

Cultural Daily

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Normani's Motivation: A Love Letter

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, September 4th, 2019

I am always asking the question, when does a popular music video evolve from just that to something more akin to a dance film? I'm still unsure of the answer... it's likely there isn't just one but many and that they are all somewhat subjective. But I think the question itself is interesting because it demands we consider the possibility that those two, heretofore, highly distinct categories—commercial art and high art—have in some ways or at some distinct points in time melded, and that they are no longer mutually exclusive. Consider for example Childish Gambino's "This is America" music video, which some highly revered artists have called one of the most important pieces of work of the 21st century. It definitely, and defiantly, occupies a niche spot in both territories.



Cut to Normani's new wildly entertaining music video, **Motivation**. While it is not "This is America" it's a great music video. I love the shots—many of them jumping from static mediums to moving or handheld wides, mixed with the locations and lighting that are a perfect display of urban LA at it's finest. And the fact that it opens with a scene that is likely taken from her own personal narrative of course makes it all the more sweet: A young Normani runs into the family room to fantasize seeing herself hit a top of the charts (106 & Park) show on television while her mother scolds her for making too much noise and takes care of her younger sibling on the couch in the background... the whole set up is lovely and just so authentic and on point. All the background set ups are so brilliant that I needed to go back and re-watch specifically for this element, and the whole video is woven together by small stories told in dance. The costuming and color design are fantastic... and did I mention the choreography by Sean Bankhead? While it doesn't veer from being just slightly over the top it is brilliantly executed and great fun on display, and—save for one shot that is likely a body double—Normani herself is no slouch as a centerpiece dancer, and no wonder as dance was her first passion. And when in the last minute the song veers into a brief instrumental break, it leads us into rapturous and fantastic visual territory, all briefly and beautifully realized as inner city streets are suddenly freshly washed with showers, then returns us to a dry DTLA at golden hour, as relatively new cable cars zoom by.



Consciously or not, **Motivation** pays homage to many other timeless music videos and stars that have helped pave the way and come before it, and of course that is a lovely and fitting nod, given that she herself has had tremendous production help from Ariana Grande. And as the lyrics suggest, no doubt it's the product of the artist's own hard work. *Take a look at me now! A little*

motivation...

But maybe as much as anything else I've mentioned, for me at least, it feels like a beautiful and joyous love letter to both Black culture and Los Angeles.

Enjoy.

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