

# Queen of Katwe

USA | 2013 | 124 mins | Cert PG

Director: Mira Nair    Screenplay: William Wheeler

Cast: Madina Nalwanga, David Oyelowo, Lupita Nyong'o, Martin Kabanza



## SYNOPSIS

Queen of Katwe is the colourful true story of a young girl selling corn on the streets of rural Uganda whose world rapidly changes when she is introduced to the game of chess, and, as a result of the support she receives from her family and community, is instilled with the confidence and determination she needs to pursue her dream of becoming an international chess champion.

## REVIEW

Mira Nair's unabashedly heart-string-tugging drama, tells the true story of Phiona Mutesi (Madina Nalwanga). Raised in a Ugandan slum, by a single mother (Lupita Nyong'o) determined not to resort to begging or worse to make her way, Phiona is reasonably happy, until she wanders into a small classroom one day, enticed by an offer of free porridge. There she is introduced to the game of chess, a game at which she is unnaturally talented. Taking her to the level of international competition, this seemingly minor skill gives her the possibility of a life in which she controls her destiny.

Mutesi's story offers every cliché of the 'poverty prodigy' genre, in which shy children who live in grim circumstances are introduced to a rarefied world of elitism, where their humble brilliance helps them beat the snob at their own game. Yet Nair lets a lot of those clichés slide, and doesn't overplay Phiona's achievements. William Wheeler's screenplay draws a Uganda that has the same complex social class system as any western country, not just a world of haves and have-nots. Mention must go to Stephanie Carroll's production design and Mobolaji Dawodu's costumes, plus Sean Bobbitt's cinematography. Every frame sings with pattern and texture. It's gorgeous to look at.

In the scenes of Phiona playing at tournaments Nair takes the focus away from the board and puts it on the spectators. The rest of Phiona's chess club is made up of huge personalities, oohing and aahing and bawling through their own matches or while watching Phiona. Nyong'o, playing her first on-screen role since her Oscar win for 2013's *12 Years A Slave*, shows her breakthrough was no fluke, while David Oyelowo is a storm of personality as the chess coach. And, in her debut, Nalwanga is perfectly understated, her charisma growing as Phiona starts to feel special.

*Olly Richards, Empire, 17 Oct 2016*



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Director Mira Nair decided to adapt "Queen of Katwe" into a film after making a documentary about the life of the man who trained Phiona Mutesi, Robert Katende.
- The film was shot entirely in Africa, in the slums of Katwe in Kampala, Uganda and in Johannesburg, South Africa. Over one hundred Ugandans worked as extras for the street scenes within the film, eighty of them without any prior experience of cameras.
- Mira Nair worked with the children by setting up an acting boot camp to help them.

## Awards and Nominations

- Winner of 'Best Family Film' in the Women Film Critics Circle Awards 2016
- Nominated for 'Best Woman Director' Alliance of Women Film Journalists Awards 2017

## And that's all folks...

...until the autumn. HCC will be back in September with another great season of films. If you're not already on our e-mailing list, get in touch via [info@highworthfilms.co.uk](mailto:info@highworthfilms.co.uk) – or watch for details of the new season in Highworth Link.

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