigue” set in with Covid, but I feel like even before Covid we were already there – there’s too much to care about and everyone’s lost the thread. That was the last key, turning this into a movie about empathy in the chaos.’

The film slyly tweaks the ‘hero’s journey’ story beats that audiences have come to expect, squishing and stretching a three-act structure as if the movie itself were jumping through a fracturing multiverse. That sense of infinity – all of the possible worlds, the depthless rabbit holes, all of the tiny moving pieces underneath it – stayed front of mind for the co-directors as they got a grasp on the nuts-and-bolts of the film’s story; it felt crucial that people watching the movie could feel the same sense of vertigo that Evelyn does, that sense of being overwhelmed by the noise and splintering choices of all of her lives. The bold structural gambits were key to creating that experience.

The film’s thematic heart helped Daniels to alleviate the somewhat itching contradiction that existed in the early inspirations of *Everything*, when the duo went to see a ‘90s double feature a few years back. ‘It was *The Matrix* and *Fight Club*, and it was at the New Beverly, and I fell in love again with those movies,’ Kwan recalls. ‘I was like, man, if I could just make something half as fun as *The Matrix* is, but with our own stamp and our spirits, I would just die happy.’

Kwan remembers being inspired specifically by *The Matrix*’s iconic fighting scenes, which harkened back to Daniels’ shared love of kung-fu films. The distinction, Kwan notes, is that ‘we don’t love violence, but we love action movies.’

‘There’s something so entertaining and visceral about it, and we wanted to try to take that kind of energy and satisfying filmmaking and point it towards love and understanding,’ Kwan continues. ‘Which was another fun challenge that we were like, we don’t know how to do that, but we want to see it on the big screen.’

## **Production notes**

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## EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE

A Daniels film

Directors: Daniel Kwan, Daniel Scheinert

Presented by: A24 and Jac Films

A Gozie Agbo and Year of the Rat production

In association with: Ley Line Entertainment

Executive Producers: Tim Headington,

Theresa Steele Page, Todd Makurath, Josh Rudnik, Michelle Yeoh

Produced by: Joe Russo, Anthony Russo, Mike Larocca

Producers: Daniel Kwan, Daniel Scheinert, Jonathan Wang

Co-producers: Allison Rose Carter, Jon Read, Sarah Halley Finn

Casting by: Sarah Halley Finn

1st Assistant Director: Rod Smith

Script Supervisor: Julia Schachter

Written by: Daniel Kwan, Daniel Scheinert

Director of Photography: Larkin Seiple

Edited by: Paul Rogers

Production Designer: Jason Kisvarday

Set Designer: Lia Burton

Visual Effects Supervisor: Zak Stoltz

Costume Designers: Shirley Kurata

Make-up Department Head: Michelle Chung

Hair Department Head: Anissa Salazar

Original Score: Son Lux

Music Supervisors: Laruen Marie Milkus, Bruce Gilbert

Sound Supervisor: Brent Kiser

Sound Mixer: Stephen Nelson

Stunt Coordinator: Timothy Eulich

## Cast

Michelle Yeoh (*Evelyn Wang*)

Stephanie Hsu (*Joy Wang/Jobu Tupaki*)

Ke Huy Quan (*Waymond Wang*)

James Hong (*Gong Gong*)

Jamie Lee Curtis (*Deirdre Beaubeirdra*)

Tallie Medel (*Becky Sregor*)

Jenny Slate (*Big Nose*)

Harry Shum (*Jr Chad*)

Biff Wiff Rick (*Sunita Mani TV musical – queen*)

Aaron Lazar (*TV musical – soldier*)

Brian Le (*Alpha jumper – trophy*)

Andy Le (*Alpha jumper – bigger trophy*)

Neravana Cabral (*Chelsey Goldsmith*)

Craig Henningsen (*security guards*)

Anthony Molinari (*police – Confetti*)

Dan Brown (*police – salsa*)

Anthony Nanakornpanom (*police – luchador*)

Cara Marie Chooljian (*Alpha jumper – jogger*)

Randall Archer (*Alpha jumper – edgelord*)

Efka Kvaraciejus (*Alpha jumper – SWAT*)

USA 2022

139 mins

Courtesy of A24

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## IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

### Preview: Everything Everywhere All at Once

Wed 4 May 19:00

### Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 9 May 18:10

### Preview: Benediction + extended introduction with director Terence

Davies + actor Jack Lowden

Mon 9 May 20:15

### Gaspar Noé in Conversation

Tue 10 May 21:00

### Preview: Summer Ghost + Q&A with director Loundraw

Fri 13 May 18:30

## SPECIAL FILMS & EVENTS

### UK Asian Film Festival: Opening Night: Javed Iqbal: The Untold Story of a Serial Killer + intro by director and cast

Wed 4 May 18:00

### Film Wallahs: Adieu Godard + intro

Wed 11 May 18:20

### Focus Hong Kong: The Bride with White Hair + intro

Thu 12 May 18:20

### Focus Hong Kong: UK Premiere: Bamboo Theatre + intro

Fri 13 May 18:15

### UK Asian Film Festival: Closing Night: Gangnam Girls + intro by director and producer

Sun 15 May 11:30

### UK Premiere: The Coup d'etat Factory + discussion with chair, Baroness Christine Blower and special guests (TBA)

Sun 29 May 14:00

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