

The National

Think **sport**



Sleep masque

Oliver Good

Last Updated: June 07, 2010 2:38PM UAE / June 7, 2010 10:38AM GMT



Lyès Salem, Sarah Reguieg and Mohamed Bouchaïb in *Masquerades* which has become a sleeper hit, two years after its initial release. *Courtesy Dharamsala*

The story of a shabby, tracksuit-wearing small-town man who fools his neighbours into believing he's found a love-match for his narcoleptic sister, instantly sounds like an indie sleeper hit.

But the film *Masquerades* wasn't created by Wes Anderson, Noah Baumbach, Jared Hess or any of the current wave of American filmmakers who focus on deadpan comedy, dysfunctional families and heartbreaking romantic relationships. Instead, it was made by the first-time filmmaker, Lyès Salem, and set in his home country, Algeria.

The low-budget drama takes place half a world away from that of *Bottle Rocket*, *Napoleon Dynamite*, or any of other films made by the aforementioned auteurs. But just like their breakout movies, *Masquerades* has seen its following grow steadily thanks to dedicated fans and successful film festival appearances. Two years after its initial release, the movie is now being screened at The Picturehouse in Dubai.

"I'm happy it has found an audience," says Salem, who also appears in the film, playing the character Mounir. "Algeria is considered by the other Arabic countries as something different, because our story is mixed up with Europe, and France in particular. But we don't really fit in anywhere. Our language is not the same as the Arabic spoken in places like the Gulf, in fact this film is subtitled so people can understand it in Dubai."