

A Wolf at the Door: San Sebastian Review

12:02 PM PDT 9/27/2013 by Stephen Farber



The Bottom Line

An adulterous affair leads to tragedy in this taut Brazilian variation on "Fatal Attraction."

Venue

San Sebastian Film Festival

Director

Fernando Coimbra

Director Fernando Coimbra's dark thriller delves into events that led to a kidnapping.

While *Prisoners*, a disturbing thriller about child abduction, is attracting American audiences, an even darker film on the same theme was showcased at this year's San Sebastian Film Festival. Brazil's *A Wolf at the Door* opens with a mother arriving to pick up her young daughter at school, only to learn that the girl already left with another woman. From that point on, the film takes increasingly sinister turns as it delves into the events that led to the girl's kidnapping. Director **Fernando Coimbra** has described the film as a modern-day variation on Medea, which provides a hint on where this story will be heading. Coimbra was also inspired by some news stories in South America that suggest why the Greek tragedy is not outdated. The film does not take audiences on an easy ride, and it's an utterly compelling and indelible drama. If it is sold as a thriller like *Prisoners*, it might have a small audience in America, but distribution will be an uphill battle.

After the kidnapping, the Rio de Janeiro police interview the girl's mother, Sylvia (**Fabiula Nascimento**), her father, Bernardo (**Milhem Cortaz**), and Bernardo's mistress, Rosa (**Leandra Leal**). These opening scenes are somewhat confusing, as each of the three tells a different version of events, and the stories do not mesh. Later, however, Rosa offers to tell the true story of what happened, and we have to take this version as the only authentic one. Although Bernardo claims that he told Rosa when he met her that he was married, she insists she did not know he had a family until they had already begun a passionate affair. Eventually he tries to break up with her to return to his family, but by this time, Rosa has become obsessed with him and also finds herself pregnant.

At this point, the film begins to echo *Fatal Attraction*, with Rosa becoming increasingly deranged as she pursues Bernardo and secretly ingratiating herself with Sylvia and her daughter. The two women strike up a friendship that Bernardo does not discover until much later. Unlike **Glenn Close** in *Fatal Attraction*, Rosa is a comprehensible and even tragic figure rather than a crazed Medusa. Leal's performance is extraordinary. In the opening scenes, the actress, who bears a resemblance to **Annette Bening**, is remarkably sensual and alluring, but she convincingly portrays Rosa's gradual disintegration. Rosa's own home life is impoverished and constricted, so she understandably clings to the idea of romance with Bernardo as an escape from her drab existence. Bernardo is also far less sympathetic than **Michael Douglas** in *Fatal Attraction*. His brutal reaction to Rosa's pregnancy is as shocking as Rosa's final act of revenge and makes it possible to understand if not condone her behavior.

Leal's performance is always astonishingly raw and vivid. Cortaz, by contrast, sometimes seems over-the-top in his outbursts of anger. Other performances are solid. One disappointment is that the film fails to show us much of Rio, but the director clearly wanted to confine us in the narrow, oppressive universe of the characters. In addition to its examination of romantic turmoil, the film also manages to incorporate some timely comments about the dangers of easy access to guns, a theme that must resonate all over the world. This intense, painful movie lingers in the memory.

Venue: San Sebastian Film Festival

Cast: Leandra Leal, Milhem Cortaz, Fabiula Nascimento, Juliano Cazarre, Paulo Tiefenthaler, Karine Teles

Director-screenwriter: Fernando Coimbra

Producers: Caio Gullane, Fabiano Gullane, Debora Ivanov, Gabriel Lacerda, Rodrigo Castellar, Pablo Torrecillas

Director of photography: Lula Carvalho

Production designer: Tiago Marques

Music: Ricardo Cutz

Editor: Karen Akerman

No rating, 100 minutes.

Link: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/a-wolf-at-door-san-638323>