

First Comes Love

Director: Joella Cabalu
Countries of Origin: Canada
Runtime: 1hr 5mins
Languages: English



With moments of levity and plenty of heart, *First Comes Love: Nakabingwit* follows three Filipinas and their white partners as they navigate the complexities of race, identity, and communication within their relationships. Across Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto, intimate conversations about family, privilege, culture, and belonging reveal that love alone is not always enough to bridge lived experience. Creating a framework for these stories is director Joella Cabalu's own personal journey, brought to life through playful rom-com-inspired recreations of the love stories she wished she had seen growing up.

Blending observational documentary with narrative storytelling, *First Comes Love: Nakabingwit* thoughtfully dissects how the stories of Western romance often overlook the realities of interracial relationships. Rooted in Cabalu's longstanding engagement within the Filipino Canadian community, the film offers a compassionate exploration of the language, vulnerability, and empathy required to navigate difficult conversations with the people we love. This is a warm and deeply resonant reflection on identity, connection, and what it takes to bridge differences.

Reflect & Discuss:

1. What expectations about love and relationships have the women in the film inherited from family, culture, and popular media? Where do those expectations come into conflict?
2. How do race, gender, and culture affect the relationships we see in the film? Where do the life experiences between partners intersect, and when do they diverge?
3. How does the filmmaker use the characteristic humour of a rom-com and reenactments to explore experiences that can also be painful or uncomfortable? How would the film feel different if these stories were presented without them?
4. What assumptions might people make about the women and their white partners in the film based on race, gender, or cultural stereotypes? How does hearing from the couples themselves challenge or complicate those assumptions?



Director Profile: Joella Cabalu

Joella Cabalu is a Filipino-Canadian filmmaker whose documentaries examine intimacies, identities, and relationships with wit, care, and emotional precision. Her award-winning work brings playfulness and nuance to complex social dynamics. In *First Comes Love: Nakabingwit*

(2026), her first feature as writer-director, Cabalu reshapes the rom-com into a contemporary documentary about interracial relationships, communication, and the courage it takes to truly see one another.