

A Fantastic Woman

2017 Chile/ USA / Germany 100 m Director Sebastián Lelio

Cast: Marina – Daniela Vega . Orlando – Francisco Reyes

Introduced by Dr Carmen Herrero

What some critics said:

“‘A Fantastic Woman’ is a brilliant film: a richly humane, moving study of someone keeping alive the memory and the fact of love “ - The Guardian
"Vega's tough, expressive, and subtly distressed performance deserves far more than political praise. It's a multi-layered, emotionally polymorphous feat of acting “ - Variety

"Subtle and tender, A Fantastic Woman handles its timely, sensitive subject matter with care”.

“It would be absurd to minimize the political impulse and import of ‘A Fantastic Woman,’ or to universalize its specific, precisely observed depiction of injustice. Marina’s experiences reveal a deeply held prejudice hardly limited to Chile. But Mr. Lelio and Ms. Vega are less invested in her symbolic status than in her living presence. She has a charisma that defies pity and a sense of poise that can be both intimidating and heartbreaking. Psychologically astute and socially aware as the film is, it is also infused with mystery and melodrama, with bright colors and emotional shadows. .. its matter-of-fact melody, and its surface modesty camouflages an unruly, extravagant spirit “ - New York Times

Winner Silver Bear for best screenplay at the Berlin film festival / Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film and more

DIRECTOR’S COMMENTS

“There’s something about using the cinematic device as a tool to connect with dimensions of the world that you don’t know too well, you’re not too familiar with,” said Lelio. “It’s like a creating a bridge, or a spaceship to travel to the unknown”

On meeting Daniela Vega, “She made me pose the question, ‘What is a woman?’ ”. He wrote the project with her in mind. “I didn’t want to make an easy melodrama or romance,” he said. “I think that came out of the process of knowing Daniela and trying to create a device that could be as complex and beautiful as its central character.”

NOTES

Daniela Vega is cast as Marina 'Una Mujer Fantastica' of the title. Her name is echoed in the water motifs that flow through the film; from the stormy seascape that adorns the wall of her bedroom, to the haunting song ("time keeps flowing like a river to the sea") to which she dances with her love.

Multiple mirrors abound in frame after frame repeatedly reflecting her. Cinematographer Benjamín Echazarreta has placed Daniela Vega at the centre of every frame, her face, the back of her neck, her full body. As she walks the streets of Santiago she is viewed from behind, from across the street, the camera moving with her as she walks past a construction site, or along a block of storefronts. She is usually alone in the frame.

The film opens with romance and music but the style of the film is very fluid, moving from modern romance via social-realist drama to detective thriller, the last signalled by the discovery of a key. At one point the drama shifts into levitating musical fantasia, our heroine flying upward toward the camera; at another point she is surreally and symbolically buffeted by the force of the wind against her. There are even glimpses of a ghost reflected in glass.

When "A Fantastic Woman" took home the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film last year, it made history twice: not only was it the first Oscar win for Chile, but the first Oscar win for a film with a transgender performer in the lead. Daniela Vega has now become a national heroine in Chile and this performance has been recognised with numerous international acting awards. Time magazine named her as one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2018. As a result of the film a gender-identity bill has moved up the political agenda in Chile.

Sebastian Lelio and his compatriots, filmmaker Pablo Larraín (other films include *Neruda* and *Jackie*) with his producing partner (and brother) Juan de Dios Larraín, now stand as the first generation to revive Chilean cinema after it was decimated by the Pinochet regime.

MUSIC

"The soundtrack merges Matthew Herbert's luscious score, dominated by long legato string phrases, with melodies that act as a further commentary on the action: Aretha Franklin's (You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman as Marina returns Orlando's car to his ex-wife; The Alan Parsons Project's Time as Marina and Orlando dance after her birthday dinner; Marina's soaring rendition of Geminiano Giacomelli's 1734 *Sposa son disprezzata* aria narrated from the point of view of a faithful but insulted wife, and the uplifting *Ombra mai fu* aria she sings from Handel's *Xerxes*" **Sight and Sound.**