

Brooklyn Boheme. Directed by Diane Paragas & Nelson George. 2011, 84 minutes

Capturing the synergy and power of a community filled with avant-garde expression, the documentary *Brooklyn Boheme* leaves the audience with some resounding reflection points.

Geographically centered in the neighborhood of Fort Greene, Brooklyn, the film presents the socio-economic history of an area abandoned by upper and middle-class Caucasians in the 1980s. Through the window of influential, creative icons, including musician Branford Marsalis, comedian Chris Rock and director Spike Lee, the viewer sees the fertile ground of creativity left in that wake. The personal nature of each interview is enhanced by the physical presence of one of the directors.

The film is broken into chapters, or vignettes, perhaps calling the title's namesake, Puccini's *La Bohème*, into the frame of reference. The viewer taken on a path that has some familiarity, as it captures a group of artists, in multiple mediums, as they blossom individually in a veritable renaissance of a vibrant area and group of people. A clear distinction of community is drawn as we see artists from multiple backgrounds and influences enhancing every facet of life for those surrounding them. A powerful reminder of the positive impact art and artists can have.

In what seems to be the third act of the film, we are given a view into Fort Greene's gentrification, and current state of existence as a place to live. As with many areas that experience a cultural revitalization, to those who lived there through the course of its rise, the reemergence of the very people who fled it in the first place is cause for some disdain. A place once considered dangerous and unattractive now draws many willing to pay high prices to live there; consequently pricing out some of the very energy many claim to be the reason for Fort Greene's blossoming.

In one poignant vignette, we see comedian Chris Rock return to his first large apartment, now occupied by an upper-middle class white couple. As we are privy to the set-up prior and the discussion between Rock and Nelson George, this visit leaves a clear impression on the changing and evolution of the neighborhood.

Between the cinematography and the musical score, the arc of the film is engaging, and finishes both reflective and melancholic. As a whole, the film feels like the directors' ode of love to Fort Greene. Because of this, the documentary rides a fine line between history and perception, leaving the viewer to sift through the concrete results of a place with obvious impact and growth. Adding to the sentimentality might be the movement's relatively recent advent, however, because of the current nature of the film, the viewer is treated to hearing from these Artists while they are still living. Overall, the film is refreshing, artfully woven, and leaves a lasting impact.

Examples of communities coming together and creating a beautiful, resonant energy always leave those who witness it grasping for the tangible. Trying to fabricate all of the physical elements never seems to develop the same sort of space for such revolutionary, truthful art. One

could reflect upon the opportunity lost, or rather, as I prefer, utilize that inspiration. It may sound like an over-simplification, but one never knows, you could be part of something bigger... right this very moment. When you are in it, as one is reminded in *Brooklyn Boheme*, and through most revolutionary Art Movements throughout history, you don't see the bigger picture until you move from it. Pure potential is happening. Right now.

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