

Featured

## The Beast In The Jungle

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Who doesn't like a motion picture that doesn't act like a film in the most traditional sense? In today's day and age – when filmmakers like Jordan Peele are steadfastly blurring the lines between horror and satire, and musical biopics reign supreme at awards season – anything revolutionary and genre-challenging goes.

Which works in the favor of Clara Van Gool's *The Beast in the Jungle* – based on the novella of the same name. A wistful piece of art that leans heavily on dance as the film's primary form of communication, it's an ode to time and enduring love, but with a melancholic spin. As existential as it gets, this Netherlands-based motion picture chronicles the decades-spanning tale of John Marcher (Dane Hurst) and May Bartram (Sarah Reynolds), two star-crossed lovers who keep finding their way back to one another.



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By no means a fairytale, this is about a soul-burning yet unfulfilled romance and the inescapable loss that accompanies such all-encompassing love. But it leaves a lot to be desired – for one, who Van Gool had in mind when she created it.

If you don't consider yourself one of those types who lives for subtle implications and emotional conflict told via an odd mix of sweeping grand jetés (full disclosure: I absolutely Googled that) interrupted by strings of dialogue then I really wouldn't recommend settling in to watch this cinematic retelling. And let's face it – that's a very niche audience, indeed. For the majority of us avid moviegoers, we would happily devote a few hours of our busiest day to a film knowing the end result is we will walk away feeling very entertained.

You won't get that with *The Beast in the Jungle*. It's so devoted to remaining true to its roots as a dance film while still attempting to shirk that stereotype in order to string in character dialogue that the “enigmatic love story” it touts is much more disjointed than it is captivating. The medium back-and-forth is more than a little jarring, and you get the sense that it's trying a little too hard to retell a classic tale in a new way that it couldn't decide on the *how*.



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Being said, it wouldn’t be just to not shower the aesthetic elements of this production in every type of praise. Seeing the richly authentic garb of the late 19th century flutter around in precisely choreographed scenes, set to a waltz-like soundtrack that rings with haunting flair, would leave any viewer a little lost in the past and thoroughly spellbound.

There’s definitely magic that plays across the screen, thanks to the obvious talent both behind the lens and in front of it. Leads Hurst and Reynolds are also well-cast in their roles; each could easily be labeled as triple-threats, and the best part about the duo is their very palpable chemistry that, at times, you can almost see the sparks light up the air between them.

If only those sparks translated to more on-screen activity, and there would be little chance of this film adaptation losing anyone who watches it. As it is, *The Beast in the Jungle* is pretty enough to look at, but can’t offer much more than an abysmal chance that the whole affair will keep you awake.



*The Beast in the Jungle* (2019) Directed by Clara Van Gool. Written by Henry James (novel) and Glenn Maxwell. Starring Dan Hurst and Sarah Reynolds.