

“Bravo, Burkina!” Finds Its Way Home with Heart and Soul

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PARK CITY, UTAH – JANUARY 23: Walé Oyéjidé attends the 2023 Sundance Film Festival “Bravo, Burkina!” premiere at Park Avenue Theater on January 23, 2023 in Park City, Utah. (Photo by Michael Loccisano/Getty Images)

By Peter Jones

In some respects, *Bravo, Burkina!* is a modest fable about home, yet the film’s visuals and narrative structure are anything but simple.

Writer-director Walé Oyéjidé packs a sizable amount of story, character, and emotion into a film that breezes through time and space like a dream in a little more than an hour. Although the tale is ambiguous, its emotions are always clear.

Bravo, Burkina! premiered January 23 at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival. Oyéjidé conducted a Q&A after the screening.

As *Bravo Burkina!* begins, a young boy from rural Burkina Faso in western Africa lives the only life he is likely to ever know. He works for his father and playfully runs through the rustic countryside with a yellow kite.

The child who plays the part is a nonprofessional actor.

“He had never flown a kite or seen a kite before this film,” Oyéjidé says.

His first experience flying one was effectively his audition.

“We had this amazing footage of this kid flying this kite for the first time. It’s like, ‘you have the part,’” Oyéjidé says. “The interesting thing is this is a young boy in a community whose life has now been changed, not just because he starred in the film, but because he was paid to star in the film.”

One day while walking his family’s herd of cows, the boy in question meets a masked spirit guide by a pond.

“Cross the water and you will lose everything —and you will gain everything,” the guide tells him.

The boy instinctively starts swimming — an impulse that inevitably proves the sad and beautiful truths of growing up and leaving an old world behind. In a story that floats seamlessly between surreal and real, a little boy becomes a man and finds fleeting love in a time and place he never quite belongs. Can one ever go back and lose — and gain — in reverse?

Universal truths run throughout this story of discovery. The homesick *Bravo, Burkina!* is a touching and poetic story that ultimately asks questions about identity, love, and home.

As for the mysterious mask that turns up in the film, Oyéjidé is vague yet playful. He says he wants the audience to reach its own conclusions, but he will give an answer of sorts.

“We had mask options. That was the coolest one,” the director says. “But it got us into trouble. That specific mask has spiritual ties to the community and required specific spiritual rituals to be done to cleanse the mask so it could be used in the kind of nonspiritual way that we’re using it. ... There’s very much a negotiation and a conversation that needs to happen, and we cannot nor should we bulldoze our way into any community.”

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