The Screen Savor: 'Inflamed Passions'

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of "CATCH A FIRE"

Iraq, 2006? Or South Africa, 1980? The aptly-named "Catch a Fire" depicts the inflammatory reaction to a tyrannizing body that takes ownership of a foreign country, forcing its citizens into poverty, exile, prison or death. Since the invader doesn't belong, ignorant of the native people's religion and culture, this film gives us yet another history lesson of how the oppressor is ultimately overthrown by otherwise peaceful citizens who find they have no choice but to ultimately fight back.

Though the setting could easily be current-day Iraq (its victims turning against the "liberators" in reaction to the mounting casualties of a war they never desired), "Catch a Fire" takes place in the Apartheid-racked South Africa of the 1980s. A true story, Mozambique-born Patrick Chamusso first attempts to tap dance to whatever "Bossman" wantsâ€”until he is wrongly accused of sabotage. After he and his loved ones undergo undeserved torture, he can no longer accept the go-along-to-get-along status quo. He travels to Maputo, offering his services to the underground left-wing African National Congress (the "ANC"), turning into the anarchist that the white Afrikaners feared he was all along. In 1981, he successfully detonates the Secunda Oil Refinery without any loss of life. By bringing down a highly viable symbol of the white man's riches via the oppression of the black workers toiling within the refinery, Chamusso turned into one of the movement's heroes.

This powerful movie, told from Chamusso's point of view, allows us a new look at the motivations that force the common man into extraordinary actions. It is in this film's vivid examination of how terrorists are created that "Catch a Fire" takes our breath away.

As Chamusso, the charismatic Derek Luke ("Glory Road," "Friday Night Lights," "Biker Boyz" "Antwone Fisher") gives a stellar, multi-layered performance that carries the film. Through the character's pain and humanity, his ultimate acceptance of his own faults and his ensuing desire to fight an overwhelming oppression with no more tools than a profound heart and a good brain, Luke succeeds in taking his audience right along with him.

Portraying his conflicted wife, Bonnie Henna is stunning, maturing from a joyful bride to a woman acting out in quiet rage. But as Afrikaner Nic Vos, a Colonel in the countryâ€™s Police Security Branch, Tim Robbins seems lost. We see a man fully aware that he's outnumbered as an Afrikaner, 3 million of him to 15 million native South Africans, yet he continues in his almost-robotic pursuit of potential anarchists. Why? What is

Vos truly thinking? Does he ever fear the loss of his own humanity as he tightens noose upon noose on innocent necks?

Screenwriter Shawn Slovo ("A World Apart") is the daughter of Joe Slovo, who was the head of the military wing of the ANC, and later one of Nelson Mandela's Cabinet members. It was his suggestion that Ms. Slovo tell the story of apartheid through Chamusso. Joining forces with her is Phillip Noyce, one of the best director/chroniclers of the personal struggle within the political upheaval of a country. In prior films he's zeroed in on Vietnam ("The Quiet American") and Australia ("Rabbit-Proof Fence").

Though apartheid ended only 15 years ago, we need to once again be reminded of that injustice as we look to the global mistreatments of today. "Catch a Fire" ignites both our hearts and minds. Bravo.

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: B-plus

Kimberly Gadette can be reached at gadettek@yahoo.com. Production Credits: "Catch A Fire" Directed by Phillip Noyce Written by Shawn Slovo Cast: Derek Luke, Tim Robbins, Bonnie Henna Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 102 minutes Grade: B-plus

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