

FIDELIO: ALICE'S ODYSSEY

Written and Directed by Lucie Borleteau

2014 / 97 min / French, Romanian, English, Tagalog, Norwegian w/ English Subtitles

Digital (DCP & BluRay)



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Synopsis

Lucie Borleteau makes her feature directing debut with this insightful study of a woman situated in an almost exclusively male milieu. Sailor Alice (Ariane Labed) joins the freighter *Fidelio* as a replacement engineer, soon discovering that the captain, Gaël (Melvil Poupaud), is a man with whom she was once romantically involved. Though she leaves behind a fiancé on land (Anders Danielsen Lie, *Oslo, August 31st*), she finds her feelings for Gaël have not abated. Buttressed by a remarkable international cast, *Fidelio: Alice's Odyssey* presents a rounded portrait of a passionate woman faced with difficult choices. Greek actress Labed won Best Actress at Locarno for her memorable performance. *Fidelio* was nominated for two César Awards including Best Debut Feature. (Text from *Rendez-Vous with French Cinema*, 2015)

VARIETY

Film Review: 'Fidelio: Alice's Odyssey

In shadowing a female engineer at sea, this seductive love triangle toys with conservative notions of desire against a seldom-examined, male-dominated work environment.

Peter Debruge- Chief International Film Critic

Easily the most fascinating film to come along and challenge traditional gender roles in the past year, "Fidelio: Alice's Odyssey" chronicles a sexually liberated female sailor's voyage of self-discovery aboard an old freighter, where she fights for respect among the randy crew — including the handsome captain, with whom she shares a romantic past — while her faithful partner anxiously awaits her return. Anchored by a courageous lead performance and steered by a fresh-voiced distaff helmer showing impressive command of both atmosphere and subtext, Lucie Borleteau's emotionally complex, logistically daunting debut should find receptive berth among discriminating fests and specialty venues.

Likened by her landlocked lover, Felix (Anders Danielsen Lie), to a mermaid at several points, Alice (Ariane Labed) seems to become a different person when at sea. The Alice he knows is passionate and attentive, almost girlishly smitten with her man. Then duty calls, intruding upon their idyll as Alice is drawn to the ocean, where she must toughen her skin in order to survive for weeks at a time as the lone female assigned to a vast cargo ship called the Fidelio — whose none-too-subtle allusions to faithfulness are not only central to Borleteau's examination, but also echoed by a diary she finds in her cabin.

The journal belongs to the aging vessel's previous engineer, whom Alice has been called in to replace. Reading her predecessor's most intimate (and frequently carnal) confessions, she takes her post as a marine mechanic amid so many sex-starved men, fending off their snide jokes and inappropriate advances from the moment she steps aboard. And yet, being a mature, 30-year-old woman, and French, she reserves the right to engage with her colleagues without that meaning they are suddenly entitled to objectify her. Naturally, this makes for a complex work environment — especially since the Fidelio's captain, Gael (Melvil Poupaud), is someone she hooked up with years earlier as a cadet.

Inviting an air of mystery into this foreign, blue-collar world, where human characters are dwarfed by massive machinery and accidents can have fatal consequences, Borleteau constructs the film's interpersonal dynamics more from body language than from explicitly spoken dialogue. Besides, both the boat and the ocean supply commotion enough, from the constant white-noise churn of waves below to the low, steady rumble of the engines, faithfully reproduced in the robust sound design, which completes the almost documentary illusion that this elegantly lensed widescreen pic was shot at sea.

The film itself was launched at the Locarno Film Festival, which favors projects whose artistic sensibilities tend to flounder in the commercial marketplace. "Fidelio" happens to be more accessible than most, but could still prove challenging beyond its native France, where it was released to generally positive reviews the day before Christmas. In the absence of eloquent interpersonal interactions (complicated enough by the conflicting languages spoken by the ship's crew), audiences must pay careful attention to subtle cues: Alice is outgoing and openly flirtatious with her colleagues, but icy at first toward Gael. In short order, however, that awkwardness melts to reveal a vulnerable woman still quite conflicted about the memory of the attraction they once shared — and rightfully wary of how it could threaten the good thing she has back home.

Like her male colleagues, she's susceptible to loneliness when away from port for too long — more than that, for the film unabashedly acknowledges that her yearning is sexual. Watching "Fidelio," it's hard not to remark how seldom contemporary filmmakers allow women to be the proactive agents of desire. As a narrative creation, Alice doesn't exist merely to excite male characters. We experience the movie through her eyes, juggling the temptations put before her, pining for the partner she left behind and dealing with the consequences of her actions, all running parallel to her unique professional activities. It's a refreshing depiction set in a truly unique setting. While the demands of shooting aboard a ship were no doubt great, so, too, are its rewards.

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/fidelio-alices-journey-fidelio-lodysee-726528>

THE **Hollywood** **REPORTER**

'Fidelio: Alice's Odyssey ('Fidelio: L'odysee d'Alice'): Locarno Review

8/20/2014 by Neil Young

The Bottom Line: Promising debut navigates the hazardous crosscurrents of work, love, sex and gender

Lucie Borleteau's globe-trotting romantic drama premiered at the Swiss festival, winning Best Actress for Ariane Labed

High passions on the high seas propel *Fidelio: Alice's Odyssey* (*Fidelio: L'odysee d'Alice*), one of the more accessibly mainstream world premieres at Locarno this year. Built four-square around Ariane Labed's engaging turn as eponymous sailor Alice, this feature debut from actress-turned-writer-director Lucie Borleteau strikes a delicate balance between the sensual and the matter-of-fact.

Labed's Best Actress prize in Switzerland, to add to her similar gong for the much edgier *Attenberg* in Venice four years ago, will boost both the Greece-born performer's rising international status and box-office prospects for French production *Fidelio* at home and abroad. Juggling romantic, dramatic and melodramatic elements against an unusual nautical backdrop, Borleteau shows sufficient ambition to ensure a fair wind of critical support.

Even her title hints at wide-ranging cultural depths, combining as it does Beethoven, Homer and Lewis Carroll. And there's also a nod towards Antonioni via the detail that the much-traveled freighter *Fidelio* was previously known as the *Eclipse*, back when Alice (Labed) first served aboard in her earliest days below decks. But Borleteau's screenplay, co-written with Clara Bourreau, proves sufficiently watertight to proceed under its own creative steam and to withstand the tempests of some credibility-straining third-act developments.

Stated baldly, *Fidelio* deals with fidelity: both in terms of individuals' commitment to their partners, and also to their own ideals. Alice seems happily settled with her landlubbing nice guy, Norwegian boyfriend Felix (Anders Danielsen Lie), even though the nature of her job — she's a ship's mechanic — means they are often physically apart for months on end. And while the wonders of Skype provide a measure of consoling "face time," it soon becomes apparent that Alice operates by the maritime maxim "what happens at sea stays at sea."

Joining the crew of the *Fidelio* to replace the recently deceased Patrick, she's startled to discover that the Captain is dishy old flame Gael (Melvil Poupaud). Romantic and professional complications duly ensue, an extra dimension of psychological intricacy added when Alice happens across Patrick's diaries (read in voiceover by Luc Catania), and contrasts his solitary private life with her own uninhibited explorations of sexuality.

Feminist aspects of *Fidelio* are present if unstressed, Borleteau mostly avoiding the clichés of the woman-in-a-man's-world subgenre to explore, in tandem with the ever-game Labeed, the universe of her proudly independent, self-confident heroine ("I'll never be a normal girl," she assures the perplexedly conventional Gael). Frank in its depiction of bedroom shenanigans, but discreet in its coital cuts, the film presents a convincingly detailed panorama of work, rest and play in the artificial, enclosed environment of the merchant marine.

In this aspect it recalls another recent Francophone picture named after an oceangoing vessel, Frederick Pelletier's underappreciated Quebecois production *Diego Star* (2013), although Borleteau and Bourreau are much less concerned with analyzing issues of exploitation and managerial dereliction.

The latter does pop up in the closing stages, competing for attention with a somewhat clunkily handled imperilment of Alice and Felix's relationship. By this stage, however, Borleteau and her collaborators have done more than enough to retain audience interest and sympathy, cinematographer Simon Beaufils' 2.35:1 widescreen compositions encompassing intimate cabin close-ups and two-shots along with suitably exhilarating vistas for fleet glimpses of distant foreign shores.

<http://blogs.indiewire.com/sydneylevine/10-rising-french-talents-to-watch-20150705>

10 Rising French Talents to Watch!

By Sydney Levine | Sydneys Buzz

July 5, 2015 at 10:00AM

Unifrance films is ready to bet that you will certainly hear about these ten talented people in the near future.

Ariane Labeled



Born in Greece to French parents, Ariane Labeled has always navigated between her two countries. She studied drama at the University of Provence and began her acting career threading the boards. After setting up a company combining dance and theater, Ariane Labeled returned to live in Greece where she played at the National Theater of Athens. 2010 was the year of her first film, "Attenberg," directed by Athiná-Rachél Tsangári. "Alps" by Yorgos Lanthimos, the following year, confirmed the talent of this strangely charming actress.

Two years later, she starred in "Before Midnight" by Richard Linklater where she played the role of Anna. The follow-up to "Before Sunrise" and "Before Sunset," this third part of the saga was a great success, making Labeled known to a wider audience.

In 2014, she played a young sailor in "Fidelio, Alice's Odyssey," who is torn between faithfulness and her desire to live her life. Winning the best actress award at the Locarno Film Festival and nominated for a César, the French actress gives a brilliant performance in Lucie Borleteau's first feature-length film. She joined Yorgos Lanthimos in Cannes in 2015, where he won the Prix du Jury for his film "The Lobster."

Cast & Crew

Director: Lucie Borleteau

Screenwriters: Lucie Borleteau, Clara Bourreau (collaborator: Mathilde Boisseleau)

Cast: Ariane Labed, Melville Poupaud, Anders Danielsen Lie, Nathanael Maini, Bogdan Zamfir, Jan Priva, Luc Catania

Producers: Marine Arrighi de Casanova, Pascal Caucheteux

Cinematographer: Simon Beaufils

Production designer: Sidney Dubois

Costume designer: Sophie Begon

Editor: Guy Lecorne