

Review: *First Girl I Loved* at VQFF

In “*First Girl I Loved*,” the first girl that teenage Clifton falls in love with is his best friend, Anne. And for a while, it looks like she’s on the same page. In one of the movie’s early scenes, she instructs him to skip school and hang out because she has some “big fucking news” to share. The pair then shoplifts wine in a well-oiled Bonnie-and-Clyde routine, and sets out on a drunken, daytime romp through suburban Los Angeles.



Still from *First Girl I Loved* by Kerem Sanga.

Later, nursing their hangovers, she’s ready to tell him her news. Clifton is all set for Annie to confess her feelings and slip him the tongue, but—record scratch—in the tradition of romcom best friends since time immemorial (or at least John Hughes’ day), Anne just doesn’t like him like that. Instead, her big news is that she’s been falling in love with her own “first girl”: a chipmunk-cheeked softball player named Sasha Basañez. (As artistic director Shana Myara noted in the show’s post-screening Q&A, one of the movie’s many perfect details is that Sasha Basañez is never just “Sasha”—she’s always referred to Jordan Catalano-style by both her first and last names.)

Boy-likes-girl, girl-likes-someone-else is a familiar trope, but director Kerem Sanga’s updated touches make “*First Girl I Loved*” feel fresh. In many ways, this is as much a movie about texting as it is about romance; I don’t think I’ve ever seen a movie so adroitly capture the particularities of being a teenager with both a crush and a cell phone. Namely: the agony of the three dot text-draft, and that weird stage of relationship flux in which both parties have trouble speaking to one another in person, despite days spent exchanging increasingly flirty texts.

However, if Sanga's greatest strength is in his ability to accurately capture teenage interactions, it might also be his biggest weakness. Sasha and Anne definitely read as real teens, but unfortunately, real teens are kind of boring! The movie has a surplus of dumb jokes and giggling that I could have done without—but then, I suppose it would have been a different movie altogether. Depending on the generosity of the viewer, these fizzy teenage conversations could either make you sigh with nostalgia or want to throw popcorn at the protagonists' beautiful, longhaired heads.

Another perceptive detail is the fact that, true to life, these teens can be brats. In many ways, they're still just kids who don't quite understand each other's perspectives, and will do dumb, impulsive things to try and get their way. Without spoiling the ending, I can promise that both Anne and Sasha wind up doing some crummy things to each other out of hurt feelings and confusing signals. Still, the title of the movie is "First Girl I Loved," promising future romances down the road. Likely, they will get older and do better, bolstered by the wisdom that comes from screwing up a time (or two) in one's youth.

[The Queer Film Festival](#) ran August 11 - 21st, 2016, bringing in over 14,000 viewers! The wonderful Joella Cabalu also won OUTtv People's Choice Award for Best Feature with *It Runs in the Family*! Read our interview with Cabalu [here](#).

0 Likes

Share