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Variety - Film Review: 'Atlantic.'

A sensitive and lyrical look at a Moroccan windsurfer who falls in love with long distances.

By [JAY WEISSBERG](#)



With: Fettah Lamara, Thekla Reuten, Mohamed Majd, Boujmaa Guilloul, Hassna Souidi, Soufyan Sahli, Wisal Hatimi, Driss Hakimi, Jan-Willem van Ewijk. (Arabic, French, English dialogue)

Brief plot descriptions are often deceptive, which is why categorising “Atlantic.” as a windsurfing movie, or even an immigration drama, fails to capture the sensitivity and lyricism that sophomore helmer Jan-Willem van Ewijk and d.p. Jasper Wolf bring to this engaging, generally restrained pic. Beautifully shot on the Moroccan coast, the film tells of a local windsurfer whose frequent association with Euro travellers adds a highly charged pull to the already palpable draw of departure. Atmospheric, at times impressionistic while still firmly tied to a discernible plot, “Atlantic.” is sailing smoothly in fest waters, and could see a small Euro release.

Perhaps there’s too much whispered voiceover from Fettah (Fettah Lamara), and the introduction of choral voices into Piet Swerts’

sweeping music is definitely unnecessary. Yet tangible rewards come from the way van Ewijk evokes the tug-of-war tension between a connection to place and a yearning for what lies beyond. He's also fortunate in casting Lamara, a talented tyro whose professional training in windsurfing enabled him to meet the brutal demands of the waves while maintaining a sense of character.

Fettah is a fisherman during the off-season and a windsurfing guide when the tourists come, lured by the famed waves of his village, Moulay Bouzarqtoune. Each year he makes friends with the visitors, and each year they leave. Jan (van Ewijk) is there with his g.f., Alexandra (Thekla Reuten), and Fettah falls for the young woman, despite knowing her unavailability. When they depart, he feels it's time for him to leave Morocco as well, training his mind and body to withstand what will be an arduous journey.

That's more or less it in terms of plot, but the director, together with co-scripter Abdelhadi Samih, fills the narrative with telling details that make the characters full-bodied figures even when they have little to do. For Fettah, his inner life is verbalised through voiceovers, addressed to young Wisal (Wisal Hatimi) whom he assures won't be abandoned in thought, and whom he enjoins to watch over the village when he's gone. Fettah can't explain why he has this urge to leave: "You who live beyond the horizon, why do you have such power over me?" he asks himself. Unlike numerous Moroccan films addressing the desperation of so many would-be emigrants, "Atlantic." doesn't identify economic or social reasons for Fettah's need to move on (aside from a drop in fish stocks). Some may suggest that's because the director is Dutch rather than a local, making him less connected to the pressing crisis in the country, yet by fashioning his pro tag as less of a stereotyped everyman, van Ewijk allows him to live and breathe as a person rather than a symbol. Certainly knowledge of the immigration issue is practically a prerequisite for a full appreciation, but since Fettah isn't limited to a particular social problem, his desires are given the kind of free range one expects from a guy who spends a lot of time windsurfing.

Nevertheless, the film remains very site-specific, and its visuals are grounded in Morocco's coastal landscape. Expansive scenes of nature alternate with shots of immediate intimacy, so that gliding camerawork — including stunning helicopter shots — gives way to closeups generally lensed above, or below, or to the side, but rarely straight-on.

A large part of the film's success comes from the way it captures the symbiotic relationship between Fettah and the waves, and the way he plays within nature's rhythms. Exhilarating windsurfing shots won't disappoint those expecting that sort of thing, yet there's far more here than surfer thrills.

Music, often consisting of minor key strings, can be a touch overdone. The period in the title is unexplained (van Ewijk also used the punctuation in his debut feature, "Nu."), and probably not worth the semiotic guesswork of wondering whether it has some deeper meaning relating to ending one stage of life and starting another.

Film Review: 'Atlantic.'

Reviewed at Dubai Film Festival (Arabian Nights), Dec. 16, 2014. (Also in Rotterdam Film Festival — Limelight; Gothenburg Film Festival — Five Continents; Berlin Film Festival — market; 2014 Toronto, Busan film festivals.)

Running time: 94 MIN.

PRODUCTION: (Netherlands-Belgium-Germany-Morocco) A Cinemien (in Netherlands) release of an Augustus Film presentation of an Augustus Film, MAN's Films, Endorphine Prod., Propellor Film, NTR Television Atlantic. production. (International sales: Fortissimo, Amsterdam.) Produced by Bero Beyer. Co-producers, Marion Haensel, Fabian Massah, Jan-Willem van Ewijk.

CREW: Directed by Jan-Willem van Ewijk. Screenplay, van Ewijk, Abdelhadi Samih. Camera (color, HD), Jasper Wolf; editor, Mona Braeuer; music, Piet Swerts, Mourad Belouadi; production designer, Karim Haffad; costume designer, Asmae Afif; sound, Christian Monheim, Gervaise Demeure, Franco Piscopo; line producers, Marianne Lambert, Souad Lamriki; associate producers, Noelle Haitsma, Steven Novick, Aron Thompson, Philip Meyers, Karl Dillon, Hans Oerlemans, Marina Blok, Sandra Beerends, Astrid Prickaerts; assistant director, Amine Lamriki; casting, Aziza Marzak.

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