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Besouro -- Film Review

By Deborah Young, February 16, 2010 04:01 ET



"Besouro"

Bottom Line: Martial arts meet Brazilian history in an original mythic story.

BERLIN -- Local Afro-Brazilian myth springs to life in the entertaining "Besouro," that rare martial arts film that has an engrossing story to tell and a social point to make. Here the focus is on Capoeira players, who, lead by the legendary hero Besouro, combine acrobatic dancing and fighting to liberate themselves from the oppression of a white plantation owner.

This first feature by Joao Daniel Tikhomiroff, a veteran director of commercials, is enlivened by well-choreographed action scenes set amid the breathtaking natural sanctuary of Brazil's Chapada Diamantina. High production values could earn it some cross-cultural video release targeting teen audiences.

Set in the jungles of Bahia in the 1920s, the tale is firmly grounded in its historical time and place, when rich white landowners exploited black workers like slaves, even after the nominal abolition of slavery. The action begins when Master Alipio (Macale), who has taught the art of Capoeira to Besouro, Dinora and Quero-Quero since they were children, is brutally murdered on the orders of Col. Venancio, the young plantation owner. The Colonel's attempt to nip rebellion in the bud has just the opposite effect, and from beyond the grave, Master Alipio urges his young student Besouro (played by the athletic Ailton Carmo, a professional Capoeira player) to fight for his people.

Escaping to the jungle to prepare himself for heroic deeds to come, Besouro receives magical powers that allow him to fly and make his body virtually impenetrable. Some of the film's finest sequences involve his initiation into the forces of nature by the wind and water goddess Orixá. As his consciousness enters the bodies of a flying beetle and then a frog, the camera assumes the animals' point of view as they fly through the air and dive underwater.

As the legendary hero, handsome Carmo flashes but one intense expression between convincing athletic leaps, unaided by the stiff dialogue. Jessica Barbosa makes a noteworthy screen debut in the dual roles of Orixá and the beautiful, independent-minded Dinora, who eventually becomes

Besouro's lover. Both she and her jealous ex, Quero-Quero (Anderson Santos de Jesus), are genuine Capoeira players who perform in several dynamic action scenes.



Tikhomiroff's direction is muscular and efficient, but takes time out for some very poetic moments set in the magical world of nature. Underlining the cross-over with martial arts movies is the aerial fighting choreography by Hong Kong master Huen Chiu Ku, who worked on "Matrix" and "Kill Bill" as well as a number of Jet Li films.

Music is varied and surprising, with a closing song sung by Gilberto Gil.

Venue: Berlin International Film Festival -- Panorama

Production: Mixer, Miravista, Globo Filmes, Teleimage

Director: Joao Daniel Tikhomiroff

Screenwriter: Patricia Andrade

Cast: Ailton Carmo, Jessica Barbosa, Anderson Santos de Jesus, Flavio Rocha, Irandhir Santos, Macale.

Producers: Vicente Amorim, Joao Daniel Tikhomiroff, Gil Ribeiro, Michel Tikhomiroff

Associate producer: Daniel Filho

Director of photography: Enrique Chediak

Production designer: Claudio Amaral Peixoto

Music: Pupillo, Tejo Damasceno, Rica Amabis, Gilberto Gil

Costume designer: Bia Salgado

Editor: Gustavo Giani


Sales agent. Shoreline Entertainment

No rating, 95 minutes

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