

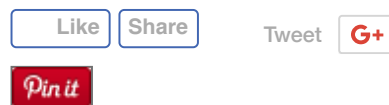


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GAMES OF LOVE AND CHANCE (L'ESQUIVE)

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By *Erica Abeel* ([Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/93](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/93)) Aug 26, 2005



Reviews

Perhaps one reason *Games of Love and Chance (L'Esquive)* ~~aced out the hot contenders at the 2005~~ [aced out the hot contenders at the 2005](http://www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button) Cesar Awards, copping a slew of prizes, is that it turns on its head the sub-genre of films about "ghetto teens." Set in the troubled projects outside Paris-captured so bleakly in *La Haine* by Mathieu Kassovitz-*Games* avoids the predictable anomie, drugs and violence. Instead, it dwells on the growing pains and romantic encounters of a group of mainly North African adolescents, and their struggle for artistic expression in a school production of *Games of Love and Chance*, an elegant 18th-century play by Marivaux.

Shy, handsome Krimo (Osman Elkharraz) breaks up (yet again) with his longtime girlfriend Magalie (Aur lie Ganito). When he happens on his "homey," the fiery blonde Lydia (Sara Forestier), haggling with a Chinese tailor over the cost of a flouncy 18th-century dress for her role in the play, he's smitten. The hormone-addled Krimo bribes his friend Rachid (Rachid Hami) for his role in the play opposite Lydia, naively hoping to come on to Lydia's character and then date her. Despite the valiant coaching of the prof (Carole Franck), Krimo shows little aptitude for the quicksilver lines of Marivaux' social satire, and flees the classroom in embarrassment. After a painful scene in which the cops rough up these kids, who are merely trying to sort out a romantic dilemma (very much in the style of a Marivaux encounter!), the play is performed and the young thesps carry the day.

The device of a play-within-a-film is wonderfully resonant because the Marivaux characters reflect back in more elegant form the modern teens' concerns. As well, without preaching, director Abdellatif Kechiche playfully proposes that these kids, despite their marginalized status, have an appetite for artistic expression that extends beyond rap. Of course, they're rooted in a particular

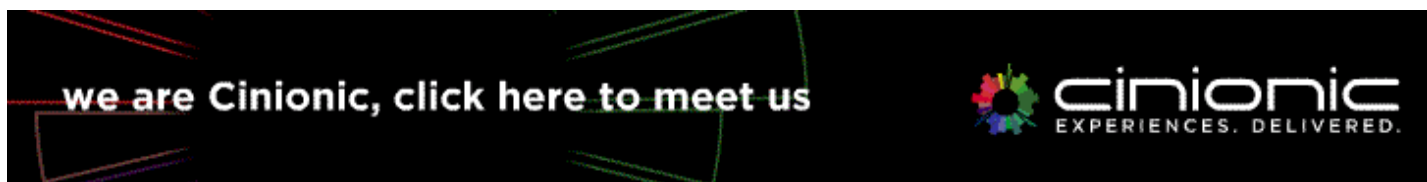
subculture, with its own robust, often amusing argot that includes vocal clicks and North African expressions. Much of the film's pungent humor comes from the dramatic contrast between the "gutter" slang and the elevated tone of the lines the kids pronounce with such élan in the play.

In fact, more than a love story, *Games* is about language (the original title means a feint, as in fencing): language as these students' point of entry into the French mainstream; as a potentially unifying medium; and as expression that endures and transcends accidents of birth. Unfortunately, such notions will resonate less stateside than for French audiences, with their reverence for the mother tongue. But viewers here can't help but respond to the raw emotions and acting ability of the largely nonprofessional cast. They'll be especially wowed by Sara Forestier's turbo-charged turn as a ghetto diva.

-Erica Abeel

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