

Under the shadow of Cassavetes

Labyrinths in Lisbon - love stories, naturally...

It first premiered at the Lisbon Village Festival, a triumphant night. Commissioned by the event and made on digital video with almost no budget, the new Bruno de Almeida film made a very strong impression in an audience packed with the cinema community. Then, the movie was blown up to 35mm and mixed on Dolby digital sound, the final touches needed for a much expected commercial release. A few days ago the movie played at the Fantasporto Film Festival and came back with the Special Jury Award. Now, there it is: a commercially release on a few selected screens across the country.

You need to go see it quickly, before it gets devoured by the market rules, which would be a nasty thing to happen. The Lovebirds is a Portuguese movie like no other. Bilingual in its cast and it's dialogue; more American than Portuguese in its form; but not in its tenderness; from New York - where the director lived more than twenty years and became a filmmaker - it brought the attitude of non conforming to the rules, either of the big industry that exist over there, or, the small one that exists here under the shadow of the government subsidies. Bringing together Michael Imperioli, Joaquim de Almeida, Drena de Niro, Ana Padrão, John Ventimiglia, Rogério Samora, Nick Sandow, Johnny Frey, Fernando Lopes and a few more - even the magnate Joe Berardo - to appear in a single movie seems impossible, as it would seem impossible to shoot it in two weeks. Right? No, it's not. Bruno de Almeida proves it with this kaleidoscope of stories that take place in one night, in the port city by the Tagus River. Some dramatic, some comedic, some tough, some tender. And my heart weeps, filling itself up and falling into the abyss - if a critic can quote the poet Cesário - for seeing Alfama rhyme with Cassavetes, in the love for the actors and for the moments, and for assuming that the perfection of the shot is not important, what matters is what pulses inside of us and what makes us tremble. I'm not saying that The Lovebirds is a perfect movie - if ever there is one - I'm saying that it is a movie that breathes energy into the Portuguese cinema that it desperately needs (and how beautiful to see the complicity of Fernando Lopes when he says that to film is to resist and to survive). I'm saying that it entertains me, it moves me, it surprises me, it makes me want to see more movies from this filmmaker. The rest it's dust.

Jorge Leitão Ramos copyright Expresso

Jornal de Notícias
March 13, 2008

The Lisbon pulse

Six stories about love, of being in love or its impossibility, during the course of one night, like so many others, in several places around Lisbon. New York based, the director Bruno de Almeida is already a strong name in the portuguese cinema, known for, among others, his documentaries on Amália, which were shown on portuguese television. Returning to fiction, a decade after "On the Run", he knits a puzzle of stories that on the whole give us a realistic sense of life, sad, happy, tragic and hopeful.

An elegant and deep exercise, proving once more, if it was still necessary, that the secret lies on the search and on the discovery, in the truth that is inside of us and on the refusal of the easy. For those who are acquainted with other films by Bruno de Almeida, like the major and definitive work on Amália Rodrigues, know that the director dominates the camera and film language and that he only speaks about what he knows - but then he give us all of himself. This time, and as always in his fiction, it's all about life. Be it a man that meets a woman that reminds him his dead wife and then finds a family completely detached from what he knows, but so alive and genuine, an archaeologist that refuses to leave the pit and return to the outside world, or a director - amazing homage to Fernando Lopes and his "Belarmino" - that has to get from his actor the best he has to give, even at the expense of his own survival. An unique movie, that touches us so much, "The lovebirds" was shot in record time under a commission made by the Lisbon Village Festival, the digital film festival that had its second edition last year. A film made by a portuguese man, even if it captures the pulse of Lisbon as seen from the outside, made with portuguese actors, but not only, and about us, particularly the ones that live in the capital - or in the many "villages" that exist in this city, "The Lovebirds" it's a pearl in our cinema that no movie lover can afford to miss.

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