

BLACK NIGHTS 2017 Competition

**The Ball: The unseen part of a refugee's journey**

by VLADAN PETKOVIC

27/11/2017 - Pasquale Scimeca's new film charts the trip of two young refugees from their destroyed home to the coast of Libya

David Koroma in *The Ball*

Italian filmmaker **Pasquale Scimeca** is probably best known for the 2000 Venice title *Placido Rizzotto*, and his most recent effort was *Biagio [+]* in 2014. He is now back with a very special film, *The Ball*, which has just world-premiered in the Tallinn Black Nights Competition. Mostly shot in Sub-Saharan Africa with



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The main character, ten-year-old boy Amin (a wonderful **David Koroma**), lives in a poverty-stricken village in an unidentified country. The village has no electricity nor running water, and Amin's main preoccupation is playing football with his school friends. But even this activity becomes impossible to take part in, as the last ball in the village gets punctured. As Amin tries to fix it by filling it with leaves, a militia invades and destroys his village.

Advised by their grandfather to go to their uncle in Sweden, Amin and his 15-year-old sister Isoke (**Fatmata Kabia**) embark on a journey "to the North", without any idea where Sweden really is. They use what little money they have to buy shoes and clothes, and some food... And promptly run out of it and water as they stride into a desert. They pass out but fortunately are found by two Italian archaeologists, who feed them, drive them to Libya and give them money for a smuggler's boat to try to get to Italy.

However, they will first end up in a jail owned by a criminal who keeps them in a cage with some 40 other women and children, until he gathers enough wannabe migrants to take them to the coast...

*The Ball* is, on one hand, a raw film in which Scimeca uses non-professionals, and the two main performers are truly exceptional and do not try to hide the fact that they are not really actors. In some of the scenes, these performances turn out to be somewhat clumsy, but Kabia and Koroma's energy and authenticity are what really drive the film.

On the other hand, it is a subtle movie that discards simple information and focuses on the journey and the characters. We can hazard a guess that they come from Sierra Leone when Amin mentions that he is a fan of the Chelsea FC player Antonio Rüdiger, but no other geographical detail is given. Instead, the filmmaker makes the most of the natural settings and the combination of the intense colours contrasted with dusty roads (and the bare feet of the

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