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WRITTEN BY SUNDANCE FELLOW
AVA DAVIS

TO BE DIRECTED BY
HILLARY R. HEATH

THE
WALTZ



Executive Summary



TITLE : THE WALTZ

LENGTH : FEATURE

GENRE : ROMANTIC COMEDY/ DRAMA

SUB GENRE : LGBTQ

ESTIMATED BUDGET : \$750K TO \$1.5M

PAGES : 91

DAYS OF SHOOTING : 15 TO 25 DAY

Logline



THE

WALTZ



A single young trans woman teams up with a reluctant dance partner to pursue her dream of learning the waltz, only for the two to slowly fall for each other while fighting insecurities and social pressures.



Awards

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TRANS POSSIBILTIES INTENSIVE

The nonprofit Sundance Institute launched the inaugural Trans Possibilities Intensive, a three-day virtual program focused on advancing transgender storytellers of color and their projects.

"This Intensive is the result of ongoing and evolving priorities through Sundance's Outreach and Inclusion work and a year of thoughtful and intentional planning, heartfelt commitment, and a belief in supporting transgender storytellers of color and their stories," said (Moi) Santos. "We are honored that the Fellows have chosen to share their artistic journeys with us and look forward to continuing our relationship and building community together for years to come."

SCREENPLAY COMPETITIONS





WHY ARE WE MAKING THIS FILM?

I have a love-hate relationship with romantic comedies. I love the fantasy and allure of finding love, but realistically those scenarios aren't possible. They feel even further out of reach by being trans, because the biggest question that comes up, for me at least, is will they see me as a woman? Will I always feel in competition with cis-women, and never feel like I am enough in the relationship? Claire's character mirrors my torrid love affair with Beauty and the Beast.

This film arose out of a thought experiment, in the early stages of my transition before I'd started hormones or started to socially transition. As I sat in a coffee shop, I thought about what a meet-cute would look like for someone like me. How to disclose so much, and the fear that comes from being that vulnerable with the possibility of rejection.

This story feels incredibly personal, and makes me emotional every time I come to work on it, because of what it represents to me, and also what I see other trans women talk about when it comes to love - the fear of rejection, the frustration in going out on several dates only to disclose one is trans and then be rejected, searching for a partner and someone to love and trying to weed out the fetishists or perverts. It can be incredibly exhausting and demoralizing.

The beauty I think in seeing a story like this is for all the transwomen who are the heroes in their own stories looking for love. It has a bittersweet ending, in hopes of not painting an unrealistic portrayal of finding love but instead knowing that sometimes you can really like someone and feel that chemistry, but at that point in your life it's just not right for either of you.



Cast

All Atlanta Actors!

WE'RE EXCITED FOR THE CAST WE HAVE ATTACHED SO FAR. WE DID AN INITIAL VIRTUAL TABLE READ IN 2020, AND THE CHEMISTRY WAS THERE. A LIVE TABLE READ IN 2022 ONLY CONFIRMED THAT THIS IS OUR MAIN CAST!



AVA DAVIS

as

Claire



SPENCER MUMFORD

as

Dave



NIKKI GARZA

as

Annalise

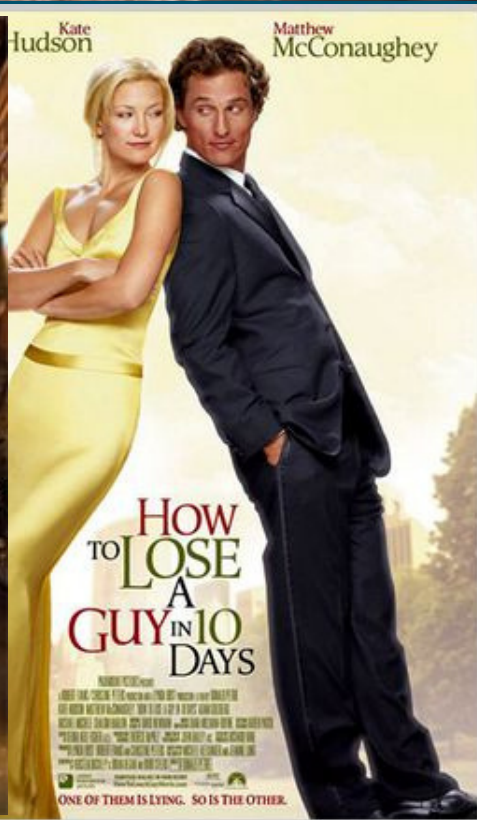
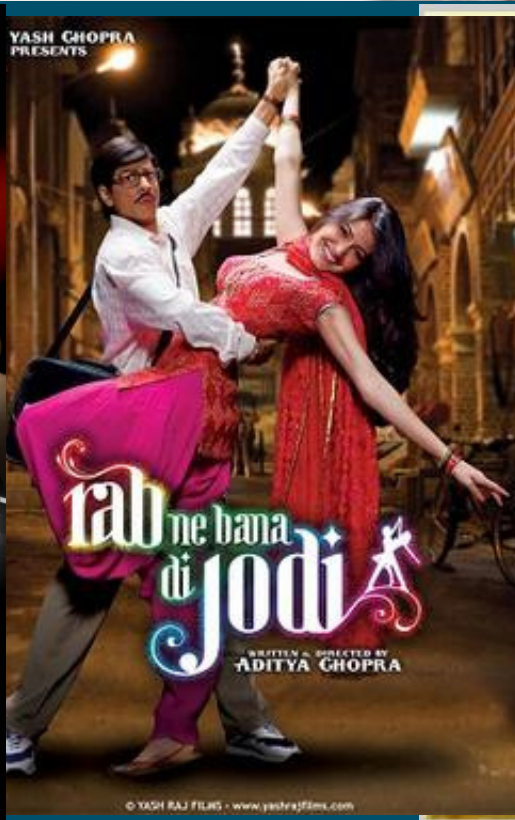
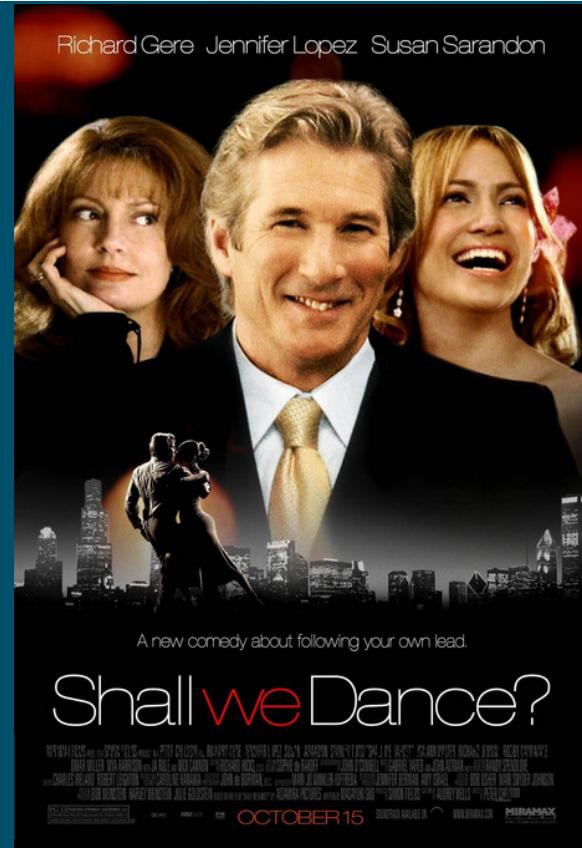


SKYE PASSMORE

as

Justin

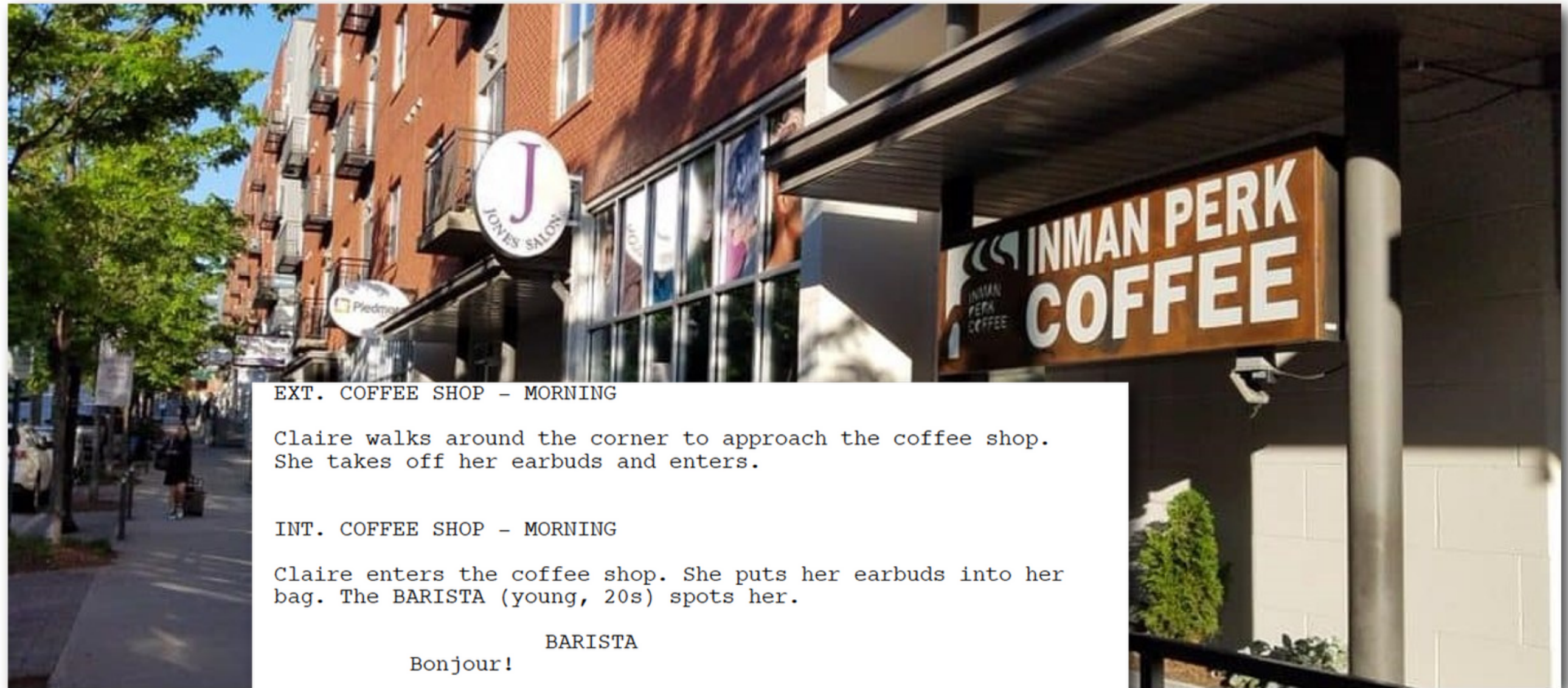
Influences



There's a surprising amount of yellow dresses in romcoms, like we've all been influenced by a certain 1992 animated movie ...



3 EXT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING



EXT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

Claire walks around the corner to approach the coffee shop.
She takes off her earbuds and enters.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

Claire enters the coffee shop. She puts her earbuds into her bag.
The BARISTA (young, 20s) spots her.

BARISTA

Bonjour!

Claire looks up and smiles.

CLAIRE

Bonjour!

Claire gets into the line.

A man brings out a basket of fresh baguettes to set near the front door.

Claire takes a deep inhale and savors the aroma of the bread.
Her face lights up even with her eyes closed, as though she's inhaled the essence of life itself.

The line has finally cleared. It's Claire's turn to order.

BARISTA

The usual?

CLAIRE

(beaming)

The usual.



Synopsis

It's 2021 in Atlanta and 29-year-old Claire has made it in her version of success. She landed her dream job at a creative agency in town three years ago and has made a name for herself in her industry. She maintains a strong and close relationship with her family, which she feels fortunate to have

Unfortunately, her previous dating misadventures have turned her off from pursuing a romantic relationship.

While watching a movie with her mom, Claire remembers how much she wanted to learn the waltz after watching beauty and the beast. A few events remind Claire how alone she feels, she logs online and signs up to learn the waltz, after too many glasses of wine.

Claire happens to sign up for a class where a bride, Sydney, has brought her wedding party to learn a dance to perform at the wedding. In the intro class, Christy teams Dave and Claire up, only for Dave to participate unenthusiastically after being partnered. Claire leaves the class early, castigating herself for putting herself in this position.

(MORE)



51 EXT. WEDDING - NIGHT

The two wave to everyone as the car takes off.

Claire and Dave stand, smiling bashfully at each other.

DAVE

So, I was thinking that maybe I could keep taking classes. That is, if you were.

CLAIRE

Well, I mean I hadn't thought about it, but it could be fun.

DAVE

It could be. What should we take next?

CLAIRE

We could try learning a waltz.

DAVE

A waltz?

CLAIRE

Yeah.

Dave's face suddenly lights up as it dawns on him.

DAVE

Like from Beauty and the Beast?

Claire smiles bashfully.

CLAIRE

Yeah.



(MORE)

Influenced from the bar scene in Weekend (2011, Andrew Haigh)



Dave runs after her to apologize, and to pitch that the two of them learn to dance together as amends for his boorish behavior. Claire agrees, reluctantly.

As the two learn to dance together, the two find a friendship unfolding and chemistry between the two developing. Sydney suggests that Dave invite Claire to the wedding as his partner after one of her bridesmaids drops out.

Claire and Dave dazzle at the wedding and almost manage to outshine the bride and groom. After their dance, Claire realizes their journey has come to an end. Dave suggests they take more classes, including the Waltz Claire has dreamed of learning.

The relationship between the two continues to unfold, as Claire's insecurities surface about the "is it, isn't it" status of dating. Still, Claire summons her courage one night at class and asks for Dave to return the favor by accompanying her to an award dinner. Dave in return asks Claire to dinner with her sister Sydney and her husband. The two agree to each other's requests.

(MORE)



65 INT. DANCE STUDIO



Influenced from Shall We Dance (2004)

INT. DANCE STUDIO

Claire and Dave are at the tail end of a run on the waltz. It's almost perfect. They have the steps down. Claire's giving it her all, but Dave appears distracted every time she looks at him.

CHRISTY

Alright guys. Let's go ahead and call it a night.

CLAIRE

(to Dave)

Hey, you wanna grab a drink afterwards? I have something I wanna ask you.

Dave hesitates. He looks at Claire, and then looks down at the ground.

DAVE

Can't. I've ... got a date.

CLAIRE

Oh. Right, well, maybe another time. Have fun on your date.

Claire hurriedly gathers her things, then gets out of the classroom. Dave rushes after her.

(MORE)



At the dinner with Sydney, it suddenly dawns on the two that they're on a date. Claire suggests a toast to being just friends. Hurt, Dave hides his feelings for the rest of dinner but asks Claire afterward on a walk. She tells him she's afraid of getting hurt, and if they're just labeled friends it's easier to call it that. The two agree to be "just friends," even though Claire is already falling hard.

A night out after dance class, and the couple run into Dave's co-workers. Claire excuses herself so Dave can catch up and celebrate their win on a big account. Dave's co-worker asks if Dave and Claire are dating and if it's the best decision.

At the next dance class, Claire asks Dave out for drinks, only for Dave to disclose he has a date. Hurt, Claire leaves. Dave chases her down, only for the two to confront each other about all the insecurities between them both that have built up.

(MORE)



85 INT. Ballroom

91.

Claire doesn't answer.

The two begin walking towards the door.

DAVE (CONT'D)

We had fun, though. Didn't we?

CLAIRE

We did.

Dave pulls Claire in for a kiss. When he lets her back up, they both smile.

FADE OUT:



Claire's Outfit



Dave's Outfit



(MORE)

THE SCENE!! From Beauty and the Beast (1992)



Fast forward three years into the future, and Claire is getting ready to leave just as Andrea did in the beginning. She engaged to Justin, and the two are in the midst of planning their wedding when Dave and Claire pass each other on the street. Dave calls Claire at her office, only for Claire to ice Dave out.

Dave sends Claire a package, with the Beauty and the Beast DVD and asks her to perform the waltz he promised her. Claire meets Dave in the ballroom, he in court attire and she in a ballgown, and the two dance to “Beauty and the Beast.”

They reminisce, and Dave asks if it's too late. Claire doesn't answer, and the two end on a kiss.



Director Bio



HILLARY R. HEATH

Hillary R. Heath is an Atlanta native and a graduate of Oglethorpe University where she studied Theatre, Art, and English. As a student, Hillary directed and produced *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* and *The Vagina Monologues* (2011, 2012). She was Assistant Director of Georgia Shakespeare Festival's *Macbeth* under the direction of Raelle Myrick-Hodges in partnership with the National Black Arts Festival. Hillary won Best Picture for her zombie horror-comedy short film *Getting Brain* at Campus MovieFest in 2013.

Hillary directed the original play *LoversLane* in the Atlanta Fringe Festival 2013 and soon after began work at Pinch 'n Ouch Theatre as the Assistant Director for *Scratching* under the direction of Nichole Palmietto. Hillary worked as an Artistic Associate at PnO from 2013-2016, where she studied the Meisner Technique, directed scenes from *Other Desert Cities* and *The Aliens*, studied directing for film under Jason Winn (*The Fat Boy Chronicles*). She directed *Wall Street Wedding*, an original play by Grant McGowen, and the regional premiere of *Gidion's Knot* by Johnna Adams.

Hillary worked with Atlanta-based sketch-comedy group, *Critical Crop Top* as a co-Artistic Director from 2015-2019 producing, writing, and directing live sketch comedy variety shows and film. She worked as the Assistant Director on *The Mother Load* Web Series with Nicole Kemper where she learned the ropes on set. As Hillary got more involved with working in film, she wrote, directed, and produced *PYT's* Web Show and co-wrote and co-directed *80's Dating Video Remix*. From there, she wrote, directed, and produced the short films *Bad Day* and *Honest Makeup Blog*. Hillary was honored to also direct episodes one and two for the You42 produced web series *PrettyFunny*.



Director's Statement

When I first read the script for *The Waltz* I was moved by the universality of the script but also the specificity of the story. Audiences are familiar with the traditional rom-com and they affect us because often they are our stories - unrequited love, being rejected, falling head-over-heels. But rarely, if ever, do we allow our ingenue to be someone other than an attractive cis-gendered woman and that is only part of what makes *The Waltz* special.

This film follows a young, confident trans-woman, Claire, who knows the love she deserves and is willing to work to get it. She is successful at work and pursues her passions and hobbies through dance classes. She has a full life and needs someone to share that life with. This is far from the trans representation we typically see in film and media. Trans women are often cast in minor roles, usually their characters' stories are filled with pain and discrimination. *The Waltz* breaks from that norm and shows us a different story- the story of a woman who has not lived a life without difficulty, but a woman who has overcome, who does not let her past define her and instead seeks to find joy and give joy in return. As the director of this film, I plan to show the audience a new story about love, romance, and happiness. A film where every woman can feel seen and heard.

I have worked closely with Ava during the development of this script and one of the most important elements of this film will be the music. Music has the incredible ability to make us swoon, give us goose-bumps, and make us feel alive. The character of Claire is no different. She listens to her favorite songs when she gets dressed in the morning and dances down the street. She knows the difference between a song that is made for a tango and one made for a samba. Her life is alight with music and the filmmaking will reflect the incredible fullness that music brings to her life. While staging the preliminary readings of the film, one of the most important things was for us to be able to incorporate the music we intended for each scene and see how it helped to create the world of the film. With music, a dance between two people becomes intimate, fun, and romantic. Because of this, music is one of the most important elements in the filmmaking for *The Waltz*. A large portion of our budget is dedicated to post-production sound and music costs to help bring this aspect of the film to fruition.

The Waltz is also a dance film unlike one we have seen. We are familiar with films like *Black Swan*, *Save the Last Dance*, and *Step Up* but what this film offers audiences is a chance to see partner dance in a new way - a hobbyist who just wants to express the rhythm she feels within. It isn't just about sensuality like in *Dirty Dancing*, it's about friendship, romance, and learning about yourself. Claire pursues dance not to meet a man, but to meet a personal goal. Her life is a dance, she flows from moment to moment sure-footed and confident. The dance element will also be incorporated into the visual aspects of the film with the use of Steadicam and fluid movement. The film itself should feel like a dance, a waltz that the audience and Claire are dancing together.



Writer Bio



AVA DAVIS



Recent Sundance Fellow Ava Davis, also known as the Duchess of Grant Park, is a trans actress, producer, and writer living in Atlanta, Georgia. She is also an advocate for increasing trans and queer representation, especially that of black and other minorities. She founded her production company, Studio Vosges, in 2019 with the expressed purpose of telling the stories of queer and trans (GSM) black, brown, and beige people. She hosts the talk show, The Ava Davis Show, on you42.com.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Literature, with a focus in art history, film, and creative writing, from the University of Georgia, and has made Atlanta her home, along with her partner, two standard poodles, one Bengal cat, and one Russian ragdoll cat.

She has acted in, written, and produced several short films, including Feast, The Decision, and the short film The Duchess of Grant Park, about a trans woman who claims the Grant Park neighborhood of Atlanta as her duchy.

Ava Davis' stage credits include Alice in Wonderland, The Laramie Project, It's A Generational Thing, Stuck, and Locked. In addition, she has performed with the One Minute Play Fest, including a special performance in collaboration with the Queens Theater in New York City to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Pride. She also performs sketch comedy and collaborates with Critical Crop Top.

She is currently working to produce and secure financing for her first feature film, The Waltz.



Writer Statement



First off, The Waltz is heavily inspired by Beauty and the Beast and Shall We Dance, with the sprinkling of romcoms such as How To Lose a Guy in 10 Days and Trainwreck. I think we can all agree that these feature, for the most part, white cisgender woman as the romantic lead.

I have a love-hate relationship with romantic comedies. I love the fantasy and allure of finding love, but realistically those scenarios aren't possible. They feel even further out of reach by being trans, because the biggest question that comes up, for me at least, is will they see me as a woman? Will I always feel in competition with cis-women, and never feel like I am enough in the relationship? Claire's character mirrors my torrid love affair with Beauty and the Beast.

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