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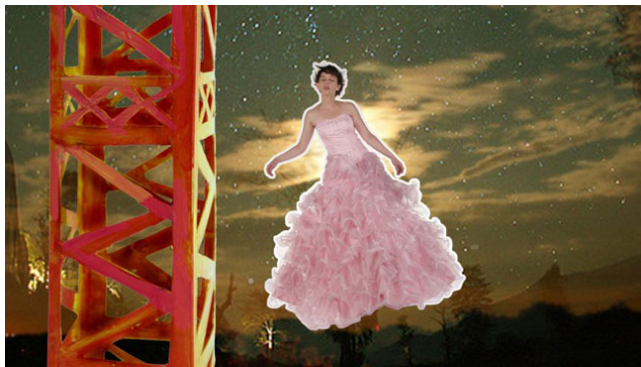
Queen of Montreuil: Paris Cinema Fest Review

10:57 AM PDT 7/9/2012 by Jordan Mintzer

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"Queen of Montreuil"

The Bottom Line

A wacky yet touching French dramedy...with marijuana and sea lions.

Venue

Paris Cinema Fest

Director

Solveig Anspach

Cast

Florence Loiret-Caille, Didda Jonsdottir, Ulfur Aegisson, Eric Caruso

Solveig Anspach's film follows a weeping widow who returns to Montreuil after losing her husband in a scooter accident abroad.

PARIS -- Quirky with a capital Q, but endearing all the same, writer-director **Solveig Anspach**'s deadpan dramedy *Queen of Montreuil* brings a weeping French widow, two Icelandic refugees and one depressive sea lion into the eponymous Paris suburb for a series of mishaps, false starts and nonstop weed smoking.

our editor recommends

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[The Last Step: Karlovy Vary Film Review »](#)

Premiering at the Paris Cinema Fest, this playful, at times potent fourth feature from former documentary filmmaker Anspach (*Back Soon*, *Stormy Weather*) should see some festival action and offshore sales before its French release early next year.

Montreuil is to Paris what Williamsburg is (or was) to Manhattan – an eclectic, still-affordable neighborhood filled with artists, immigrants and working-class hold outs. Such is the setting to which 30-something Agathe (**Florence Loiret-Caille**) returns after losing her husband in a scooter accident abroad, arriving home with his ashes in tow and accompanied by two Icelanders – the pothead poet, Anna (**Didda Jonsdottir**) and her son, Ulfur (**Ulfur Aegisson**) – stranded after their airline company went bankrupt.

Climbing out of her catatonic state of mourning, Agathe slowly gets back in the swing of things with the help of her wacky roommates, flirting with a friendly neighbor (**Eric Caruso**) and learning that her dead hubby wasn't exactly a stand-up guy (especially in one hilarious sequence where a mistress (**Sophie Quinton**) shows up unannounced). Meanwhile, Anna winds up landing a job as a crane operator (given her ganga intake, it's a miracle she doesn't cause a small massacre) and Ulfur befriends a stranded sea lion named Fifi who, according to Icelandic legend, may hold the power of reincarnation.

If this sort of sounds like **Francois Ozon** by way of *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*, Anspach and regular co-writer **Jean-Luc Gaget** manage to tone down the eccentricities enough to make their characters both believable and likeable, and *Queen of Montreuil* eventually turns into a touching fable about various people – and animals – trying to find their way back home.

Loiret-Caille (*Let it Rain*) delivers plenty of straight-faced laughs as the lost and grieving Agathe, but Jonsdottir – who starred in two of Anspach's previous films – definitely steals the show as a marijuana mommy whose wisdom becomes apparent once the smoke clears.

Warmly lit cinematography by **Isabelle Razavet** blends well with the colorful local settings, while **Martin Wheeler**'s upbeat score is in the pure indie comedy tradition.

Production companies: Agat Films & Cie/Ex Nihilo, Mikros Image

Cast: Florence Loiret-Caille, Didda Jonsdottir, Ulfur Aegisson, Eric Caruso, Samir Guesmi

Director: Solveig Anspach

Screenwriters: Solveig Anspach, Jean-Luc Gaget

Producer: Patrick Sobelman

Director of photography: Isabelle Razavet

Production designer: Marie Le Garrec

Music: Martin Wheeler

Costume designer: Olivier Beriot

Editor: Anne Riegel

Sales Agent: Films Distribution

No rating, 87 minutes.