

Film Notes

by Iona Brandt

Farewell Amor

The debut feature by Tanzanian-American writer-director Ekwa Msangi is the story of a family reunited having been torn apart by the war in Angola. Husband and father Walter (Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine) has been living in New York, and when his wife, Esther (Zainab Jah), and daughter, Sylvia (Jayme Lawson), finally join him, they have to pick up from where they left off after 17 years of separation. When Sylvia enters a dance competition, it gives her an outlet to negotiate the challenges of this strained family relationship. After landing feet first in a new life, the characters must 'rely on the muscle memory of dance to find their way back "home"' – Msangi.

Msangi is currently a teacher who empowers African filmmakers all over the world. As a mentor at Maisha Film Lab in Uganda, she describes the challenge of getting her students to look beyond writing narratives that are rooted in the Hollywood rhetoric of a Third World struggle and over-dramatised plots. 'The pull is for my students to write "issue-driven" films,' she writes on her website, 'some with the most non-believable and overly dramatic scenes and plot lines.' She attributes much of the blame to the NGOs who

USA | 2020 | 95m | 15 tbc

Director: Ekwa Msangi

Starring: Zainab Jah, Jayme Lawson, Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine

provide funding, who intend to use the films for education programmes, and so drive the creativity out of filmmaking. She says this means 'everyone is a caricature and stereotype, every woman is meek and waiting for some male and/or foreign savior to come rescue her from Female Circumcision, Battering Husbands, Evil Aunties, Conniving Neighbors, Fistulas waiting to happen ... it's outrageous.'

Naturally, Msangi's own film features a more believable narrative. *Farewell Amor* tells a personal story, inspired by the relationship of her aunt and uncle, who were separated in the mid-'90s and are still awaiting visas to be reunited. The film was released in the wake of Black Lives Matter and is evocative of the continued discrimination and xenophobia Black Americans face in Trump's America.

However, Msangi does not intend *Farewell Amor* to be a finger-pointing, political, or 'immigrant' film. Immigrants are too often talked about as a 'burden' on the state, she



Excellent

Fair

Poor

What did you think of the film? Please mark or tear the number.

Please add any further comments here:

Please detach this from your Film Note and drop it into the box or hand it in at the end of the screening. Thank you!

Film Notes

told *The Upcoming*, rather than being thought about 'as people who bring things to our communities, people who work so hard; and also what they've left behind, what they've had to do and become in order to even be here.' She added that New York is the perfect setting for this kind of a story due to its history of diversity. Although Msangi does not speak Portuguese, the language in Angola, she did love Kizomba dancing, a style that originated in the country, and she wanted to overcome language barriers to add these voices to the cultural conversation.

Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine described the film to *IndieWire* as a 'classic love story ... this time, it's

Thank you so much for attending FilmBath Festival 2020. We are a small local charity supported by BFI Film Hub South West, IMDb, Earthsong, Bath Function Rooms, Clearly PR, The Bunch, and a host of wonderful businesses. We are so grateful to everyone for being so supportive of the festival — and to you, our lovely audience members. This year, more than ever, thank you for coming out to enjoy cinema with us. Without you there would be no festival.

We love hearing what you think. Were you particularly passionate about a film? Perhaps you have an idea to improve the festival? Let us know! We'll be emailing all ticket holders a link to our audience survey — we'd really appreciate it if you could take just a few minutes to fill it out. You can also write to hello@filmbath.org.uk, tweet @FilmBathUK, or find us on Facebook.

seen through this other lens'. Walter and Esther struggle to unite their idea of love for each other, which they nurtured through their imaginations while apart, and the reality of a relationship that's been changed by the fact they have separately evolved into different people. Jayme Lawson was impressed by how the script explored the intimacy that can be found in a relationship rekindled. However, the ongoing struggle to overcome the continued sense of separation, despite being back in a shared physical space, is not easy to achieve.

Why not consider becoming a FilmBath Benefactor? Your support will enable us to achieve our ambition of promoting diverse film events in and around Bath, and championing equality on screen and behind the camera. Benefactors also receive a special preview of the festival programme hosted by our Creative Director, priority booking, and an invitation to our opening night party, among other exciting benefits. See our website for details.

We hope you'll join us next year for (a hopefully more normal) FilmBath Festival 2021!



Keep up to date with Film Bath Festival and receive Priority Booking FREE.

Name

Email

Please detach this from your Film Note and drop it into the box or hand it in at the end of the screening. Thank you!