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FAREWELL TRAVELLING PLAYER

(ADIEU FORAIN)

(DRAMA — MOROCCAN)

A Les Films du Sud production. (International sales: Films du Sud, Rabat.) Produced, directed by Daoud Aoulad-Syad. Screenplay, Ahmed Bouanani, Youssef Fadhel. Camera (color), Thierry Lebigre; editor, Bouanani, Nathalie Perry; music, Lachhab; sound, Gerome Ayasse. **Reviewed at Carthage Film Festival (competing),** Tunis, Oct. 24, 1998. Running time: 92 MIN.

Rabi Abdellah Didane
Larbi Med Bastaoui
Kacem Hassen Essaklli
Schoolteacher Nezha Rahile
(Arabic dialogue)

By DEBORAH YOUNG

Farewell Travelling Player" is the most likely festival pic to leap out of Morocco's current mini-boom in production. Using a slow tempo and minimum action to emphasize the three male leads' alienation, it is not an easy watch.

On the plus side, first-time helmer Daoud Aoulad-Syad shows a flair for striking visuals that glorify Moroccan landscapes and architecture, giving audiences something to look at while the characters meander around the desert from one fairground to another.

Most unusual is Rabi (Abdellah Didane), a young man who makes his living as a transvestite dancer at tawdry fun fairs. He is hired by kind Kacem (Hassen Essaklli) as a come-on to audiences at his wheel-of-fortune betting stand. Though Rabi's homosexuality is never made explicit, he clearly tells Kacem's macho son, Larbi (Med Bastaoui), that he has no interest in women.

Rabi's friendly overtures to Larbi, a gruff misanthrope, fall on barren ground, but he forms a sincere friendship with an attractive, independent young teacher (Nezha Rahile), who is herself something of an outcast in the desert town. Refusing to marry her rich suitor, she further defies social conventions by smoking in public and, one imagines, by befriending Rabi.

Film's narrative ranges from elliptical to puzzling, with terse dialog offering little clarification. This ambiguity gives it a modernist feel that is quite unusual in Moroccan cinema. Thierry Lebigre's lensing picks out the spare beauty of prefab buildings and desert palaces, lonely truckers' set faces and eerie fairground lights in the night. Cast appears chosen for its intense, disquieting expressions.

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