

The
Badlands
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presents



30th Anniversary Screening on 35mm
Prince Charles Cinema
Tue 25 Oct, 2016

Something Wild



USA / 1986 / 114 mins

Directed by Jonathan Demme / Produced by Jonathan Demme & Kenneth Utt
Written by E. Max Frye / Photographed by Tak Fujimoto / Edited by Craig McKay
Music by Laurie Anderson & John Cale / Costume & production design by Norma Moriceau
Art Direction by Steve Lineweaver / Casting by Risa Bramon & Billy Hopkins

Starring Jeff Daniels (Charlie Driggs), Melanie Griffith (Audrey Hankel, aka 'Lulu'), Ray Liotta (Ray Sinclair)

It's become pervasive to throw around the label 'cult classics' - which often amounts to endlessly celebrating popular hits like *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Aliens* for the sake of nostalgia. Meanwhile, we have a kinky little movie like *Something Wild*, quietly doted on by filmmakers, critics, and underground music lovers, yet the 30th anniversary has almost slipped by unnoticed. Financed by Orion Pictures, and described by its director as "a screwball comedy that turns into a film noir, as life itself does," it's a mainstream movie and one of independent spirit, a fun, sexy comedy and a spiky, unnerving thriller, as well as a jamboree of alternative and bohemian talent.

Something Wild begins with a traditional meet-cute, as Lulu (Melanie Griffith) catches Charlie (Jeff Daniels) skipping out of a diner without paying for his lunch and confronts him about it. Charlie presents himself as a straight shooter, a rising star at his bank and a stable family man, but Lulu views him as a "closet rebel" and makes it her business to liberate him. The notion of a repressed man being unleashed through a meeting with free spirit recalls Howard Hawks comedies such as *Bringing Up Baby* or *Ball of Fire*, but the heroines of those films rarely pursued their prey as aggressively as this. Lulu essentially kidnaps Charlie, throwing away his pager, handcuffing him to the bed during sex and making him an accessory to a series of crimes. Charlie makes a show of protesting - and the pair drive past a series of red lights as they leave New York, including a large red sign that reads WRONG WAY / GO BACK - but really, we sense that he wants to be corrupted.

There's another sharp turn in the film with the introduction of Lulu's ex-husband Ray (Ray Liotta), who's both a pleasant charmer and a violent psychopath, and complicates the film's romantic journey rather nastily. "I had no idea where the story was going," Demme said about his first reading of the script. "And every time I thought I had figured it out, it veered off in another direction."

Though best known for his multiple Oscar-winners *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Philadelphia*, Demme is in fact a hugely eclectic director, with a filmography that spans everything from Roger Corman B-movies and scrappy indies to concert films and large-scale literary adaptations. *Something Wild* was Demme's attempt to reassert his independence as a filmmaker after experiencing the pain and humiliation of having the Goldie Hawn WWII romance *Swing Shift* taken away from him and completely recut. Fittingly, for a film about people swimming through contradictions in order to find themselves, he's described it as "a rebirth" and "a schizophrenic movie."

Working from a script by E. Max Frye, Demme surrounded himself with distinctive artists to ensure that the vision presented on screen would be entirely unique. Griffith and Daniels both balance combinations of sweetness and sexiness, with the Daniels character learning to shake up his outward staidness to enliven an inner passion, and Griffith's, despite being a walking reference to the tragic Louise Brooks figure in *Pandora's Box*, gravitating towards a suppressed desire to settle down. In Liotta, both characters confront an enemy who defines unbalanced emotions - it's a deliriously unhinged performance, and Martin Scorsese pointed to its "explosive energy" as the reason he cast Liotta in *Goodfellas*.

To define the film's visual style, Demme continued his partnership with cinematographer Tak Fujimoto, with whom he had worked for the first time on *Swing Shift*, and he brought in Mad Max costume designer Norma Moriceau, giving her free rein as production designer to create a vivid, colourful portrait of Americana. Laurie Anderson and John Cale collaborated on the music, with the help of David Byrne, who had just worked with Demme on *Stop Making Sense* and provided the opening song.

Indeed, regarding the soundtrack, Roy Ivy concluded the following for the website Consequence of Sound: "It's a mad mash of reggae, dub (the good shit, not the wubba), salsa, Latin, rock, and new wave that makes you feel impulsive, horny, stoned, terrified, brave, hungover, and unapologetically criminal." While the soundtrack album only includes ten tracks, the film itself contains around fifty, ending with Sister Carol singing a wonderful reggae reworking of The Troggs' "Wild Thing" to camera over the closing credits.

Those final scenes take place in SoHo before it became a gentrified cube; the road movie journey includes homely vignettes in folksy gift shops, neighbourhood diners and black churches; the film's cameos include not just Demme character actor regulars like Charles Napier but maverick directors like John Waters and John Sayles. There's a feeling of the lunatics taking over the asylum in *Something Wild* - not for a revolution, but to make their own cheeky twist on big-budget formula pictures, and doing it with the diverse quirk of real life.



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