

Film Review: ‘Beyond the Lights’ Has a Respect for Storytelling

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 14, 2014 - 7:13pm

- [Beyond the Lights](#) [2]
- [Danny Glover](#) [3]
- [Gina Prince-Bythewood](#) [4]
- [Gugu Mbatha-Raw](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Love & Basketball](#) [7]
- [Minnie Driver](#) [8]
- [Movie Review](#) [9]
- [Nate Parker](#) [10]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [11]
- [Relativity Media](#) [12]

CHICAGO – Writer/Director Gina Prince-Bythewood, the creator of the cult favorite “Love & Basketball,” is back with another original story that she created, an intimate and romantic perspective on a singer on the path to nowhere, despite superstar-level fame. Gugu Mbatha-Raw stars as that singer in “Beyond the Lights.”



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

As she did in “Love & Basketball,” Prince-Bythewood adds more than just a surface story of desperate problems to go along with desperate fame. Mbatha-Raw portrays a Beyoncé-type performer, who has a passion for singing but not the trappings. The writer/director fashions a world of fans, co-performers and a mother, all who don’t understand what it’s like to maintain the profile thrust upon the singer. This pushes against the psyche of the whole story, which is part of that atmosphere that makes tension and the subsequent romance more substantial. This also gives a bit more starch to the usual love story, and provides the singer character with a little more redemption.

The film opens in the past with a stage mother (Minnie Driver) who drags her daughter Noni to a talent show. The girl performs admirably, but the second place trophy is not enough for the driven mama. The next scene is now, with Noni (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) now a hip-hop singer, waiting to break out as a solo artist. The reaction to this phase in her career has Noni teetering on a hotel balcony, and saved from jumping by her police bodyguard Kaz (Nate Parker).

Kaz is an ambitious law officer, using it as a step to a political career. The hero and the woman he saved play a game of cat-and-mouse, circling each other but not committing. Meanwhile the record company is jumpy themselves, thinking the bad press of the incident will derail the upcoming album, plus Noni’s mother and rap partner don’t approve of the budding relationship. When Kaz and Noni do finally connect it means consequences for both.

“Beyond the Lights” opens everywhere on November 14th. Featuring Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Minnie Driver, Nate Parker and Danny Glover. Written and directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood. Rated “PG-13”



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Mother (Minnie Driver) and Noni (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) in ‘Beyond the Lights’
Photo credit: Relativity Media

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- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/beyond-the-lights>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/danny-glover>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/gina-prince-bythewood>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/gugu-mbatha-raw>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/love-basketball>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/minnie-driver>
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- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/nate-parker>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/relativity-media>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/24790/beyond-the-lights-has-a-respect-for-storytelling>