

Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child Film Review

Written by Kam Williams
Monday, 29 May 2017 16:22



[Jean-Michel Basquiat](#) (1960-1988) was born in Brooklyn to a Puerto Rican mother and a father of Haitian extraction. Blessed with a rebellious nature, he ran away from home a lot during adolescence, finally leaving for good at 17. Moving to Manhattan, he dropped out of school to fritter away his days spray-painting his alias, "Samo," all over the place, because as he put it, "The whole object of doing [graffiti](#) is fame."

Fortunately, some well-connected folks in the high-priced art world recognized that [Jean-Michel Basquiat](#) actually had some talent and convinced the kid to go legit. He agreed to give it a try, and watched with amazement as his paintings rapidly escalated in price from \$200 to \$30,000 a piece. It wasn't long before he found himself rubbing elbows with celebrated icons like Andy Warhol and Julian Schnabel.

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Some people can handle such overnight success, but [Basquiat](#) wasn't one of them. Because he was making way more money than any of his friends and hangers-on, he got a swelled head and decided to serve as the fulcrum of a non-stop, substance-abusing party which eventually culminated with a heroin overdose in his studio at the age of 27.

All of the above, plus his arresting array of hairstyles ranging from sumo wrestler to Mohawk to weed-wacker, are amply illustrated in [Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child](#), a cautionary documentary about the downside of having it all.

[Basquiat](#) was already the subject of a dramatization of his life directed by pal Schnabel and starring Jeffrey Wright.

What make this flick a real treat is seeing film footage of the bombastic iconoclast in all his glory before he bottomed out on smack. Too bad he didn't have that one person in his entourage he could trust to pull his coattails about the dangers of intravenous drug use. But *hey*, if he were still alive, there might not be any Basquiat mystique for the upscale auction houses to capitalize on. In certain circles, it's still better to flameout than to fade away.

Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child

Unrated
Running time: 90 Minutes
Distributor: Arthouse Films

Excellent (4 stars)

The DVD is available on www.amazon.ca, .com and .co.uk

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About the author of this review: Kam Williams is a syndicated film and book critic who writes for 100+ publications around the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean. He is a member of the New York Film Critics Online, the NAACP Image Awards Nominating Committee, and Rotten Tomatoes. He is a contributor to TheLoop21.com, eurweb.com and so on. He is also a columnist for our webmag www.megadiversities.com. One of his interviews made the cover of Heart and Soul magazine last fall. One of Kam Williams' interviews with Spike Lee is included in the 2002 book entitled Spike Lee: Interviews (Conversations with filmmakers). This book collects the best interviews of Lee. Some of Kam Williams' articles are translated into Chinese and Spanish. In 2008, he was Voted Most Outstanding Journalist of the Decade by the Disilgold Soul Literary Review. In addition, he has been honored at the U.N. (for BMORENEWS GLOBAL FORUM ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT) on June 15th 2012 by the Foundation for the Support of the United Nations (FSUN). Williams is an erudite Attorney who holds a BA in Black Studies from Cornell University, an MA in English from Brown University, an M.B.A. from The Wharton School, and a J.D. from Boston University. Recently, he was featured on this website: <http://www.caribbeanlifene.ws.com/stories/2015>.

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