



Log In | Online Subscription Help | Language Dictionary

Search variety.com SEARCH

Home | 11/2/2011 8:56 P.M. | Text size: a<sup>-</sup> A<sup>+</sup>

Subscribe to VARIETY at 73% off the cover price

Latest News | Latest Reviews | Features | People News | Charts | Opinions | Events | Photos | Videos | VarietyMediaCareers.com

FILM | TV | LEGIT | MUSIC | DIGITAL | INTERNATIONAL | Archives

# Film Reviews

Posted: Wed., Oct. 26, 2011, 4:14pm PT

Share Print

Abu Dhabi Film Festival

## El Gusto

(Documentary -- Ireland-Algeria-France-UAE)

By JAY WEISSBERG

A Quidam Prod. El Gusto, Eikosi Prods., Babylone production, in association with Entreprise Nationale de Television Algerienne, with the participation of the Irish Film Board, Region Paca, La Ville de Paris, Centre Culturel Francais d'Alger, Sanad. (International sales: Babylone Prods., Paris.) Produced by Safinez Bousbia, Heidi Egger, Philippe Maynial. Directed, written by Safinez Bousbia.

With: Mohamed Ferkioui, Mustapha Tahmi, El Hadj El Anka, Rachid Berkani, Ahmed Bernaoui, Liamine Haimoune, Abdel Madjid Meskoud, Mustapha Tahmi, Luc Cherki, Redha El Djilali, Maurice El Medioni, Joseph Hadjaj, Rene Perez, Robert Castel, Jose de Suza. (Arabic, French dialogue)

### OTHER RECENT REVIEWS:

- Asmaa
- Autograph
- Back Door Channels: The Price of Peace
- Children of the Stones -- Children of the Wall
- Once Again
- OK, Enough, Goodbye.

Read other reviews about this film

POWERED BY MROE

**Toe-tapping and infectious on emotional and intellectual levels, "El Gusto" is Algerian-born Safinez Bousbia's heartwarming tribute to her native country's lost egalitarianism as much as to the elderly exponents of the popular music form called "chaabi." Comparisons are being made to "The Buena Vista Social Club," and while there are similarities, Bousbia's docu concentrates on the history as well as the music, making the orchestra's reunion at the end especially poignant. Fests will be breaking down the door, since auds are sure to embrace "El Gusto" with gusto; international arthouses could also have a winner.**

Chaabi is a genre of popular Algerian music that arose out of a felicitous melding of Berber melodies, religious chants and Andalusian tunes. Looked down upon for decades as an unworthy bastardization suited only to the lower classes, it began to find legitimacy in the 1930s under the inspired tutelage of El Hadj M'Hamed El Anka, who founded a conservatory to train young men (chaabi in its early days was performed exclusively by men) as professional musicians.

Bousbia's interest was sparked in 2004 when she went into Mohamed Ferkioui's small antique shop in Algiers to buy a mirror, and came away with a wealth of stories about El Anka's conservatory, which Ferkioui attended. Over the ensuing years, the helmer, an architecture student in Ireland, traced all of El Anka's students still alive, most scattered around Algiers or residing in Paris and Marseille. Their stories reflect the mid-20th-century history of Algiers' Casbah, a warren of alleyways that for centuries was home to the city's working class, mainly Muslims and Jews.

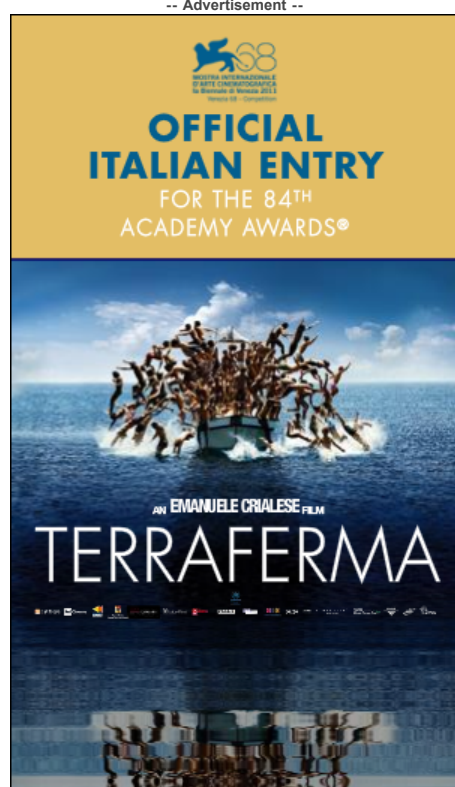
The demographic made sense: Christians tended to reside in the European quarters and spoke French better than Arabic, whereas Muslims and Jews lived and worked together, connected by their shared Arabic language and common living spaces. Chaabi borrowed from both heritages, and the musicians speak here of their brotherhood. But when the War of Independence came, few had time for music; by 1963, Jews were stripped of their citizenship, and most fled to France where they experienced additional racism. Meanwhile, the Casbah was allowed to crumble, and its residents spread out across the city, further dividing the old colleagues.

Deeply affected by their stories, Bousbia was determined to bring the musicians together. When Algeria wasn't forthcoming, she found sponsors to gather them in Marseille for a special performance. Only auds with hearts of stone can watch the reunion of these elderly men without tears, and only those without ears will refrain from swaying to the intoxicating rhythms at the emotional concert. Viewers may notice how the French residents in the orchestra, christened "El Gusto," appear to take control a bit too much, and the concert's formality seems to go against chaabi's roots in bars and cafes but the privilege of seeing these men together and hearing them

Email or Share | Print | RSS Feed | Bookmark

Get Variety: Mobile | Digital Edition | Newsletters

Subscribe to Variety



cinema's roots in care and sales, but the privilege of seeing these men together and hearing them play supersedes all quibbles.

Visually, "El Gusto" is a pleasure, with Nuria Roldos' fluid camera beautifully exploring the Casbah's byways. Archival black-and-white photos and footage are well integrated, and sound is tops; CDs of El Gusto's performances are selling well. Bousbia took home the prize for Arab-world docu director at Abu Dhabi.

Camera (color, HD-to-35mm), Nuria Roldos; editor, Francoise Bonnot; sound, Sebastien Pierre. Reviewed at Abu Dhabi Film Festival (competing), Oct. 15, 2011. (Also in Busan Film Festival – Wide Angle.) Running time: 89 MIN.

Contact the Variety newsroom at [news@variety.com](mailto:news@variety.com)

**Read next review: [Asmaa >](#)**

## **VARIETY** CONFERENCES

### **Film Technology Summit**

November 7, 2011  
The Annex Space @ Hollywood & Highland, Los Angeles, CA

### **Future Of Film Summit**

November 8, 2011  
The Annex Space @ Hollywood & Highland, Los Angeles, CA

### **American Music Conference Presented By Variety and Dick Clark Productions**

November 18, 2011  
Nokia LA Live, Los Angeles, CA

### **Entertainment Apps Conference**

December 1, 2011  
Sofitel Hotel, Los Angeles, CA

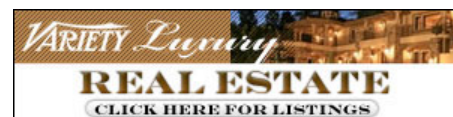
### **Variety's Home Entertainment Hall of Fame Awards**

December 5, 2011  
Beverly Hills Hotel, Los Angeles, CA

### **Content Protection Summit**

December 8, 2011  
Hilton Los Angeles, Universal City, CA

[View all Conferences and Events](#) ▶



© Copyright 2011 **RBL**, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. Variety and the Flying V logos are trademarks of Reed Elsevier Properties Inc., used under license.

[Subscribe](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [About Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Help](#)

**Media:** [LA 411](#) | [New York 411](#) | [Variety](#) | [Variety Arabia](#)

**Construction:** [Reed Construction Data](#)

**Business Directory:** [HotFrog](#)