



FILM: **A FANTASTIC WOMAN**

FDG RATING: 3.8 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Sebastián Lelio: *director; and writer (Chile)*
Daniela Vega: *actress, Marina*
Francisco Reyes: *actor, Orlando*

DATE: June 10, 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **A FANTASTIC WOMAN**

A Fantastic Woman is a modern-day Cinderella story for actress, Daniela Vega. A few years ago, Vega was working in a hair salon in Santiago, singing opera and acting in local theater on the side. A mutual friend introduced her to director Sebastian Lelio, who was researching the transgender community for a potential film. After a conversation with Varga, he knew he would make the film, and only with a transgender actress as the star. Varga became the cultural advisor for the film and it wasn't until after the script was finished that Lelio realized Varga was absolutely the perfect person to play Marina Vidal. Her performance is outstanding, earning the Chilean film an Oscar for best foreign language film at the 2018 Academy Awards.

The story is about a young transgender woman, Marina, navigating hateful prejudice especially from her partner's family (his 2nd ex-wife, Sonia), and the police, as she mourns his untimely death. The family restricts her from attending his funeral. And the police unnecessarily violate her as part of their reactive interrogation, assuming she caused his death. Bigotry, nuances of identity, defiant self-assertion, and grief are the gnawing themes.

We first see Marina singing at a night club and witness the caring affection between her and a much older, successful businessman, boyfriend, Orlando (Francisco Reyes) as they make plans to live together. The two personas feel authentic and nuanced compared to the other stereotypical characters in the film who seem flat and almost cartoonish, which some resident reviewers highlighted as the film's looming flaw. After a romantic evening, they are back at his apartment, when Orlando suffers an aneurysm causing him to fall down the stairs. A panicked Marina drives him to the emergency room where he dies on the operating table thrusting her life into a tail spin. She is treated with suspicion by hospital staff not only because her license hasn't been changed to reflect her gender identity (they refer to her as "he") but also because of the suspicious bruises on Orlando's body. The police arrive to question her and pointedly ask if Orlando was paying her for sex. They mockingly think she does not deserve to be treated as a grieving girlfriend but rather as a queer suspect. She has instantly lost any semblance of belonging which Orlando represented for her.

We slowly learn Marina's back story as she reaches out to her family for support and as Orlando's family lashes out at her. Early in the film, when Sonia finally meets Marina, she cruelly states, "When I look at you, I don't know what I'm seeing. A chimera, that's what I'm seeing." The mythological reference to a fire-breathing female monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail is chilling. But interestingly, a chimera is also a thing that is hoped or wished for but in fact is illusory or impossible to achieve, which alludes to Marina's desire to be a woman.

Hallucinatory images, reflections in mirrors, and exaggerated stylized dreamscapes artfully illustrate her grieving mind and emotional state, a technique that most of us found extremely effective. Others thought they were unnecessary. We agreed the acting was exceptional. What does it take to be a fantastic woman? Orlando believed Marina was. We watched her through his eyes and then witnessed her vulnerability, self-doubt, defiance, strength, resilience, and grace as she fought to be respected. We agree she deserves the film's title.

Placing the transgender experience squarely in the limelight with confidence makes A Fantastic Woman not only timely but also memorable. We, applaud the film with an almost fantastic rating of 3.8 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net

www.filmdiscussiongroup.com