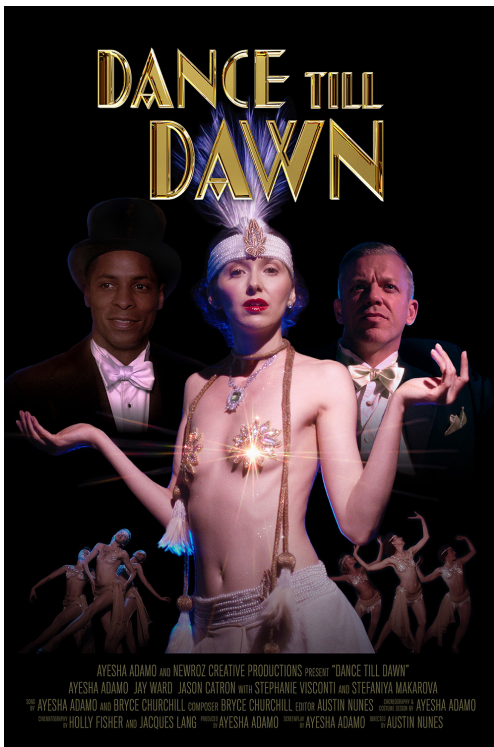


DANCE TILL DAWN



Press Contact: Ayesha Adamo • ayeshaadamo@gmail.com

Running Time: 9:58

Type: Short Film / Music Video

Director: Austin Nunes

Writer: Ayesha Adamo

Song: performed by Ayesha Adamo
written by Ayesha Adamo and Bryce Churchill

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/436605212>

Website: <https://www.ayeshaadamoacting.com/dancetilldawn/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/dancetilldawnfilm/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ayeshaadamo/>



LOGLINE

In 1919, an aspiring starlet and a seasoned comedian step into the radiant spotlight, and step off stage into a society swirling in change, each weighing the cost of success against the chance to be seen and remembered.

SYNOPSIS

New York City, 1919. A year of soldiers shipping back from war in victory. A year that women gained the right to vote. A year of heavy drinking, as Prohibition had been passed, but not yet ratified. “Drink up while we all still can.”

In 1919, we were on the verge of both great freedoms and great restrictions, and some were on the verge of making it big, having stars in their eyes all the same. *Dance Till Dawn* is a long-form music video that glimpses at the lives of performers as they step into the spotlight, and likewise, as they step off stage into a society swirling in change.

Inspired by the saucy world of the Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic, the characters in *Dance Till Dawn* echo the lives of the era’s major players: Marion Davies, the starlet; William Randolph Hearst, the millionaire; Bert Williams, famed comedian and the first person of color to be a member of Actors Equity; and of course, Florenz Ziegfeld, the master impresario.

“The Great War, the sea of change, the wars we wage within ourselves...be soft and frolic while the world is pulled apart.” How different is the sea of change today?

While fictional, this project takes the approach of historical accuracy in presenting the world of 1919. For example, Bert Williams, who is the inspiration for the Walker Kingston character, was an African American star that performed at the Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic in blackface, and Florenz Ziegfeld, the inspiration for the character Flo, was not only his employer but also a close friend and an early activist when it came to race and civil rights. This project presents these life moments, and similarly the “me too” dressing room scene between Sterling and her suitor, in stride with their era, showing the unsettling alongside the glamorous confection.

CREATOR Q & A

A little Q & A with recording artist, lead actress, and writer of *Dance Till Dawn*, **Ayesha Adamo**, and director, **Austin Nunes**.

First off, since this is a music video, tell me about the song “Dance Till Dawn”

Ayesha: I wrote “Dance Till Dawn” with my frequent music partner, Bryce Churchill. Bryce produced the track and I wrote the vocal melody and lyrics. Bryce is a wonderful musician and producer, and we both like to go over the top with our layering of sounds. Some of the thickest layers of vocal harmonies in the final chorus have over 40 layers of my voice, and six parts to the harmony. Bryce is also the film composer, and I really love the way he was able to give some of the riffs from this contemporary song the 1919 vintage treatment. He even recorded the sound of a cheese grater on one of the tracks! I think it could have been a hit back in the day too.

What was it like to work on material invoking the world of a century ago?

Austin: Period pieces are always a favorite of mine because it leans into the duty of film to transport you to another feeling, place, and time. *Dance Till Dawn* was no different. Ayesha and I love the micro details of period correct props, accessories, beauty, and all the things that build a world that is immersive, stunning, and believable.

I understand that some of the characters are based on people in history.

Ayesha: All of the characters in *Dance Till Dawn* are fictional, but they are modeled on real people who lived. My character, Sterling De Crécy, is primarily modeled after Marion Davies, who very famously had a relationship with William Randolph Hearst. Jay Ward's character, Walker Kingston, is modeled after Bert Williams, an extraordinarily successful comedian, who was the first black member of Actors Equity, and even a very early filmmaker. There is, in fact, a tale of Bert Williams putting a racist bartender in his place by ordering ten drinks at \$50 a piece, as though the money weren't a thing, and I wove this tale into *Dance Till Dawn*. All of these characters were part of the world of the Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic, the saucy late night after party of the Ziegfeld Follies. Our venue in the film goes unnamed, but I did manage to find an actual antique knocker from the real Midnight Frolic that was used to knock the table and cheer on the dancers in the video, just like in 1919—yes, historically, this is where the term “knockers” comes from.

The story of *Dance Till Dawn* is more open ended in format, what was it like to bring the dialog scenes together with the music video?

Austin: I've always been more impacted by music videos that have a narrative element motivating them, so I was excited for *Dance Till Dawn* to incorporate important interactions to set the stage and lift us off into a fully realized music visual. With monumental works like *Black Is King* at the forefront of our culture, *Dance Till Dawn* similarly transports us into a golden age of Visual Albums, where cinema equals soundscape.

Ayesha: The thing about *Dance Till Dawn* is that it's really not a narrative—there's no solid story structure, only glimpses of lives, each woven into the next, like a string of memories. And I feel like the openness of the music video format allows for more experimental screenwriting. One of my favourite parts is the poetic voiceover that leads into the song itself, a dream sequence with the voices of characters chiming in like conversations you remember hearing. That was one of the themes driving the piece for me: memory. There were the difficulties that these performers encountered—the sexual propositioning, the racism—and these were just days in the story of their lives, experiences that are still relatable to performers 100 years later. And yet these characters wonder, “Do you think they'll remember us?” But really, it's that they're a bit like us. We know them even if we don't remember them, and we also know how it feels to want the lives we've lived to have mattered and to be remembered.

Speaking of the montage sequence, there is the moment that we see Walker's character performing in blackface.

Ayesha: Many people aren't aware that even as a person of colour, Bert Williams performed in blackface when he was on stage. Including this moment in the montage, of Walker leaving stage and removing his makeup afterward, naturally we knew that it would be a sensitive thing. Initially in the script, I had written it as something shot from behind that we only see the edges of, but on set, Jay Ward, who plays Walker, was on board for showing this part of the character's life more fully. When I got him in the studio to record the voice that you hear in his head during that moment, juxtaposed with the cheering crowds...I knew that we had something poignant that shouldn't be erased from the string of memories. Because the wound is still there, and so it speaks to us.

And what about the #metoo scene with your character, Sterling?

Ayesha: It's funny because I actually wrote this scene before #metoo was even a thing. And living in the world of cabaret in 1919, I imagined Sterling as the type who knew how the game was meant to work and what her next move had to be. There was a smart bit of directing that Austin gave, where he had me admire myself in the mirror while Jason Catron, who plays Mr. Davenport, was kissing my neck. It's a subtle thing, but I think it speaks volumes about the two agendas in the room with these characters. I think we feel more of a twinge of distant sadness coming from Sterling in the ending moments, her expression now that she's in the spotlight, and also in that introspective montage voiceover.

What do you think people will come away from *Dance Till Dawn* feeling?

Ayesha: It's been so interesting to see the early reactions of the few people who have seen the project so far. Some latch on to the glamour and confection of it all. And others watch it and feel a bit sad about the drawbacks these characters are facing in their world. I think it definitely serves the uncomfortable alongside the beautiful, which makes it linger on the palate even more. And these characters don't make the choices that you would necessarily expect. Sterling takes the jewels and the deal from her wealthy gentleman suitor. Walker meets the racist bartender with a five hundred dollar bill and a look that says, "How ya like me now?" Of course, we see that both characters have their crestfallen moments, we catch a glimpse of sorrow here and there, but they are also successful people who have the resilience of the spotlight carrying them through, and it's a balancing act in a world that's changing all around them. And we're in just as much of a changing world today.

How does *Dance Till Dawn* relate to the kind of work you're doing as an artist overall?

Ayesha: There's a lot of me tied up in this project, and like much of my work, it's the sort of storytelling that defies attempts to pin everything down. *Dance Till Dawn* lives on memory and the inexplicable way that we sometimes feel in moments of our lives, moments that just float strangely in the glitter. And I love to bring a boldness of colour and sparkle into the world, the sort of things that dreams are made of.

Austin: The integration of film into music video has been a trajectory I've always wanted to pursue. The most impressive moments in pop music history have been the advancement beyond the construct of a typically formatted music video. Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, Madonna's *Blond Ambition World Tour* have all progressed their music with narrative stories that intensify the message. My own cinematic background and obsession for pop culture make a short film like *Dance Till Dawn* an exciting and passionate feat for myself and hopefully a joy for others.

ARTIST BIO



Ayesha Adamo is an Actor, Recording Artist, and Filmmaker. She was formerly a member of the pop group, Beauty4 (EMI Records Taiwan), who performed entirely in Mandarin Chinese. Ayesha is also one half of the band Loss of Eden, and the production team, Alchemical Disco. Alchemical Disco's debut track, "Atomic," reached #20 on the Music Week UK Commercial Pop Club charts in 2014. Ayesha's 2015 solo release, "Midnight Elite," reached #16 on the Beatport Electronica charts, #29 in Deep House and #77 in Techno. Ayesha's recent acting credits include the film tentatively-titled *Bluebirds*, opposite James Chen (*The Walking Dead*, *FBI*, *Iron Fist*), and *We Are The Prototypes*, which also premiered at Dances With Films in 2018 and won the 2019 Spirit of Dragon Con Award. When she isn't performing, Ayesha works to support female filmmakers, environmental causes, and teach meditative spiritual techniques.

www.ayeshaadamoacting.com www.ayeshaadamo.com

DIRECTOR BIO



Austin Nunes is a Director, Photographer, and Cinematographer. He's inspired by bygone eras, blonde pop icons, and queer culture. Much of his recent work involves America's Drag Race superstars, music artists, and performers that use a stage. www.austinunes.com

END CREDITS

Ayesha Adamo in Dance Till Dawn
Directed by Austin Nunes
Written and Produced by Ayesha Adamo
Director of Photography: Holly Fischer and Jacques Lang
Composer: Bryce Churchill
Song by Ayesha Adamo and Bryce Churchill

Cast (in order of appearance)

Redhead	Jessica Sherr
Bartender	Walter Brandes
Walker Kingston	Jay Ward
Dancer #1	Stephanie Visconti
Cigar Guy	Bryce Churchill
Saucy Lady #1	Holie Barker
Saucy Gentleman #1	Michael Catlege-Johnson
Saucy Lady #2	Tony LePage
Saucy Gentleman #2	Natalie Roy
Flo	Clyde Baldo
Sterling De Crécy	Ayesha Adamo
Dancer #2	Stefaniya Makarova
Mister Davenport	Jason Catron
Photographer	Benjamin Cerf

Unit Production Manager	Nick Sakai
First Assistant Director	Jennifer Pappas
Second Assistant Director	Mariya Chulichkova
First Assistant Camera	Marcus LoScalzo
First Assistant Camera	Javed S. Ali
Second Assistant Camera	Nicole Dia
Second Assistant Camera	Rachel Gwozdz

Production Design	Ayesha Adamo
Choreography	Ayesha Adamo
Art Director	Laurel Smith
Art Department Assistant	Nina Bangalore

Key Gaffer	Anthony Asaro
Key Grip	Joseph Dibble
Grip	Kerri McConnell
Grip	Josh Timpko
Best Boy Grip	Pete Pirro
Sound Operator	Andrew Schwarz
Production Assistants	Wanda Victoria
	Jennifer Dominguez

Costume Design	Ayesha Adamo
Wardrobe Stylist	Angelina Scantlebury
Key Makeup	Tim MacKay
Assistant Makeup Artist	Paola Leon
Key Hair Stylist	Adi Nujeidat
Hair Stylist	Karlo Ortiz
Hair Stylist	Daniel Muñoz
Hair Stylist	Monique Albritton
BTS Still Photographer	Monzeeki

Editor	Austin Nunes
VFX and Audio Engineer	Bryce Churchill
ADR Editor	Ayesha Adamo
Colorist	Mickey Micklos
Sound Designer	Will Ogilvie

Executive Producer	Ayesha Adamo
Co-Producers	Bryce Churchill
	Nick Sakai

“Dance Till Dawn”
Written by Ayesha Adamo and Bryce Churchill
Performed by Ayesha Adamo
Mastered by Emily Lazar at The Lodge, NY
Assisted by Chris Allgood

Special Thanks to
The Triad Theatre
The Paris Café

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STILLS

