

'Transatlantic' on Netflix is a fascinating WWII drama



CHENNAI: Anna Winger's frightening World War II adventure "Transatlantic," now on Netflix, was adapted from Julie Orringer's novel "The Flight Portfolio."

"Transatlantic" will grip viewers with its exciting narrative of how famous painters and writers — many of them Jewish and the others critics of Hitler — were moved from Marseille in unoccupied France under the Vichy regime to Portugal and the US.

Some of them trudged through treacherous paths on mountains to reach Spain.

Some were lucky to get visas to fly to the US. Literary journalist Varian Fry (Cory Michael Smith) and American heiress Mary Jayne Gold (Gillian Jacobs) were responsible for helping many flee France as the German forces closed in on Marseilles.

The first few of the seven episodes — all around 50 minutes — are somewhat dull. It is only in the last couple of segments that the pace picks up and the series gets exhilarating.

The visually captivating “Transatlantic” opens in 1940 in the port city of Marseille at a time when the US had not joined the war. US Consul Graham Patterson is essayed by Carey Stoll as a heartless human being.

Fry and Gold decide to take things in their own hands and form the Emergency Rescue Committee (later known as International Rescue Committee).

At first, Gold has enough resources arriving from her wealthy father back home in America, but he is not happy with his young daughter living in a hostile environment and cuts off the resources.

Fry and Gold then spend their meagre money in accommodating refugees in Hotel Splendide and later Villa Air-Bel using false documents to get as many men and women out of France.

Among them are writer Walter Mehring (Jonas Nay), artist Max Ernst (Alexander Fehling) and philosopher Walter Benjamin (Moritz Bleibtreu). However, many things work against their mission, and in the final run in with the French police, there is tension and turmoil.

An international cast speaking English, German and French give real pep to the limited series. With people shackled up on beaches while others sip coffee in cafes discussing racism and antisemitism, there is always something new to provoke thought in every episode.

However, “Transatlantic” has one flaw — instead of focussing on Fry and Gold’s work, the series veers into covert love affairs. But even then, the underlying levity lifts “Transatlantic” to near glorious heights.
