

AGENDA

REVIEW

Conversations on flight and loss

A Ticket to Atlantis offers a surprisingly moving, and timely, seaside performance

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: For some theater lovers, an evening's entertainment entails a comfortable separation between audience and performer. Those needing this sort of splendid isolation might be a bit bewildered by "A Ticket to Atlantis," which has briefly revived Ain al-Mreisseh's historic ladies beach.

Ultimately, the sustained, dreamlike lyricism the players accomplish during this multi-media performance more than compensates for the slight inconvenience of theatrical immersion.

"Atlantis" has been devised by Lina Issa and Mayar Alexan, a pair of Syrian- and Dutch-trained performers, with Argentine composer-multi-instrumentalist Santiago Cordoba, who accompanies each performance live.

Its makers cast the show as an exploration of the relationship between the human body and the sea. Taking its departure from the experiences of migrants who have fled disaster by sea, the piece proposes a link between the human desire for safe haven and the legend of the drowned city of Atlantis, while alleviating the burden of identity.

"Atlantis" isn't theater driven by dialogue and plot but a modular composition bereft of both. What semblance of narrative it does have is expressed during a sequence of metronomic monologues in the midst of the performance.

This "act" of the play is sandwiched between two other pre-recorded monologues in which Cordoba's music and Issa and Alexan's, sometimes ritually inflected, movement are central features.

The performance space is the former Ajram ladies beach – a concrete ledge extending for a dozen or so metres from the Ain al-Mreisseh seafront, where an ensemble of squat historic structures shields the proceedings from the Corniche's traffic.

Audience members are never allowed to feel separate. As they descend toward the water, individuals encounter Issa – who encourages each to perform a brief (non-religious) ritual act before taking a seat.

Apparatus are distributed for



In the second act of the show, audience members move to flotation devices.



Mayar Alexan and Lina Issa, in the third act of the show.

individuals to listen to a recorded monologue in standard Arabic (English-language typescripts are available). The conceit of the play's first, highly poetic mode is that the sea is sentient, with a memory of the human beings that have physically interacted with her.

The narrator depicts a woman

who comes to swim daily, a ritual she performs to grieve the loss of her husband, who himself drowned at sea. Though the language makes the monologue less universally accessible than other facets of the play, there is a lovely sensitivity in how the physicality of the woman's movement through the sea – and how she

and the sea mingle – is depicted.

For those leery of the childish tropes of Disney-style personification, Issa and Alexan's characterisation of this body of water is intriguingly adult – at once curious about the humans that move atop her and impervious to the sentimentality humans feel when other members of the species drown,

PHOTOGRAPHY



Mayar Alexan performs in the first act of the show.



The audience listens to a recorded testimonial, told from the perspective of the sea.

Photos by Ria Hajj

Cannibals terrorize Venice in horror film Bad Batch

By Ella Ide
Agence France Presse

VENICE, Italy: Ana Lily Amirpour's "Bad Batch" is a cannibal love story starring Jim Carrey and Keanu Reeves. The up-and-coming Iranian-American director compared her savage fairytale, screening in the Venice film festival's Critics' Week program, to an orgasm.

"Bad Batch" is the hotly anticipated follow-up to Amirpour's Farsi-speaking vampire Western "A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night," 2014, which tells the tale of a young woman who wanders the deserted nighttime streets in a futuristic wasteland version of the United States.

In the new film British actor Suki Waterhouse (of "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies"), stars as Arlen, a misfit who is cast out into the desert. There she is captured by a community of cannibals and eaten bit by bit, kept alive to ensure her flesh stays fresh as one by one her limbs get the chop.

Salvation not only from the cooking pot but the nightmarish society may lie with cannibal Miami Man (Jason Momoa from "Game of Thrones"), whose child Miel (Jayda

Fink) Arlen takes under her wing.

U.S. stars Keanu Reeves and Jim Carrey have smaller but key roles as a commune leader and hermit in the story, which critics read as a cautionary tale for today's American society.

"At a time when presidential candidate Donald Trump is advocating the construction of a physical wall to protect the national purity of the American population," Variety magazine wrote, "the story of exiling undesirables to a fenced-off wasteland "doesn't sound all that dystopian."

In researching the film, she spent

Amirpour told the world's oldest film festival that the "action-adventure fairytale" is "a love letter" to America.

She said she had been influenced by Robert Zemeckis' 1984 action adventure "Romancing the Stone," as well as the Westerns she used to watch with her father.

In researching the film, she spent a year getting to know a community of people who live "off the grid" in the desert in California in a place called "Slab City," and said most of

the extras used had been locals.

Waterhouse, 24, a former model, said she had been drawn to the role from the very first moment, but playing it had felt "like I was an orange being peeled. I was absolutely terrified and stayed terrified throughout."

Amirpour said she had had no qualms about presenting slapstick master Carrey – famed for films such as "Ace Ventura" (1994) and "Bruce Almighty" (2003) – with a non-speaking role as "I feel like in a way he is the hermit."

"I'm just trying to figure out who I am," she said. "It's this huge, massive thing, figuring out who you are. You have to constantly strip it back down to its basic elements."

"You have to devastate your reality and everything you know, how you understand the system that you exist in, to be able to evaluate yourself," she said.

In addition to self-analysis, there is also an element of self-pleasure to the film, she said, particularly in the choice of the soundtrack, which is dominated by Brooklyn electro duo Darkside. "Explaining how I picked the music would be like explaining how I have sex," she said. "It's very hard to explain, it just feels right and turns me on so much and then I'm just coming all over place."

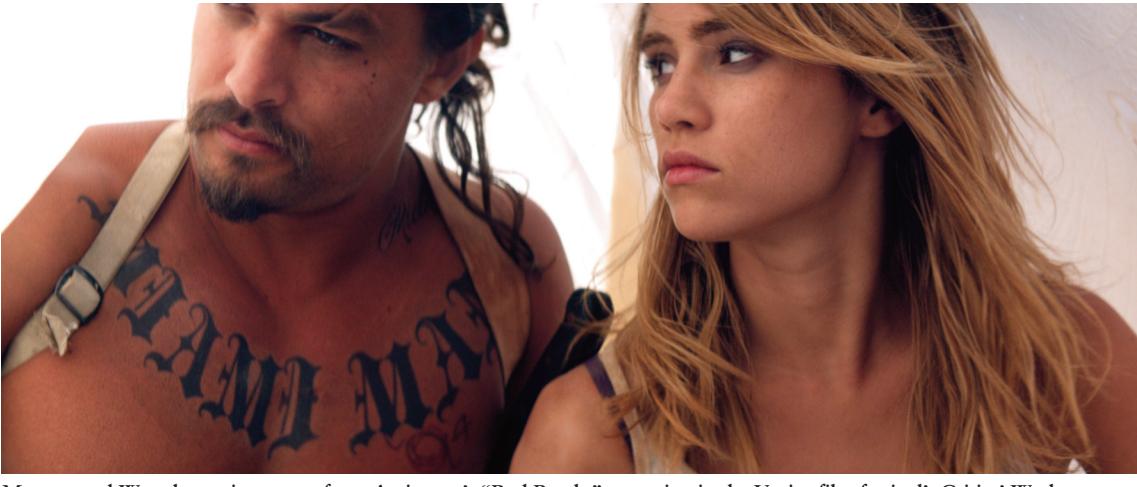


Photo courtesy of the Venice Film Festival

JUST A THOUGHT

The cure for anything is salt water: sweat, tears or the sea.

Isak Dinesen
(1885-1962)
Danish author