

Sita Sings the Blues

USA, 2008, 89 min, Animated, 16x9. (Not rated)
Dir: Nina Paley. Stars: Annette Hanshaw.

Based on "The Ramayama of Valmiki"

IMDb score 7.7

FVFS panel voted 4 stars (out of 5)



For a trailer go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ot0BNbXnz5s>

The glamour of India, the glamour of the 1920s, the depth-sounding drumbeat of the ancient mythic world, and the woman who loves the wrong kind of man – Nina Paley gets them all together, along with a relevant chunk of autobiography about a disappointing husband of her own, in her dazzling first full-length animated feature.

In the ancient Indian story, the Ramayana, Sita is the wife of the man-god Rama, and the embodiment of the Virtuous Wife. She suffers one awful punishment and test after another from her mistrustful and apparently other-directed (what will people think? etc) husband. In Paley's movie, Sita steps forward from time to time to sing a torchy Jazz Era song ("Mean to Me," and the like) in the voice of Annette Hanshaw, a stylistically elegant and not-well-enough-known voice of the '20s.

Sita's story (kidnapping by 9-headed king, rescue by Rama, rejection by Rama, monkey-god help) alternates with modern-day episodes about Nina's own real-life inexplicably disintegrating marriage, and also with the occasional very funny and illuminating conversation about the Ramayana and its meanings among several of the filmmaker's witty and well-educated Indian friends ("The king had four wives . . . no, three wives . . . three wives and four sons, that's right!! . . You know if Sita had just gone with the monkey a lot of lives would have been spared . . .").

You can enjoy it just for the luxurious pleasure of Paley's use of Indian artistic styles in motion, from powerful ancient Hindu motifs, to detailed Moghul-ish backgrounds, to deliriously gaudy street-market devotional calendar art.

I also came away with the best grasp I've had yet on the Rama-Sita story, more than worth knowing both on the archetypal front (Some Things Never Change) and as background to the hundreds of Indian movie stories that take it up from one angle or another.



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ABN:62 373 979

www.fvfs.org.au

admin@fvfs.org.au

03 9873 1369