



FILM: **40 YEAR OLD VERSION**

FDG RATING: 3.5 ☺☺☺☺○

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

Radha Blank: *director*  
Radha Blank: *screenplay writer*  
Radha Blank: *actress, Radha*  
Peter Kim: *actor, Archie*

DATE: February 21, 2021

### DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **40 YEAR OLD VERSION**

Radha Blank's semi-autobiographical comedy/personal dramady, *The 40 Year Old Version*, is about an artist (also named Radha) who a decade ago was named a promising under-30 talented play writer, but ever since has been creatively and professionally stalled. She pays the rent on her Harlem apartment by teaching playwriting/creative expression to a room full of rowdy, moody young adults who rap about their explicit sexuality. Her gay Asian agent, Archie, (her best friend since childhood) tries to find opportunities for Radha but she doesn't make it easy being perpetually impatient, outspoken, and kind of a mess emotionally, at the same time avoiding calls from her brother who wants her to help sorting through her late mother's things.

So what's a black 40 year old girl to do? She's surrounded by rap and has always been able to spit out raw, funny, intricate rhymes, so instinctively starts spewing out clever, biting, rhymed phrases that capture her life in its painful 40 year old version facing the realities of middle age in 21<sup>st</sup> century New York City. One resident reviewer described this as her favorite scene, "She was rapping in her bedroom, testing it out, and rhyming AARP, dry skin, being tired...and she realizes she is on to something. Such an original story." Another discussion participant noted the authenticity of her words describing her situation. And who knew there is a Rap Competition Night Club? – a favorite scene. A few discussion participants really didn't like the Rap language while another thought they were hilarious.

It's a life choice detour that underscores both Radha's desperate search for an artistic venue and her age since her presence is completely incongruous with the happening underground rap scene and provides fodder for humorous riffs. As director and actress, Blanks perfectly balances the serious emotional themes with comic jabs at herself and the white dominated theater industry.

Radha has been trying to get her play, *Harlem Ave.* about a black shopkeeper, produced and after Archie manages to present it to J. Whitman, a wealthy white producer, Whitman suggests her work needs to focus more on Black suffering, tells her to add a white character to her play, and says he can't meet her request for a black director since all have full schedules so hires a white female director. He twists the story of a Harlem shopkeeper into a self-serving parable of gentrification. A published critic noted that this strand of the movie's plot includes its most painful and pointed satire. As the play progresses to the workshop stage, Radha increasingly feels uncomfortable with the compromises she is making to appeal to white audiences. One line in particular stands out, "White people love that stuff."

What could have been her stepping stone to success, crumbles on her play's opening night when Radha appears during the curtain call and denounces her work, rapping about the need for an artist to stay true to their artistic vision.

A very discerning discussion participant absolutely loved the film with its universal themes of aging, feeling washed up professionally, all framed in a female black experience. We agreed that Radha's character was refreshing, and loudly applaud her directorial debut. One discussion participant thought it was a bit too long and too loose, but looks forward to more work by this talented filmmaker and actress.

The pleasure, ambition, struggle, compromise, to create a work of art, as a middle age Black woman, portrayed with self-effacing humor, played out in mostly syncopated scores of 3 and 3.5s, with a few stronger beats, setting the rhythm of a final 3.5 for *The 40 Year Old Version* on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)

See you at the movies!

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