

Movie review: Detail is missing in La Bolduc's drama

The biopic boasts a terrific performance from Debbie Lynch-White as the legendary Quebec singer, but could have used more emotional depth.

BRENDAN KELLY, MONTREAL GAZETTE ([HTTPS://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/BRENDANKELLYROCKS](https://montrealgazette.com/author/brendankellyrocks))

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Debbie Lynch-White is a force of nature in the role of Quebec chansonnière La Bolduc. Émile Proulx-Cloutier portrays her troubled husband, Édouard Bolduc. *LAURENT GUERIN / LES FILMS SÉVILLE*

La Bolduc

☆☆☆

Starring: Debbie Lynch-White, Émile Proulx-Cloutier, Mylène Mackay

Directed by: François Bouvier

Duration: 103 minutes

Let's start with the good news: Debbie Lynch-White is absolutely terrific in the title role of *La Bolduc*, the new biopic that recounts the life and times of Mary Travers, a.k.a. La Bolduc.

Lynch-White is a force of nature on the big screen, which will not surprise anyone who saw the actress over the course of her six-season stint in the gripping female prison drama *Unité 9*. She's great here, capturing this extraordinary woman who became a most unlikely star in Quebec in the 1930s.

The film from director François Bouvier covers much of *La Bolduc*'s adult life, starting with her early days in Montreal when she was struggling to make ends meet, right through to her death from cancer in 1941 at the age of 46.

The other positive is that the film does a good job of recreating working-class Montreal from that era.

The trouble — and this is something that plagues so many biopics — is that because Bouvier and screenwriters Frédéric Ouellet and Benjamin Alix want to squeeze in all the key events from Travers's life, the story jumps from one event to another and never goes deep enough.

We see her career start when her husband, Édouard Bolduc (Émile Proulx-Cloutier), is laid off from his job; she simply has to get out and start singing to make a little money. It's cool to see how she starts writing songs in a very off-the-cuff style, making up lyrics about the lives of ordinary Quebecers.

The film chronicles the problems in the marriage, with an increasingly frustrated Édouard trying to drink away his troubles. But it would have been nice for us to know more about these tensions, for the filmmakers to go into more detail about what it must have been like for a man in that era to watch his wife take charge of the family, and to feel more intensely what that must have been like for Travers.

Instead, the filmmakers turn it into something of a didactic drama, ramming home the idea that *La Bolduc* was a feminist hero. Yes, she was, and it's great to see a narrative about a strong woman succeeding. But making a parallel with feminist reformer Thérèse Casgrain (Mylène Mackay) seems a little forced.

But this film remains worth seeing, just because so few of us really know the story behind the woman who is considered to be French Canada's first *chansonnière*.

La Bolduc opens in Montreal cinemas on Friday, April 6.

bkelly@postmedia.com (<mailto:bkelly@postmedia.com>)

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