

## A Fantastic Woman [15] 2017|Chile/Ger/Spain/USA|100 min

UK release date **2<sup>nd</sup> March 2018**

Director **Sebastián Lelio**

Screenplay **Sebastián Lelio, Gonzalo Maza**

Cinematographer **Benjamín Echazarreta**

Cast **Daniela Vega** (Marina Vidal); **Francisco Reyes** (Orlando); **Luis Gnecco** (Gabo); **Aline Küppenheim** (Sonia); **Nicolás Saavedra** (Bruno)

Sebastián Lelio's Oscar-nominated film *A Fantastic Woman* is a sublime study in the exalted ordeal of grief. It is also as gripping as any procedural crime thriller, and cops and police doctors do play a role. I went into a kind of alert trance watching this – in tandem with the heroine's own weightless alienation and shock. When the screen went dark prior to running the final credits, I assumed for an instant that some small initial section had come to a close. In fact, an hour and three quarters had gone by.

It is a wonderful performance from the 28-year-old trans actor Daniela Vega: passionate, intelligent and with a certain understated dignity. She is rarely absent from the screen and Lelio's camera seems always to be catching her character in the act of transcending loneliness, heroically defusing the internal opera of pain, rising above the thousand petty little indignities and hostilities that the world now wishes to add to the ordinary agony of her bereavement.

Vega plays Marina, a young trans woman in the Chilean capital Santiago; she is a waitress and club singer. At the very first, we see Marina giving an elegant but very ominous performance of the Puerto Rican song *Periódico De Ayer*, or *Yesterday's News*: "Your love is like yesterday's newspaper / Which no one wants to read any more ..."

Marina is in a very happy relationship with an older cis man: Orlando (Francisco Reyes) is a handsome, silver-haired, divorced guy in his 50s with a grownup son. In the middle of the night, after a sumptuous and indulgent romantic meal, Orlando wakes up next to Marina, feeling desperately ill and disoriented. Poor panicky Marina prepares to drive him to hospital but leaves

him alone outside on the landing of his apartment building while she flusters about getting her things. He dazedly staggers forward and falls down the stairwell, fatally worsening the situation while sustaining bruises that mean the police need to get involved.

Lelio shows how this grim event brings all the conformism and cruelty of society into vivid focus. It was there all along of course, but it didn't matter as long as her relationship with Orlando protected her. At a single stroke, Marina's whole existence is pathologised and criminalised. She has no rights as Orlando's girlfriend; she must vacate his flat and isn't welcome at the funeral. His ex-wife and son do not conceal their hostility, and she suffers threats and assault from a brutish family member. Officials insist on calling her "Daniel" and the police think that Orlando got his wounds from Marina, but scrupulously take into account the possibility that she may have been defending herself – like many another trans woman being abused – so she has to report for a medical examination, in an excruciatingly ambiguous state of victim or assailant. Her existence is on trial.

A Fantastic Woman is a brilliant film: a richly humane, moving study of someone keeping alive the memory and the fact of love.

After **Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian, 1 March 18**

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