

FILM AFRICA FESTIVAL BLOG – The Suns/Soleils Post- Screening Review

Soleils may have screened yesterday at Hackney Picturehouse but we couldn't resist publishing this wonderful review of this whimsical history lesson



Soleils is a very peaceful, spiritual experience for the viewer. It doesn't use traditional continuity or narrative, so the characters go on a road trip through different periods of history and all notion of space and distance is abandoned. The film pieces together fables told by a wise man – a “griot”- with segments of African history to create a modern day fable.

The character of the Great Uncle is so wise and comforting that you'll wish he were sitting at your bedside telling you these stories. Admittedly, it is frustrating – as voiced by Dokamisa – that Sotigui never answers a straight question but replies with more stories, as it makes the film occasionally hard to focus on and occasionally loses the viewer's attention.

The soundtrack – both relaxing and invigorating at the same time – adds to the

liberal treatment of time and space as the characters travel miles and years through an imagined universe, resulting in a feeling of unrestricted imagination. A brave move by the filmmakers that succeeds brilliantly.

The landscape is stunning, so alien and baffling to those of us who have never experienced it firsthand, and it was this coupled with the tales of history that I had never heard that made this film intriguing.

The most gripping parts of Soleils are the things Sotigui tells Dokamisa when giving her a straight answer, not speaking in riddles. For example, their discussion about the lack of prisons in Africa before the colonization by the white people is fascinating and tells history from a perspective that is not so widely known.

It would have been nice to have seen more of these moments in the film. There are many instances where Sotigui details examples of historically white prejudice, their sweeping bigoted generalisations and shocking to Dokamisa and to the audience still because many of these views have been accepted as historical fact. However, the film could have done more to debunk the accepted history and reveal the 'true' history. An example of when the film succeeds in this is when our leads visit Robben Island and discuss the prisons, because it was this moment that stuck in my mind; as a white viewer it was genuinely fascinating to learn this part of history in a way that has not been offered to me through my education.

The film leaves you feeling like you have been given a small and personal insight into some of Africa's rich history, but it left me with the desire to know more. It was frustrating to realise how little I know about all these countries that have been subject to so much change from external powers, and yet there are still many cultural traditions that prevail across this continent. The messages that come from this film are enlightening, so while it may not be classically structured or have the easiest dialogue to follow but this film will cause you to take a second look at the moral codes you took for granted, and give you a visual feast along the way.

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