

Interview: Samantha Montgomery of ‘Presenting Princess Shaw’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 7, 2016 - 4:52pm

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CHICAGO – There are show business stories, and then there are show business miracles. In the tech age we’re living through, the needle-in-a-haystack hope that a song, video or rant will go “viral” online is part of the experience. Singer Samantha Montgomery was one such singer, and her story is in “Presenting Princess Shaw.”

The new documentary, directed by Ido Haar, tells a story of two disparate people. On one side of the world is Samantha “Princess Shaw” Montgomery, a working class warrior in New Orleans, who fills her lonely hours by creating original “a capella” songs on her YouTube channel. On the other side is Kutiman (Ophir Kutiel), an Israeli musician whose specialty is gathering other music artists on YouTube and collaborating with them (online) to create original works. When Kutiman stumbled across Princess Shaw (Montgomery’s stage name), suddenly a new star was about to be born. The story of “Presenting Princess Shaw” is the story of that unlikely circumstance, which leads to a whole new life for Samantha Montgomery.



Samantha Montgomery in ‘Presenting Princess Shaw’

Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures

Samantha continued her fame journey, by participating in a promotional interview for the film with HollywoodChicago.com. The person that is in the movie is the real deal, and that special voice that Princess Shaw possesses comes shining through.

HollywoodChicago.com: How did you discover YouTube, in the sense that you could interact with it, and what did you do for your first

posting?

Samantha Montgomery: It was a couple years ago, and before that I'd always interacted with YouTube. I put myself on my own channel after I got my braces. [laughs] I was basically a shower singer, and thought I had found my voice, so I opened up and started posting my songs on YouTube.

HollywoodChicago.com: How did director Ido Haar approach you to start making the documentary? What excuse did he make to start chronicling your life?

Montgomery: I got a Facebook message from his wife, and she told me that Ido was working on a film project about YouTubers. I thought, of course I wanted to do it, and after an exchange of messages he came from Israel to start filming. What is funny is that I thought anyone can fake an accent – I didn't know if he was from Israel or around the corner. [laughs]

I took a friend to meet him at his hotel, and as soon as we started talking everything became easy. There was no negativity from him, we started with an open mike that night, and kept going from there.

HollywoodChicago.com: So he just set up his camera, and started filming your daily life?

Montgomery: Yes, but it was a small camera, and he took a fly-on-the-wall approach, which didn't bother me at all. It was pretty simple.

HollywoodChicago.com: As a songwriter, does the lyric drive the melody or do you come up with how the song sounds in your head and then right the words?

Montgomery: They actually come together. The lyrics come with the melody. But if I come up with another melody that suits the words, I can tweak it. But mostly it comes out together.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've had so many shocks regarding this journey you're on. When you see yourself on that 30 foot screen, how does it change the perception of how beautiful you are?

Montgomery: I guess I've learned to accept my flaws. When I first saw myself, I was very critical, I would think, 'Noooo!' [laughs] I analyzed angles, and whether I was holding my stomach in. It made me realize, though, to accept myself as I am. Most people will say 'you look wonderful,' and I had a hard time agreeing with them.



Montgomery and Her Collaborator Kutiman in 'Presenting Princess Shaw'

Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures

HollywoodChicago.com: The film emphasizes so much how lonely life can be. Now that you belong to the world, does loneliness feel different for you?

Montgomery: No. I mean, here we are sitting here, but we're still alone. I learned to love myself, which was huge, but even as you say the world loves me, nothing changes when it comes to loneliness. You still have to deal with your demons, the world can't help you with that. It's nice to know more people like you, but it doesn't change you and your loneliness.

HollywoodChicago.com: Part of your experience meant visiting Israel, on the other side of the world. Besides your music experience there,

what did you discover about the people or atmosphere that really made an impression on you?

Montgomery: It was about community, I feel that Israel is a true community. They are really great people, even though they tend to rush around. Everybody I've met from there has been great, and it's very social there. Nobody stays inside, everybody is on the streets together.

HollywoodChicago.com: You spoke of overcoming some pretty horrific things in your childhood. Has that honesty been freeing for you, or are you still struggling to make sense of it all?

Montgomery: I think it has been freeing, because before we simply never talked about it. That makes you a caged bird, and I don't want to be caged bird. It's like that old saying, 'I know why the caged bird sings.' If you keep these memories locked in your mind, then you never have to deal with it. When you express it to the world, it becomes real.

HollywoodChicago.com: I noticed at that premiere concert that they did your hair up like Amy Winehouse...

Montgomery: Really? I thought it was more like Vampirella. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: [Laughs] I guess it reminded me of Winehouse, and somebody said in the film that your voice and style are very similar to her. What is your impression of what Amy went through in her fame, and what lesson will you learn from her if you are to get that popular?



Presenting Samantha Montgomery

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Montgomery: Amy's circumstances were really sad, I wanted to grab her and say that everything is okay. But of course, it wouldn't necessarily mean it would work. She had her own demons. I can't really say what I would do, because I don't know what she was dealing with, and fame is a hard pill to swallow. And then there is the money...it's impossible to comment on Amy Winehouse, with all that.

HollywoodChicago.com: Well, you've reached a certain level of 'fame.' What has been alienating to you so far regarding it, what feels so strange about it?

Montgomery: I think it's when people want a picture, or a selfie, and they're actually crying when they meet me. I just want to say, 'no no no,' don't worry it's just me. It's still surreal – when I'm singing, I'm Princess Shaw, but everything else is just Samantha, just me.

HollywoodChicago.com: Director Ido Haar possessed the secret of what Kutiman was doing, while following you around with your life. Tell me about the day that you saw the orchestration with your song, and what Ido Haar and you talked about once it all became clear?

Montgomery: I still wasn't sure what was happening, I didn't put two and two together. I had no idea they were connected at all. Even later, when I was showing it to my cousins, I didn't realize it. He finally sent me an article in the Huffington Post that he had done, and I finally got it. It was wild. [laughs]

It was more natural and real, I never would have been the way I was had I known it was coming. It was like hearing a train in the distance, not know it was coming, and suddenly it crashes right into your living room. It was like, 'okay, time to get on the train.'

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, your life has made one of the greatest turnarounds in the history of lives. Besides a belief in God, what is

your perception of the possibilities of the universe, now that it has blessed you the way it has?

Montgomery: I truly believe the possibilities are endless, and no matter what you’re doing just be good at what you do. Success doesn’t necessarily mean being in a movie and singing on screen, success can be self worth, learning to love yourself and helping others. Whatever you do, make sure you are successful at it – it doesn’t have to be a singer, adored by millions. If you adore yourself, then you are successful. That’s how I feel.

“Presenting Princess Shaw” continues its limited release in Chicago on June 10th, and is available via digital download. See local listings for show times and theaters, plus check online digital download providers for availability. Featuring Samantha Montgomery and Ophir Kutiel. Directed by Ido Haar. Not Rated.



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Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 29 2024 - 5:48am*):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/26576/interview-samantha-montgomery-of-presenting-princess-shaw>

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