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Farewell Amor

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Farewell Amor

Abstract

This is a film review of *Farewell Amor* (2020), directed by Ekwa Msangi.

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Film and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture. He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.



Farewell Amor (2020), dir. Ekwa Msangi

Ekwa Msangi has developed her 2016 short into a feature length film that beautifully illustrates the challenges of immigrant families separated for years and then reunited. Walter (Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine) has been living in Brooklyn, New York for 17 years since leaving his native Angola. His wife, Esther, and his daughter, Sylvia, can now join him after living apart from him for years in Tanzania. Each of them has their own story of how they adjust to their new life, told one at a time by the filmmaker, before their stories unite. In the process, we come to understand the unique challenges each of them faces, as well as the way they are brought together to face their new life with hope and love.

Walter has not remained faithful to his wife Esther (Zainab Jah), and has lived for some time with Linda (Nana Mensah), who he asks to leave the apartment before his wife arrives. He does not tell his wife about her, and he tries to erase any signs of Linda, but Esther suspects that there was another woman there. Walter is filled with guilt and yet is torn, as he is still in love with Linda. He feels a duty to his wife, but little passion: dance is how he connected with Linda, and

with Esther, but now Esther has become a conservative Christian who disapproves of dancing. Esther, for her part, prays constantly: she is afraid of this new country, afraid that it will corrupt their daughter and destroy their family. Her solution is to retreat to religion. She calls a Christian friend in Tanzania, but her friend only asks her to have faith, and to send money to the church. Esther is ready to send a thousand dollars to them, even though Walter disapproves of giving away such an exorbitant amount while they are still struggling: he finds her approach to their new life escapist, although she also wants to save their marriage.

Their daughter Sylvia (Jayme Lawson) has her own struggles as she seeks to fit into an American school. DJ (Marcus Scribner) is an African American student who likes her and who invites her to join their dance group for a competition. But Sylvia does not know how to dance in their style, and prefers her own style from her own culture. While Esther disapproves of Sylvia's dancing, Walter encourages it, as he knows that dance allows Sylvia to show her true self. That is something he also wants for Esther and himself: when they go out on a date, he entices Esther to dance with him, which rekindles their passion momentarily until a memory of Linda intervenes.

The climax occurs when Sylvia is able to share her own individuality in her dancing through a solo competition and her parents are able to see how much dance means to her. To preserve their family, they must preserve their culture, expressed here through dance, as all three of them find joy in the ways it connects them with each other and with the lands they have left behind. While immigrants are forced to assimilate in many ways, they should not be required to sacrifice their traditions or their identity. This film celebrates the ways that immigrant families can survive and adapt, and the wonderful music of the film acts as accompaniment to and enactment of the process of their journey. It's a wonderful story of the power of love and music to bring hope

and abolish fear. Msangi's debut feature film is a joy, as are the performances of all the actors, and I hope to see many more stories from this talented director in the future.