



SUGAR

USA | 2008 | 120m | 15 | subtitles

Director: Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck

Screenplay: Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck

Cinematography: Andrij Parekh

Editing: Anna Boden

Original Music: Michael Brook

Leading Players: Algenis Perez Soto, Karl Bury, Michael Gaston

filmnote

Sugar is writing/directing team Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck's second feature film after their 2006 indie hit *Half Nelson*, which won its star Ryan Gosling an Academy Award Nomination. The pair's strong gritty style and themes of personal growth and isolation permeate throughout this engaging film as they did throughout their excellent debut.

Sugar tells the story of Miguel 'Sugar' Santos (Soto), a Dominican Baseball player who dreams of playing major league American baseball in order to secure a better life for himself and his family back home in the Dominican Republic. When a talent scout approaches Sugar after seeing him play, he is signed to a minor league team. Pressures of having to support his family back home and coping with a new language makes Sugar question his dedication to the game he has spent his life playing.

The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2008 and won significant acclaim along with a Grand Jury Prize nomination. Critics such as A.O. Scott praised the film as "sad and hopeful, but the film's sorrow and its optimism arise from its rarest and most thrilling quality, which is its deep and humane honesty." This is what sets Sugar apart from most modern sport dramas, where the actual sport is the main focus. Boden and Fleck bring a realistic view of sport in modern society and highlight the callousness of American commercialism which promises glory to a production line of young men but abandons them unceremoniously when they don't make the grade.

Nicholas Barber for *The Independent* writes that "Sugar is as political as a Michael Moore or a George Clooney tub thumper but it makes its points more subtly. In one scene, Miguel is shopping for clothes and catches sight of some underwear labelled 'Made in the Dominican Republic'. He doesn't say a word but the film-makers trust us to know what he's thinking: maybe the underwear was stitched in the very factory where his mother and sister work. And maybe he himself is just another product that's been exported to America and then sold at a knockdown price."

TONIGHT'S SCREENING SUPPORTED BY RELAYS



what did you think of the film? please mark or tear your vote ▶

excellent A

please add further comments about the film or the festival here

B

fair C

D

poor E

to be included in our e-mailing list (you'll receive occasional bulletins about film festival activities, special email-only offers and news) **please give your email address** on the other side of your voting slip ▶

The film also speaks volumes about racial prejudices in Middle America as Sugar's arrival in an Iowa town is met with some disdain with players openly voicing their thoughts about having a Latino player on their team. This is taken to a stronger extent in the scene where Sugar finds himself in the middle of a race-related brawl in a bar.

Sugar's struggle to make himself welcome in his new community is also explored through his relationship with Helen and Earl Higgins (Ann Whitney and Richard Bull), an elderly couple who house team players every year. As Sugar struggles to learn English, the Higgins's provide him with the basic aspects of life in America and how they are vastly different to the way that Sugar has lived his life thus far. This is proven in the scenes where the Higgins's attempt to communicate with Sugar and educate him about his new living conditions.

Sugar is a sports film that truly defies convention. Previous defining films such as Rocky or Any Given Sunday have tended to focus primarily on the main protagonist's hardships in an already established world, yet Sugar is a young man who struggles with the onset of modern life in another country.

What lies at the heart of Sugar's story could typically be construed as culture clash, yet Algenis Perez Soto portrays Sugar as not just a young man lost in another country but as uneducated in the ways of the world. He grows more and more uneasy with his abilities in baseball as he experiences life in a different country. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to construe the film as a coming of age story as Sugar begins to realise that there is ultimately more to life than his love of the game.

Sugar ultimately finds that he needs to evolve beyond the world of baseball and moves on to discover another dream, which essentially proves a realistic ideal in life; that dreams and our designs for our lives change irrevocably. Sugar is an everyman character following a dream and therefore should appeal to anyone who's ever wanted something more from life.

BFF Film Note by Alexander Hobbs

Also tonight at Bath Film Festival 2009

Rondo Theatre, 9.30pm | £6 / £4

Blind Loves / Slepe Lasky

Juraj Lehotsky | Slovakia, Czech Republic | 2008 | 77m | PG | sub-titles | blindloves.com

A visually striking combination of non-authored, observational documentary – we witness the quotidian demands of sightless lives – and wildly-realised fantasy – music teacher Peter's visions of an undersea kingdom are vividly recreated in bold animated sequences. A beautiful film which makes for truly compelling viewing.

to be added to our mailing list, or to have your entry updated, please give us your **name:**

address:

phone:

email:

we might occasionally have an opportunity to send you details of other arts events which we feel might interest you. Please tick this box if you would prefer **not** to receive these:

I am interested in:

a year-round arts cinema club directors' introductions film with other artforms film / live music festival pass for all films
short / experimental film email film newsletter matinee screenings late-night screenings workshops volunteering
sponsoring an event **something else...**

would you be interested in joining a 'Friends of Bath Film Festival' scheme, which would confer benefits in return for a small joining fee?
yes **no** please detach this slip from your flmnote and hand in following the screening, or return to:

BFF, c/o On The Video Front, 7 Terrace Walk, Bath BA1 1LN telephone / fax: **01225 401149** email: **info@bathfilmfestival.org.uk**