

# The Bastard Sings The Sweetest Song

Doc about violence takes flight

By SUSAN G. COLE

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Whether by good fortune or filmmaking smarts – or both – Christy Garland plunks her camera into the lives of a struggling family in Georgetown, Guyana, and comes out with cinematic gold.

Muscle is trying to save his family from poverty and his mother, Mary, from herself. He does the former by selling fighting cocks (the bastard in the title is a species of bird) and the latter by confining Mary in the house so she doesn't drink herself to death.

Mostly, he wants to break the cycle of violence that's driven his mother, a skilled poet, to alcohol in the first place.

The film unfolds slowly, disclosing insights and information in a way that maximizes their impact. A sequence in which women in Muscle's generation talk about how they've been trained to accept abuse – but then turned the situation around – manages to be both devastating and funny. And the moment when Mary describes her life's most painful experiences sends the narrative into the stratosphere.

Garland shoots Mary and the caged birds – an effective metaphor – in tight close-up, but occasionally heads into the streets of Georgetown to illuminate small-town life.

**This one really creeps up on you.**

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