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# AIDA OF THE TREES

(AIDA DEGLI ALBERI)

(ANIMATED - ITALY-U.K.)

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A Medusa release (in Italy), in association with Telepiu, of a Medusa Film (Italy)/The Producers Film (Aida) (U.K.) presentation of a Lanterna Magica production. Executive producer, Maria Fares.

Directed by Guido Manuli. Screenplay, Umberto Marino, Manuli, freely inspired by Giuseppe Verdi's opera; (color); editor, Michele Buri; music, Ennio Morricone; art director, Victor Togliani; animation director, Roberto Edson Basarin; storyboard artist, Maurizio Forestieri; technical director, Marco Massa. Reviewed at Cola di Rienzo Cinema, Rome, Dec. 22, 2001. Running time: 75 MIN.

Italian voices: Enzo Iachetti, Massimo Lopez.

By DEBORAH YOUNG

One of the most expensive feature-length toons ever to come out of Italy, "Aida of the Trees" is much closer in spirit to Disney films and American cartoonery than its seasonal rival "Momo," also co-scripted by Umberto Marino. Directed by Guido Manuli and produced by animation studio Lanterna Magica, both former associates of "Momo" helmer Enzo D'Alo, "Aida of the Trees" represents a second current in Italo feature animation that tips its hat to blander international models.

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**CAT GIRL:** Italian "Aida of the Trees," helmed by Guido Manuli, is close in spirit to Disney pics and American cartoons.

The only unmistakable Italian touch is Verdi's opera "Aida," which inspired pic's slave-princess heroine, but here she ends up a good sight happier. Pic should slide into extensive sales and comfortable earnings thanks to its eminently familiar look.

Aida, drawn as a cross between a wide-eyed teenage girl and a blue cat, is the daughter of the king of the nature-loving Tree People, who live in the city of Alborea. Their idyllic world of flowers, vines and chirping animals is threatened by the warlike city dwellers of Petra, a Babylon-inspired burg built of massive stone and filled with Golden Calves.

The Petrans are potentially nice people but they worship Satam, a monstrous stone dragon that comes to life and spreads evil over the world via one of the king's advisers. It is Satam who keeps the two peoples at war.

Young Ramades, a teenage boy with lion features and an Egyptian-pharaoh haircut, is doted on by Petra's own pouting princess, but he falls in love with Aida on a visit to Alborea. She saves his life but is taken prisoner by Petra's cobra-like soldiers. Now reduced to slavery as the princess's handmaiden, she watches as wedding plans proceed between her mistress and Ramades — but all the palace intrigue can't keep the story from its happy ending, telegraphed from reel one.

Art director Victor Togliani has created two completely contrasting cities in Petra and Alborea. Petra, a massive, built-to-impress stone tower sticking out of a desert wasteland, is filled not only with ill-treated slaves but also with clever machinery that all city slickers will appreciate. Its war on trees strikes up an ecological theme, with Alborea presented as a model of blooming natural living.

Animation veers from very detailed gray monsters — such as a fearsome hydra that attacks the heroes — to colorfully drawn figures like Raz the crocodile, whose tears reveal the things he's seen. Verdi's music has been replaced by a less memorable soundtrack composed by Ennio Morricone, plus several contemporary love songs sung by female voices.

**'Aida of the Trees' only unmistakable Italian touch is Verdi's opera, which inspired slave-princess heroine.**