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Arabian Nights

Nuits D'Arabie (Luxembourg - Belgium - Austria)

By ALISSA SIMON

A Samsa Film (Luxembourg)/Artemis Prods. (Belgium)/Allegro Film (Austria) production, in association with BL Film. Produced by Claude Waringo. Co-producers, Patrick Quinet, Helmut Grasser. Directed by Paul Kieffer. Screenplay, Kieffer, Philippe Blasband.

With: Jules Werner, Sabrina Ouazani, Anne-Marie Solvi, Marco Lorenzini, Nargis Benamor. (French, Luxembourgish, Arabic dialogue)

A Luxembourg man's obsession with an Algerian woman leads to tragedy in tightly structured European co-production "Arabian Nights," whose underlying theme deals with Westerners' misconceptions of the Arab world. Boasting fine perfs and production values to match, helmer Paul Kieffer's compelling drama is first-rate fest material that should attract even wider auds in ancillary. Pic opened in Luxembourg theaters in November.

When handsome young train conductor Georges (Jules Werner) first meets Yamina (Sabrina Ouazani) en route from Luxembourg City to Bettembourg, she's just a passenger whose ticket he needs to inspect. But the next day, she's aboard the train again, on the run from mysterious assailants.

Yamina refuses to go to the police, so kindly Georges offers her a hiding place in his holiday cabin. As she shares her story, his compassion grows into fascination, friendship and maybe even love.

For naive Georges, who ruefully notes he's traveled enough miles to span the globe without ever having been anywhere, Yamina reps an exciting -- and exotic -- distraction in his well-ordered life. When she suddenly disappears, Georges determines to find her at any cost, discovering along the way that neither she nor Algeria is anything like what he expected.

From leads to supporting roles, perfs are strong yet nuanced. Gorgeous lensing by French d.p. Jean-Louis Sonzogni (working with a high-tech HDW-F900R camera) supports the storyline with two distinct looks -- everyday realism in Luxembourg and a more allegorical feel for the Algerian desert.

Other tech credits are fine, with Jeannot Sanavia's haunting score a standout.

Camera (color, HD-to-35mm), Jean-Louis Sonzogni; editor, Thierry Faber; music, Jeannot Sanavia; production designers, Veronique Sacre, Ramdane Kacer; costume designers, Magdalena Labuz, Fatiha Benslimane; sound, Carlo Thoss, Thomas Gauder; associate producer, Jani Thiltges. Reviewed at Dubai Film Festival (Arabian Nights), Dec. 13, 2007. Running time: 110 MIN.

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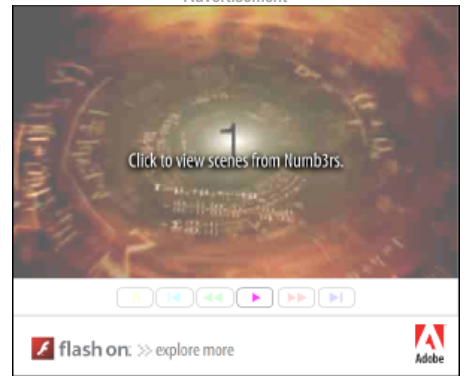
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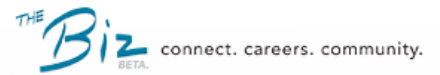
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