

# Review: Cannes title 'Everybody Loves Touda' is a sparkling example of Nabil Ayouch's work



CANNES: Directed by Morocco's Nabil Ayouch, Cannes Film Festival title "Everybody Loves Touda" is a compelling look at a single mother, Touda (an excellent Nisrin Erradi), who lives by the age-old dictum "never say die."



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Living in a small town, she is a bundle of music and mirth and her dances seem to bring cheer to her audience, but she soon faces unwanted attention.

The Cannes screening ended with a standing ovation, and Ayouch's fourth outing at the festival seemed to garner far more audience appreciation than in earlier years. In 2012, his critically acclaimed drama "Horses of God" played in the Un Certain Regard section, which is second in importance to the main competition and is widely seen as a platform for experimental cinema. But Ayouch has also played in the In Competition section for the coveted Palme d'Or — his 2021 feature "Casablanca Beats," the first title from Morocco since 1962 to vie for this honor, proved a sensation.



Maryam Touzani and Nabil Ayouch attend the "Everybody Loves Touda" Photocall at the 77th annual Cannes Film Festival. (Getty Images)

Like his other movies, Ayouch approaches "Everybody Loves Touda" with fascinating realism that at times may appear a little too harsh. Having written the script with Mayam Touzani ("The Blue Caftan"), Ayouch may have given us formulaic fare, but he infuses Touda with a kind of determination that is awesome. Striving to relocate to Casablanca, where her deaf son would have better schooling and she herself could find greater opportunities, Touda begins to sing in village nightclubs, bearing with a grin the lecherous gaze of men drunk with delusion.

This is not the first time that Ayouch puts women in such precarious positions. His 2008 “Whatever Lola Wants” talks about the trials of a postal worker in New York who dreams of becoming an Egyptian belly dancer, and “Much Loved” (which played at in the Director's Fortnight section) created a storm with its exploration of prostitution in Morocco.

Peppered with lively music (by Flemming Nordkrog), Touda croons folkloric songs on liberation and other forms of women's rights. The actress's gripping performance causes the narrative to sparkle —Erradi has a remarkable on-screen presence that makes the movie a joy to watch.

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