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Masquerades: A Lyes Salem debut feature

Lyes Salem talks about casting himself in the lead of his first feature length film

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Image Credit: Supplied photo

Set in the remote Aures mountains of Algeria, Masquerades tells the story of Mounir, a determined young man, whose only dream is to be accepted and appreciated by his fellow men.

As an experienced theatre actor, Lyes Salem knows all too well the challenges of being a director. He knows, for instance, the difficulties many directors face in communicating what can sometimes be complicated and nuanced emotions that they want portrayed on screen.

So when he decided to make his first feature length film, based on a script he wrote five years ago, Salem cast himself in the lead.

"Because I created the character, I knew him better than anyone and I just couldn't see anyone else playing Mounir," he says, reiterating that the decision was not due to budgetary constraints. "I am, after all, an actor who directs."

Masquerades, Salem's debut feature and his third film (he's directed two short films *Lhasa* and *Jean-Fares*), will release this week at Dubai's own art house cinema The Picturehouse for a two-week run.

Watch the trailer:

Set in the remote Aures mountains of Algeria, the film tells the story of Mounir, a determined young man, whose only dream is to be accepted and appreciated by his fellow men.

To attain this, he lies and tells his family he's found a rich suitor for his sister Rym, whom the village is convinced will end up a spinster.

As word spreads, the entire village gets involved. The arrival of the news throws up a number of interesting, often humorous, situations as the village prepares for a non-existent groom.

Salem, a French-Algerian, says he deliberately chose the remote setting because he liked the barren landscape.

"I wanted it to look like a western and wanted the dust and wind to juxtapose the conflicts of the characters and colourful relationships," he says.

"It could also be a microcosm of any society or community anywhere in the world. The theme is universal."

The film, while posing a lot of questions, does not have any message, he adds.

"I want people to make their minds up," he says.

Masquerades has already won a number of international awards including the Muhr Arab Award for Best Film at the Dubai International Film Festival in 2008.

The film will be screened at The Picturehouse, Reel Cinemas, The Dubai Mall from June 3 to 16.