



NEW RELEASES

# Queen of Glory

*Queen of Glory* begins with a montage. Cross-cut with close-ups of brightly patterned fabrics and a soundtrack of echoing voices and pulsing percussion, Sarah Obeng (Nana Mensah) packs a suitcase and boards a train. Her destination is not a city in Ghana (which holds a central place in the film's imaginary) but the Ghanaian diaspora community of the Bronx. Though the neighbourhood is a site of alienating and infantilising familial duty and dysfunction for our heroine, it is also an escape route from the professional and romantic precarity of her adult life in Manhattan – whether she knows it or not.

The first words we hear are those Sarah recites to herself under her breath as she arrives at the front door of her aunt Christie (Christie Mensah): 'I'm not getting on the scale, I'm not getting on the scale, I'm not getting on the scale.' Inside the apartment, Christie jovially looks Sarah up and down, then turns her around like a mannequin ready for display. 'It looks like you've been eating,' she says. Sure enough, moments later, Sarah is instructed to 'get on the scale.'

Food features centrally in this film, sometimes igniting family tensions and sometimes distracting from them. Food stands in variously for desire, community and friendship, as well as for guilt and control. Waist-height shots present food as the centre of family life while characters step in and out of the margins of the frame. But these are no pastoral still lifes: always in movement, food in these shots is delivered, cleaned up, eaten, discarded, shared, cooked, butchered.

'Salad!' exclaims Sarah down the phone to her mother, fibbing about what she's currently eating. 'Work!' she snaps impatiently in the same scene – a futile explanation of her reasons for not being able to drop everything at a whim to answer her family's beck and call. 'I usually tell mine to fuck right off,' boasts her colleague Emma (Emma Kaye). Sarah should be so lucky. When she receives another phone call, announcing her mother's death, she drops everything to return home to the Bronx. She is suddenly tasked with taking over the management of her mother's Christian bookstore, welcoming her estranged father (Oberon K.A. Adjepong) who is visiting from Ghana, explaining to family members that yes, there is a will, and processing the Ghanaian rituals of death and grief. We see her make and receive countless phone calls, each one staging a minor drama of connection and disconnection.

As it introduces us to Sarah and her surroundings, *Queen of Glory* is littered with signifiers of millennial insecurity: the unbearable price of urban living; the anxious slippage between 'boyfriend' and 'partner' when she attempts to refer to her unreliable lover. The film is the latest in a wave of contemporary feminist comedy dramas helmed by writer-director-creators such as Michaela Coel and Issa Rae, charting the romantic and professional failures of women in their twenties and thirties who are never quite given, or able to take advantage of, the tools they need to succeed. One reference point that springs to mind is Desiree Akhavan's semi-autobiographical *Appropriate*

*Behaviour* (2014), which has a sardonic queer feminism that articulates the intersectional experience of dating, sex, work and family as a queer woman of colour. Like Akhavan, who is Iranian-American, Mensah and her protagonist push against, rather than attempt to secure, the straightforward representability of diasporic identity.

Even Sarah's supposed professional success is tinged with abjection and disappointment. That she is actually willing to take the time to answer her students' questions and grade their papers seems to prove the joke's on her, as she never has time for her own work. Meanwhile, her post-doctoral future is entangled with romantic precarity, the progression of a fraught relationship with a married senior colleague always proving unnervingly elusive. Her Ivy League doctorate in molecular neuro-oncology only impresses her father insofar as it ensures she'll 'know how babies are made'.

This is the first time Mensah has both written and directed, having previously written a couple of episodes apiece of the TV series *Bonding* (2021) and *An African City* (2014). She acted in both of those, and alongside Sandra Oh in last year's Netflix series *The Chair*, in which she managed to get across the quiet exhaustion and despondency of being one of only two women of colour in a stiflingly and incompetently old-school academic department. But unlike *The Chair*, *Queen of Glory* doesn't turn out to be more interested in its tedious white male love-interest and his mid-life crisis than in its central women of colour.

Playing a role of her own making, Mensah is superb, especially as Sarah proceeds unsteadily through waves of grief. In particular, she adeptly evinces the strain of under- or over-performing emotion under the gaze of others. Cinematographer Cybel Martin's camera lingers on close-ups, sometimes for what feels like too long, awkwardly capturing Sarah's emotional trajectory as she struggles to ground herself against the chaotic ebbs and flows of 'home'. From one moment to the next, Mensah humorously expresses an exhausted disdain for her impossibly demanding family; slowly allows herself to welcome a quiet friendship with an unexpected companion; and finally breaks down in a silent outpouring for her mother's death. Mensah has talked in interviews about her childhood memories of the Bronx and its visceral sensations, and the film captures the lively urban mundanity of neighbourhood life: a butcher's shop, a packing store, industrial outlets, a kerbside DVD hawker relentlessly pushing his wares. Having been convinced to curtail her expectations in order to make a film she'd actually be able to fund, Mensah designed *Queen of Glory* around filming locations she didn't have to pay for, including her family's own Christian bookstore. The credits include a thank-you list far exceeding any other cast or crew category, an even longer list of Kickstarter supporters, and a final nod to the 'people of the Bronx'. The result of this supposed downsizing is, for all its awkwardness, a tender, powerful film.

**Clara Bradbury-Rance, *Sight and Sound*, September 2022**

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## QUEEN OF GLORY

*Directed by:* Nana Mensah

©: Gas The Film LLC

*Presented by:* Cape Coast Media

*Executive Producer:* Lidz-Ama Appiah

*Produced by:* Baff Akoto, Kelley Robins Hicks,

Jamund Washington, Anya Migdal

*Co-producer:* Cooper Troxell

*Associate Producer:* Loryn Lopes

*Unit Production Manager (Additional Photography):* Elouise Montgomery

*1st Assistant Director:* Arckii Mun Jong Kim

*1st Assistant Director (Additional Photography):* Annalise Lockhart

*Written by:* Nana Mensah

*Director of Photography:* Cybel Martin

*Additional Photography:* Jason Chau

*Edited by:* Cooper Troxell

*Additional Editing:* Jessica Landaw

*Production Designer:* Katie Hickman

*Art Director (Additional Photography):* Austin Ashamole

*Make-up Department Head:* Lisa Thai

*Music Supervisor:* Rico 'Superbizzee' Washington

*Sound Mixer:* Anthony Thompson

*Sound Mixer (Additional Photography):* Chase Bennett

*Re-recording Mixer:* Ben Carr

*Supervising Sound Editor:* Ben Carr

## Cast

Nana Mensah (*Sarah Obeng*)

Meeko Gattuso (*Pitt*)

Oberon K.A. Adjepong (*Godwin Obeng*)

Adam Leon (*Lyle Commons*)

Russell G. Jones (*Hezekiah Falusi*)

Anya Migdal (*Tanya Malinova-Thayer*)

Harold Akyeampong (*adowa drummer*)

Gloria Nyame (*adowa dancer*)

Christie Mensah (*Aunt Christie*)

Jennifer Mensah (*Jennifer, cousin*)

Emma Kaye (*Professor Emma Jacobs*)

Madeline Weinstein (*Caitlin*)

Joseph Lamour (*pizza delivery*)

Alok Tewari (*Raja Singh*)

Arlene Chico-Lugo (*Xiomara*)

Xavier Stone (*Bible Bar guy*)

USA 2021

79 mins

A Bohemia Media release

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## NEW RELEASES

### Hit the Road (Jaddeh Khaki)

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

### The Feast

From Fri 19 Aug

### My Old School

From Fri 19 Aug

### Where Is Anne Frank

From Fri 19 Aug

### Queen of Glory

From Fri 26 Aug

## RE-RELEASES

### The Big City (Mahanagar)

Continues from Fri 22 Jul

### Paris, Texas

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

### The Harder They Come

From Fri 5 Aug

### Burning an Illusion

From Fri 19 Aug

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