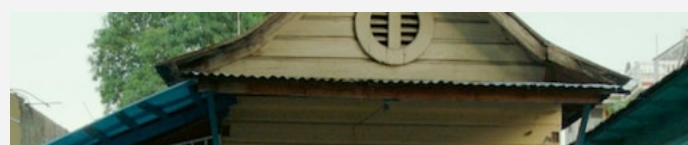


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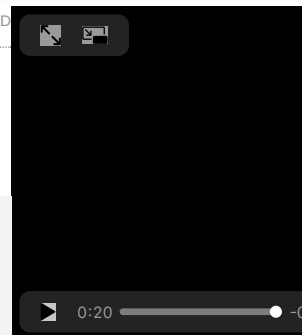
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Freda Movie Review: Fascinating Interplay of the Personal and the Political in Haiti



Gessica Geneus' Freda, which got a lot of attention at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival, is an engaging interplay of a woman's problems in the backdrop of political crises in Haiti.



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GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

Freda by dir. Gessica Geneus

F

reda

Director: Gessica Geneus

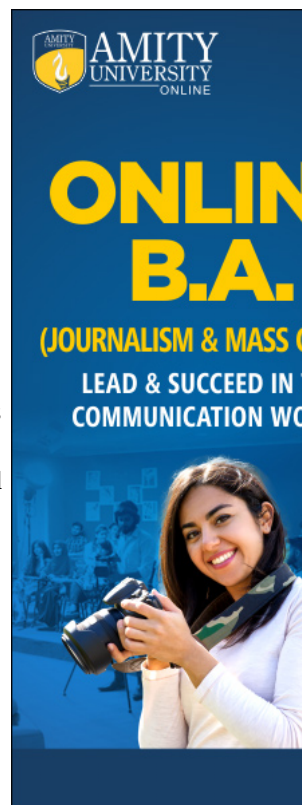
Cast: Nehemie Bastien, Djanaina Francois, Fabiola Remy, Jean Jean, Cantave Kerven

One of the movies which got a lot of attention at the recent Cannes Film Festival was Freda from Haiti. The buzz also emanated from the recent developments in that country, the assassination of the President and the utter political chaos which followed. Not that these were anything new in Haiti; they have been a regular feature, and Freda examines how prudent it is for Haitians to stay on or migrate to greener pastures and brighter prospects.

Freda reminded me of the Balraj Sahni-starrer Garam Hawa, helmed by M.S. Sathyu, in which the protagonist is caught in a dilemma when his relatives and friends leave India for Pakistan after the bloody Partition in 1947. With literally hot winds of hatred against Muslims blowing across India, Salim Mirza (Sahni) – who has lived all his life in Agra – is in two minds. Should he or should he not go away? Finally, after innumerable sleepless nights, he decides that India is his home and he should not run away.



Freda (the protagonist in the movie, played by Nehemie Bastien) is also in a quandary, not being able to decide whether she ought to leave her country like her brother and many friends. The film is fascinating on this score,



and may also be true of present-day India, where many of the young professionals and even others discouraged by the state of affairs, including lack of lucrative job opportunities, have been looking for openings abroad.

In Freda, actress, singer and director Gessica Geneus weaves into the the plot her own tension and turmoil in a story set in 2018 Haiti. The picture has gotten only bleaker since then with the murder of the country's President on July 7, 2021. Young woman Freda, a student of anthropology, helps her mother in their modest hole-in-the-wall grocery store in Port-au-Prince. They barely earn enough.

Adding to the mother-daughter woes are Freda's brother, Moses (Cantave Kerven), who lazes about, wasting his time and squandering money. Freda's younger sister, Esther (Djanaina Francois), is equally unhelpful, spending most of her time whitening her skin, straightening her hair and trying to catch the eye of any man she thinks is rich. Their mother, Jeannette (Fabiola Remy), is loving, but weak and helpless.



As if all this was not enough, Freda's artist boyfriend, Yeshua (Jean Jean), wants to leave Haiti and start a new life in the Dominican Republic. He cajoles and urges Freda to join him, impressing upon her how the escalating violence in their country is a grave threat to all of them.

Freda is a movie of flash-points and conflicts reflecting the social and political challenges in Haiti. Cinematographer Karine Aulnette takes us right into the heart of the street clashes: protests demanding an end to corruption, guns going off and a frightening atmosphere of complete lawlessness.

A good part of the film also talks about how important a woman's beauty is, how education for her is seen as pointless luxury and how change can occur if she and her ilk themselves fight for it. All this multiplies Freda's problem. On top of these, she is not pretty in the conventional sense, and life seems all the more tough for her.



An engaging watch!

(Author, movie critic Gautaman Bhaskaran has covered Cannes Film Festival for 29 years)

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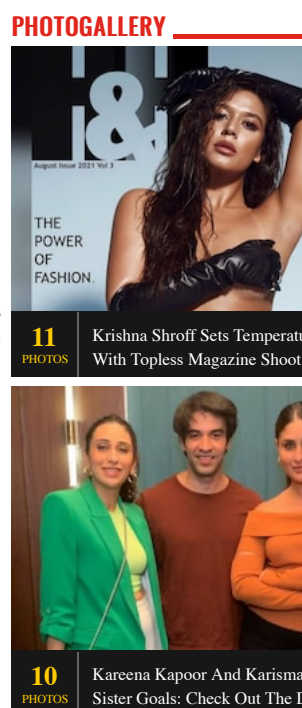
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