



fish

Skies of Lebanon

(France 2021)

Spoiler alert: You may prefer to read this review after the screening

DIRECTOR : Chloe Mazlo

RUNNING TIME : 90mins

RATING :

Synopsis:

Set in 1950, newly-qualified nanny Alice, takes a job in Lebanon. Life is good until the civil war breaks out.

Review: Fabien Lemerrier

Chloé Mazlo delivers a very original and extremely charming feature debut, tackling the history of the Lebanese conflict through a love story, a family, and an approach both poetic and melancholy

Many films were severely hit by the Covid-19 crisis, forced to remain in the starting blocks interminably with release dates pushed further and further back, before being released practically in bulk in cinemas as other events and productions were appearing on the horizon. Among these works slightly sacrificed by our times, some however truly deserve our attention. One of them is *Skies of Lebanon*, the feature debut from French director Chloé Mazlo.

'I want to walk with you along the path that leads to the sky'. We are in Beirut, in the 1950s, and Alice (Italian actress Alba Rohrwacher), who ran away from her Swiss family to work in Lebanon in a family of expats, meets the young astrophysics university student Joseph (Wajdi Mouawad) whose ambition is to build a rocket to send one of his fellow countrymen to space.

A delicate idyll, a wedding, the birth of a daughter, the time happily passing — until 13 April 1975, when a shooting breaks out in town. It's the beginning of the civil war... A conflict that progressively turns upside down the entire existence of Alice and Joseph, of their daughter Mona, and of the rest of the family who comes to take refuge in the two protagonists' apartment, soon packed ('it's like a hotel, in here!'). As the negotiations are relayed on the radio and the violence escalates, making everyday life more and more frightening, a crucial question arises: to leave, or to stay? This choice brings to the surface profound disagreements in the couple, even beyond questions of love and emotion... Cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 20th November 2022

8.15 pm Tuesday 22nd November 2022

Review: Cont.

'To create magical moments despite it all'. In tackling such a dramatic historical topic, Chloé Mazlo could have taken the paths already signposted by many films dealing with war via the microcosm of the family. But this filmmaker, who comes from the world of animation, is an artist equipped with a very singular personality and delivers a very personal film, in a unique style. Punctuated by poetic and handcrafted animated moments in stop-motion, *Skies of Lebanon* builds a fictional universe around an apartment with fascinating décor, providing a perfect backdrop for the talent of Alba Rohrwacher and the heart of this fascinating story to flourish.

Based on a script written by the director together with Yacine Badday, this tale interweaves individual destinies and collective tremors, like a series of family pictures detailing a travel through time to a paradise found before it is lost.

Source: www.cineuropa.com Fabien Lemercier 30/6/21~ Edited extracts accessed 9/8/22

Review: Glenn Kenny

In the popular imagination of the West, Lebanon is most frequently invoked as a place of ruin and strife, not romance and enchantment. The debut feature from the filmmaker Chloé Mazlo, *Skies of Lebanon*, is, among other things, an intriguing swing of the pendulum of depiction.

Starring the Italian actress Alba Rohrwacher, the movie opens in 1977, as Alice, her character, is leaving the country. On board a ship, she begins writing a letter. In the first of many visual surprises, the movie switches modes, to stop-motion animation, as Alice recounts an oppressive 1950s childhood in Switzerland. After training to become an au pair, she takes an assignment as far from home as available: to Beirut.

The Lebanese capital is here depicted via diorama-like frames with vintage photos for backgrounds. The effect is storybook. So is the narrative, for a while: Every day Alice takes her infant charge to a small cafe, and there she meets Joseph (Wajdi Mouawad), a charming rocket engineer whom she'll fall in love with and marry.

Their life is beautiful, for a while. Alice's extended family is delightful and the couple's daughter, Mona, is sensitive and talented. The movie's treatment of the civil war that rips Lebanon apart, and eventually shatters Alice's world, is mixed. The depiction of how ordinary people try to insulate themselves from civic strife (a scene in which a pyjama party is interrupted by an air raid, for instance) is sharp. Showing the warring factions as two small gangs on a street corner — divided by a pile of sandbags, with fighters costumed in masks and in one case a feather boa — feels glib.

The movie's openheartedness eventually wins the day, though.

Source: www.nytimes.com : GlennKenny ~ 21/7/2022

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Some Thoughts on: *Riders of Justice*

This wonderful Danish film came with an incredible reputation and much critical support. It didn't disappoint. This to me, was a real highlight in what has been a most varied and high quality FISH season so far.

This film had everything. Great humour, an emotional and engaging family in crisis, suspense, violence and a biting look at many aspects of modern life. The direction was superb, paced perfectly to reveal all the twists and turns in this ludicrously funny and moving tale of fate, love, loss, revenge, life governing algorithms, missed opportunities, forgiveness and the crucial understanding of how important it is to have the ability to reassemble combat equipment in a shootout with murderous bikie gang members.

I loved the sympathetic treatment of the 'nerds' in this film. At first seen as just ridiculous and obsessive compulsive, they develop into an engaging and essential team, demonstrating skills and flaws just like everyone else. Multi skilled too, they proved equally adept at offering psychological advice to grief and loss sufferers, as well as being probability experts. Hilarious. Stories of 'losers' banding together to overcome the odds in films like the Stephen King's story *Stand by Me* and in his *It* as well, were brought to mind with this little gang of Scandi computer whizzes. Great stuff.

Modern technology came in for a bit of critical examination when the facial recognition technology let them all down so critically. So topical when you consider China's current usage, Bunnings out here and the hacking issues with Medibank and Optus. The great digital age of simplicity and efficiency isn't always as effective as it's cracked up to be. Oh for the good old days of quill and parchment!

The casting of this outing was spot on. From the villains, to the damaged family and, of course, to the statistically driven predictors and algorithm writers, all delivered strong performances delighting, frightening and amusing and eliciting empathy in equal measure.

I loved this film. In fact, I loved it so much, that after the Tuesday night screening, I watched it again on the following Friday night on SBS World Movies. It's still there on On Demand, so if you missed the FISH screenings, you don't have to miss out at all!!

Thank you FISH, but most of all, thank you Denmark!!!

Ross Armfield.

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COMING UP:

December

Antoinette in the Cevennes
[France]

Sunday 11th & Tuesday 13th

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Message from the President

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge my appreciation to the committee members for all they have done during my enforced absence.

Thanks to Ross Armfield for another great review.

I would also like to express our thanks to Ed Fisher for his email below. It is always reassuring to read such positive comments and I can assure him we are delighted when members send us reviews.

Sandra Gillespie

I have just returned home after the Sunday screening of 'Riders of Justice'. After reading Jay Weissber's review there is no way I could improve on that but I simply felt compelled to make a comment on what was a gripping experience and very memorable. To call it black comedy touches only part of it, I think I went through a whole gambit of emotions. It was 116 minutes of sheer breathtaking enjoyment and eye-popping violence. I did join in with the applause at the end of the film as it was certainly well deserved.

While in the past I have been tempted to make a comment but have resisted as I imagine you get flooded with such tomes. I do, however, want to congratulate the selection committee for the outstanding films you have presented over the last several months. Sure, some have been better than others but all have been engrossing and thought provoking. The overall standard has been very impressive. I understand that you don't get to view these movies beforehand and the selection is made on reviews etc. That in itself makes it more impressive that you can gain so much insight from the material you have been given to read.

With good wishes, please keep up the great work.

Ed Fisher.



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