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ATLANTIS

(FRENCH)

A Gaumont-Cecchi Cori Group Tiger co-production. Produced by Claude Besson. Directed by Luc Besson. Camera (color), Luc Besson, Christian Pétron; music, Eric Serra; sound, William Flageolet; propertymaster, Marc Biehler; 2nd unit camera, Mathieu Schiffman, Vincent Jeannot; optical engineer, François Laurent; head diver, Jean-Marc Bour; scientific & technical advisor, Pierre Labout. Reviewed at Theatre Antique d'Orange, Orange, France, Aug. 16, 1991. Running time: 80 MIN.

Three years in the making, Luc Besson's "Atlantis" is a labor of love consisting of nothing but underwater flora and fauna with music. Sans commentary, this 80-minute travelog speaks for itself, delivering a message that the seas abound in wondrous things. Pic should soak up Gallic viewers like a sponge and impress fans of superlative underwater lensing.

Carefully planned itinerary spanning 38 months enabled Besson, cinematographer Christian Pétron and three divers to anticipate weather conditions and the presence of desired subjects in the waters of the Galapagos Islands, New Caledonia, the Seychelles Islands, Australia's Great Barrier Reef, French Polynesia, British Columbia, Florida, the Bahamas, the North Pole and the tragically depleted Red Sea.

Armed with custom-built wide-screen format camera gear, crew captured crisp, evenly lit and graceful footage. Completely fluid camerawork reflects the pace of marine life, speedy or serene.

Structured in segments devoted to various marine life forms, pic contains exquisite moments such as a manta ray gliding like a rubbery stealth bomber, its tubular eye protrusions made elegant by the accompaniment of a Maria Callas aria. In a contrasting episode, the camera takes an accelerated spin through seaweed to find a group of sleek sea mammals break-dancing.

In the penultimate segment, the camera journeys through a close-walled crevice toward the blue light of polar ice formations. No life is immediately apparent in this chilly domain filmed under extremely rigorous conditions, but the textures are impressive.

Eric Serra's perfectly integrated score, a blend of composer's own synthesizer work and live sessions recorded with London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, ranges from thunderously visceral to quasi-classical to playful pop. Score is sometimes on the obvious side but enjoyable.

"Atlantis" makes a seamless case for the silent world that has deteriorated to a frightening extent. It demands the breadth and height of the big screen.

—Lisa Nesselson

VARIETY