

Presenting Princess Shaw



MAGNOLIA PICTURES

Samantha Montgomery and Israeli musician Kutiman in “Presenting Princess Shaw.” Montgomery, a.k.a. Princess Shaw, drew Kutiman’s attention with the original songs she posted to YouTube.

BY STEPHANIE MERRY

For every YouTuber who hits it big, there are countless others vlogging into the void, with nothing but a few page views to show for their efforts. How does someone even become Internet famous with so much competition? You can see for yourself in the emotional, captivating “Presenting Princess Shaw,” a documentary about a nurse’s assistant with a spectacular voice.

Samantha Montgomery spends her days in scrubs, working in a New Orleans elder-care facility. At night, she uses YouTube like a diary. Under the name Princess Shaw, she often posts videos of herself singing soulful a capella ditties of her own creation, but she also puts up goofier videos of herself dancing with her co-workers, as well as tearful confessionals about the sexual abuse she endured as a child. With braces and hair dyed bright red, she looks younger than her 38 years, but her songs reveal a past full of pain.

Her present isn’t that much more promising. She may have just moved into her own apartment, but when the wheels are stolen off her car, she doesn’t have the money to replace them;

A painful past gives way to YouTube STARDOM

later, the electric company shuts off her power. On the artistic front, she performs at open-mic nights to empty houses. Her existence feels marked by loneliness.

Unbeknown to Shaw, on the other side of the globe, a talented Israeli musician and composer has fallen in love with one of her songs.

Ophir Kutiel, who goes by the name Kutiman, cobbles together YouTube videos of musicians to make beautiful new compositions. In the film, he uses one of Shaw’s songs, “Give It Up,” layer-

ing in a child playing piano, a bassoonist and a trombone player; he adds an electric guitar solo and drums. He essentially gives Shaw a whole backing band for a song that — before he got ahold of it — had just 83 views.

Documentarian Ido Haar — a friend of Kutiel’s — knew all this before approaching Shaw, although he told her only that he was working on a movie about YouTubers. Bouncing between Shaw’s story and Kutiel’s, the film lets the audience know what’s about to happen — viral fame — before the singer has

figured it out. That gives the movie a palpable sense of excitement, as if we’re all part of a surprise party, just waiting for the guest of honor to arrive.

It’s a lovely tale, even if it’s not quite the Cinderella story you might expect. The documentary also brings up some interesting points about how the Internet — the land of vitriolic trolls — can draw two very different people together to create great art from odds and ends.

The movie, which is composed of a lot of grainy footage and rudimentary shots, shies from issues of intellectual property ownership, however.

Shaw is a complex character and an underdog worth rooting for. She isn’t necessarily using YouTube to become rich and famous, although that would be nice, given her tough life. Music is her therapy. Even when she auditions for the television competition show “The Voice,” she talks about wanting to be seen.

What she needs is a witness to her pain. Well, she found one. (Or, rather, he found her.) Now she has an audience of moviegoers too, not to mention a remix of her song with more than 2.6 million views. All it took was a little help from a skinny stranger and the Internet.

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Ratings guide

Masterpiece

Very good

Okay

Poor

Also reviewed

The Idol

A Palestinian singer competes on the TV show “Arab Idol” in this fact-based drama. **32**

Hockney

A documentary looks at the life and career of artist David Hockney. **32**

Plus

Family Filmgoer **35**

Opening next week

The Conjuring 2

is a horror sequel based on the work of real-life ghostbusters.

The literary biopic **Genius** looks at the relationship between author Thomas Wolfe (Jude Law) and his editor Maxwell Perkins (Colin Firth).

A band of magicians is recruited for a heist in **Now You See Me 2**.

Warcraft is a fantasy adventure based on a video game.

A Sri Lankan warrior moves to France in the drama **Dheepan**.

A struggling painter grouches about the art world in the documentary **Art Bastard**.

The Fallen Idol is a re-release of a 1948 film noir.

Unrated. At Landmark’s Atlantic Plumbing Cinema. Contains foul language and mature thematic material. In English and Hebrew with subtitles. 80 minutes.