



Beasts of the Southern Wild

Director: Benh Zeitlin

Country: USA

Date: 2012



This season is supported by Film Hub North West Central, proud to be part of the BFI Film Audience Network.

A review by Tim Robey for *The Daily Telegraph*:

Few American debuts in recent years have announced a talent as singular as that of Benh Zeitlin, the blazingly gifted director and co-writer of *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. A contained explosion of imaginative feeling, this dippy and spectacular plunge into magic realism has been picking up prizes around the world, and won the Camera d'Or award for best first film at Cannes. It bustles with ideas, resplendent visuals and a battered yet proud humanity. On all fronts, it's simply unmissable.

Much of the attention has focused on the remarkable lead performance of Quvenzhané Wallis, six years old when it was shot: she plays Hushpuppy, doughty resident of a deprived and isolated bayou community called the Bathtub, on the coastal side of Louisiana's levees. Her mother has left, and she lives only half in the care of her sick father (Dwight Henry), whose rusted-out shack is a distance away from the trailer she sleeps in.



Hushpuppy is no holy innocent but a fizzy little sprite with a face like a clenched fist, facing everything that comes her way – principally the Katrina-like storm that threatens to obliterate her world – with the pugnacious instincts of a born survivor. She gets a voice-over, which applies the deliberately inarticulate lyricism of Terrence Malick to the Toni Morrison-like mantras recurring inside her head, whipping up fresh poetry from this cocktail of influences.

Extreme poverty is a difficult thing to manage on screen without tipping towards the poles of miserabilism or fraudulent escape. Hushpuppy herself knows no other condition, and the movie merrily shares in her determination to make the best of it. Zeitlin's film is as much fantasy adventure as a hardscrabble tale of endurance, sharing strong thematic undercurrents with Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, and several of Studio Ghibli's masterworks. His patterning of the story's symbols and conflicts – wait till you get a load of the aurochs, massive prehistoric warthogs played by bewigged pigs – is every bit as assured as his marshalling of the non-professional cast.

An ecstatic Cajun-rock score helps Hushpuppy mount her defiant riposte to the natural world, which bows down in turn to her sheer resourcefulness.

With a presence as fierce as Wallis in centre frame, it's hard not to. You can quibble with this or that aspect of the film's content – it's not instantly exempt from accusations of a sort of Disneyfied cultural stereotyping. But the reckless swirl of the imagery is vital, eccentric and bold enough to constitute its own majestic defence.

From: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/9617493/Beasts-of-the-Southern-Wild-review.html>