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Ma Belle, Ma Beauty

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Ma Belle, Ma Beauty, winner of the NEXT (the NEXT program provides a showcase for what the festival calls â??Pure, bold works distinguished by an innovative, forward-thinking approach to story-telling.â?•) Audience Award, presented by Adobe at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival, follows Bertie (Idella Johnson), Lane (Hannah Pepper), and Fred (Lucien Guignard) who had all three once shared a balanced, functional, polyamorous relationship in New Orleans. At its core, *Ma Belle, Ma Beauty*, is simply a complicated love story between Bertie and Lane. But it is also much more than that. The filmâ??s director, Marion Hill, is a New Orleans-based director with roots in Vietnam, England, and France, and is known for her direction of the camera in the nuances of femme power, queer sensibilities, and radical sensuality across cultures. In her debut feature, *Ma Belle, Ma Beauty,* Hill touches eloquently on each aspect with respect and openness.

The mise-en-scene was scrumptious with some help from its employment of Hollywood-esque focusing and resultant eye-pleasing bokeh. The New Orleans-led, acoustic guitar soundtrack helped create tone while providing a much-needed respite from the COVID blues. In addition, a cast of beautiful actors giving powerful and intense performances amped up the narrative. In juxtaposition to the acting and music, and as equally important to the filmâ??s narrative, was the on-location filming of open-air village markets, pristine waterways, and a country estate in the south of France providing a serenely magical quality to the filmâ??s ethereal tone.

Ma Belle, Ma Beauty, opens with Bertie, who married Fred and settled into Fredâ??s hometown, in southern France continuing to pursue her singing despite, or in spite of, a nagging depression. Soon, however, Laneâ??their quirky ex who disappeared from their three-way relationship years ago shows up unexpectedly for a surprise visit, bringing new energy and some emotional baggage of her own. As the tensions of unresolved disputes, misaligned intentions, and jealousy surface, the sexual dynamics skyrocket when a lovely painter, Noa (Sivan Noam Shimon), fresh out of her service commitment to the Israeli Army, inserts herself into the mix. And, when the group of friends, including some attractive locals, venture down to the river for frolicking in the sun, Bertie begins experiencing feelings of liberation and the vague yet persistent reawakening of her past sexuality.

Posited as â??an interracial, polyamorous, relationship-driven dive into the complexities of sexual fluidity and triangulationâ?• with a promise to deliver a respite from the COVID blues, I felt Hill succeeded triumphantly. Having lived and worked in New Orleans in the immediate aftermath and reconstruction following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, my interest was piqued upon seeing where the director hailed from. In her â??Meet the Artistâ?• introductory video, Hill explained that the film was made with a lot of love as a small group of friends and collaborators from many different places came together in France to make the film. And that all of the post-production and music, which features over twenty New Orleans musicians, was done in New Orleans.

In closing*, Ma Belle, Ma Beauty* was recently added to the upcoming SXSW (formerly known as South by Southwest) Film Festival slated to run March 16-20, 2021, as a Festival Favorite from acclaimed standouts and selected premieres from around the world. *Ma Belle, Ma Beauty* is a beautifully constructed film with exquisite mise-en-scene, gorgeous soundtrack, heady acting, and delightful direction. Highly recommended.



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Category

1. #Sundance
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Tags

1. NEXT Audience Award

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