



NEW RELEASES

Jumbo

Zoé Wittock's debut feature is a disarmingly enchanting psychosexual tale of a young woman who falls in love with a fairground ride. Jeanne Tantois (Noémie Merlant, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*) lives with her mother in Luxembourg, just across the border from France, and works at an amusement park by night where she cleans the giant, illuminated machines. A shy loner who's been let down by all the men in her life, Jeanne develops a physical and emotional attachment to a ride that she names 'Jumbo', and finds fulfilment and a perception of love that's been missing in her human relationships. Wittock's take on objectophile love proved a success at the Sundance and Berlin Film Festivals, and marks the director as a talent to watch.

Justin Johnson, Lead Programmer

After a title sequence written in flickering blue, green and red letters, writer-director Zoé Wittock's *Jumbo* begins with a strange vision: a young woman stands, her back to the camera, and opens her arms in ecstatic surrender to brightly-hued lights rapidly circling in the sky overhead. This will turn out to be a dream, as Jeanne Tantois (Noémie Merlant) wakes slumped over the desk in her bedroom, surrounded by the little coloured lights of the models that she fell asleep building. Awkward and withdrawn, Jeanne is not very good around people, but she has been obsessed since her childhood with fairground rides, even building elaborate working miniatures of them. That opening close encounter with one in her sleep shows, from the outset, that these 'attractions' are a big part of her fantasy life – and tonight she will be working with the real thing, as she begins her first night shift at the local amusement park

The traffic between fantasy and reality is key to *Jumbo*. 'Inspired by a true story' reveals text accompanying the title on the screen, even as it becomes clear that the film's narrative conforms to every detail of cinema's most fantastical wish-fulfilment genre, the romance. For here we have a meet-cute: falling in love, dreamy sex, obstacles and a rival, with everything culminating in a climactic marriage – even if the object of the protagonist's desire is not, as her single mother Margarete (Emmanuelle Bercot) would like, Jeanne's new boss Marc (Bastien Bouillon), but rather the park's newest ride, the Move It, which Jeanne renames Jumbo, and with which she is soon passing every night in a blissful relationship that she fancies is not one-way.

Trying to get Jeanne to acknowledge a father who has long since left the picture, the straight-talking Margarete tells her daughter, 'I didn't make you with my vibrator!' adding the wry postscript, 'Unfortunately.' In fact, Jeanne is more likely than most to appreciate the allure of machinery – but her relationship with Jumbo is, she insists, 'not about sex, it's something else.' Not that sex is entirely absent from the idealised sequences where she frolics with her inanimate inamorato amid pounding pistons, heady lights and oozing oil – but for Jeanne, this is a more profound bond, where her fantasies collide with the metal physicality of the ride, and this shy, introverted woman finds her happy place. These scenes realise the deepest imaginings of Jeanne's head and her heart, and even if at some level she knows that her *amour* is of the *fou* variety, she just does not care. After all, isn't most love, to varying degrees, a dizzying delusion?

The more grounded Margarett, however, really does care, freaked out and embarrassed by her daughter’s aberrant infatuation, and worried about what it will mean for the standing of both of them in their close, closed-minded community. The woodland town where they live is small – small enough, indeed, that when the stranger Hubert (Sam Louwyck) wanders into the bar where Margarett works, she can instantly tell that he is not from around there. Yet it is the well-travelled, worldly Hubert who will prove the must unfazed by, and open to, Jeanne’s unusual romance. This is where *Jumbo* flashes its true colours. For though (very) loosely reimagining the real-life story of Amy Wolfe – who in 2009 married a roller coaster in Pennsylvania and assumed the surname of its manufacturer, Weber – the film is also a classic coming-out (as well as coming of age, and just plain coming) narrative, allegorising both the rejection and acceptance faced by anyone whose erotic interests do not adhere to narrowly conventional expectations.

Jumbo initially holds out the promise of amusement-park worker rites of passage like those in Greg Mottola’s *Adventureland* (2009), but is in fact more akin to the carnival attraction erotics of Clifton Childree’s *The Flew* (2008), or the object sexuality of Marco Ferreri’s *I Love You* (1986) and Craig Gillespie’s *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007), while literalising the carousel caprices of Max Ophuls’s *La Ronde* (1950). Most of all, though, Wittock takes Jeanne and her feelings entirely seriously, and by showing this idiosyncratic heroine’s experiences from her own internalised perspective the film gives life to the inert form of Jeanne’s ‘ride’ and engenders from the cold steel of Jumbo’s materiality a strangely transcendent magical realism that is nothing short of a miracle. For, like any great romance, *Jumbo* leaves the viewer wanting to entertain the fantasy and to keep at bay the disillusionments and disappointments of everyday existence. After all, as Jeanne herself puts it, ‘Some people believe in fairytales, don’t they?’ Here, love – Jeanne’s, but also in different ways Margarett’s and Hubert’s – conquers all, defying the gravitational forces of real life.

Anton Bitel, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2021

JUMBO

Directed by: Zoé Wittock
©: Insolence Productions, Les Films Fauves, Kwassa Films
Insolence Productions *presents a co-production with* Les Films Fauves and Kwassa Films
With the participation of: Film Fund Luxembourg *With the help of:* Centre National du Cinéma et de l’Image Animée, Centre du Cinéma et de l’Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles
With the support of: Eurimages, Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge via Belga Films Fund *With the participation of:* Wallimage (Wallonie)
In co-production with: Proximus
In association with: Sofitvcine 6, Belga Productions, Flammes Films
Producers: Anaïs Bertrand, Gilles Chaniel, Annabella Nezri
Written by: Zoé Wittock
Director of Photography: Thomas Buelens
Editor: Thomas Fernandez
Art Director: William Abello

Costume Designer: Carine Rando De Felice
Original Music: Thomas Roussel
Sound: Michel Schillings, Mike Butcher, Ingo Dumlich, Grégory Lannoy, Maxence Dussere, Pascal Jasme

Cast
Noémie Merlant (*Jeanne Tantois*)
Emmanuelle Bercot (*Margarette*)
Bastien Bouillon (*Marc*)
Sam Louwyck (*Hubert*)
Tracy Dossou (*Fati*)

France/Belgium/Luxembourg 2020
93 mins

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