

Review: 'Maria' rests on the shoulders of the superb Angelina Jolie



JEDDAH: One of the most fascinating movies I watched at the recent Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah, “Maria” may not have inched up to reach its great height had it not been for lead star Angelina Jolie. Jolie superbly plays the legendary Maria Callas, a Greek soprano who made Paris her home. The audience is introduced to her a week before her death on Sept. 16, 1977. Frail and pacing up and down her living room, she collapses, and the movie is rewound seven days before her end.



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Like so many celebrities, who came before and after her, Maria leads a wretched life of excesses and miserable loneliness. Director Pablo Larrain's third biopic after "Jackie" (on Jacqueline Kennedy) and "Spencer" (on Princess Diana), the film hardly takes us outside her palatial mansion in the French capital that soon begins to feel like a golden cage. Imprisoned of her own will, Maria's life spirals towards an anticipated end.

We are told how she had travelled a torturous journey from the slums of Nazi-occupied Athens to the European and American concert halls in a narrative that is interspersed with an affair with the Greek magnate Aristotle Onassis.

Though Larrain makes his film seem almost eventless — we follow along as Maria navigates her apartment or wanders through the bourgeoisie neighborhoods of Paris — we sense a storm gathering in a distance as she sinks into self-destruction.

The Chilean work may not have been so compelling had it not been for the exceptional portrayal of Maria by Jolie, who disappears into the character with ease and conviction. She is faultless as an epitome of tragedy and sorrow and this makes the movie eminently watchable.
