

'Miss Juneteenth' builds to a beautiful ending

BY MAKENZIE WHITTLE

The Bulletin

A quiet but honest film can easily slide by among big-budget blockbusters. Writer and director Channing Godfrey Peoples' debut film "Miss Juneteenth" is one of those films driven by the world it portrays that deserves to break out of the pack.

The film follows Turquoise Jones (Nicole Beharie) a Fort Worth, Texas, working, nearly-single mom and former beauty queen who has scraped and saved to put her 15-year-old daughter Kai (Alexis Chikaeze) into the same Miss Juneteenth Pageant where, if she wins, she could win a full scholarship to any Historically Black College. Kai, however, is indifferent to her mother's insistence that she join the competition, and instead is more interested in her boyfriend and trying out for her school's dance team.

But Turquoise pushes her daughter toward the crown, putting a massive deposit on a ball gown, correcting her grammar when an error is made and doing as much as she can to set her up for potential greatness.

We learn early on that while many Miss

Juneteenth's have gone onto said greatness, Turquoise's life has not turned out that way and it is implied that before she could complete her tenure as pageant queen, she got pregnant and her dreams of reaching for more were put on hold.

Instead, she does odd jobs including working at a hole-in-the-wall bar and as a beauty mortician. While her husband Ronnie (Kendrick Sampson) promises to help out, he is rarely able to follow through and mostly keeps his own interests above those of Turquoise and Kai. This leads to tensions in the family, and while Turquoise is still clearly working through things, she appears to care for him still.

But nothing is ever easy when you can barely afford the basics, and Turquoise puts every penny into Kai's competition, pushing both of them to their breaking points.

Beharie carries the film expertly. Her character is confident and capable but barely keeping it together. Beharie brings all

of that just behind her eyes, giving the audience a sense of what is boiling beneath without ever saying a word.

The rest of the cast's performances, while not bad, fall a little more flatly compared to Beharie.

Plot-wise, things chug along and there are side characters who don't get much more attention other than being plot devices without fully exploring their potential as more.

But this is Turquoise and Kai's story, their struggle to be who they want to be in front of one another. Though there is no doubt they love each other, we only get a strong look at it toward the end.

It feels very honest, and while it has tones of sexism, mother-daughter relationships and even classism that are fairly universal, the storyline is very beautifully rooted in Black culture.

It is a slow burn of a film, nothing big or outlandish happens, but it quietly builds until a beautiful ending that brings it all home.



Vertical Entertainment

Nicole Beharie in a scene from "Miss Juneteenth" (2020)

More Information

"Miss Juneteenth"

99 minutes

No MPAA rating



new on DVD & Blu-ray

■ Movies released the week of Feb. 2

"Let Him Go," "Wild Mountain Thyme," "Tesla," "Breach" and "Host."

Peoples, a Fort Worth native herself, gives us a strong debut feature film that captures the nuances of Black working-class life in a steady and beautiful performance from Nicole Beharie.

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important and fascinating women. Stream it on Disney Plus or rent it from Amazon Prime, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

"Malcolm X" (1992) — The Spike Lee joint clocks in at just under three and a half hours and spans the entire life of the civil rights activist from his youth, crime-riddled young adulthood and eventual conversion to the Nation of Islam where he became an outspoken advocate for their more militant methods of protest. Over the epic scale, the audience is able to connect fully to X, played dutifully by Denzel Washington, and see the full scope of his transformation through

his life. The script is based on X's autobiography as it was told to Alex Haley and it doesn't miss much, which is what makes it a compelling watch. Stream it on HBO Max or rent it from Amazon Prime, Google Play, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

"Selma" (2014) — Surprisingly, this was the first film to center around Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. Director Ava DuVernay takes viewers through the events leading up to the march from Selma to Montgomery including the horrific events of Bloody Sunday where protesters were stopped on the Edmund Pettus Bridge and beaten. David Oyelowo provides a solid and stirring

performance as King showing a lot of his human flaws that the history books tend to gloss over. Stream it on Hulu (with Live TV) or rent it on Amazon Prime, Google Play, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

"Straight Outta Compton" (2015) — Following the rise and fall of gangsta rap group N.W.A, the film surprisingly connects to a wider audience beyond fans of the band and the music they created. The deeper story between the musicians is powerfully done and leaves the biopic one that will last. Stream it on Hulu (with Live TV) or rent it from Amazon Prime, Google Play, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

"What Happened, Miss Simone" (2015)

— The documentary lays out the life of jazz great Nina Simone using mostly her own words through interviews and diary entries as well as through her daughter, Lisa, and her friends. Viewers get an incredibly intimate look at the turmoil the singer endured at the hands of her abusive husband as well as her struggle with bipolar disorder which was not diagnosed until later in her career. What's more, we get a stunning insight into how deep her talent went. Stream it on Netflix or rent it from Amazon Prime or iTunes.

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