



WAR WITCH is a Fourth Quarter 2015 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd.

Democratic Republic of Congo 2012 color 90 minutes Productions Komona, Inc. / Tribeca Film / Item 7 / Studios Shen / Telefilm Canada / Vision Globale / Super Ecran Productions Producers: Pierre Even, Marie-Claude Poulin, Kim Nguyen, Anne-Marie Gélinas

12 of a possible 20 points

*****of a possible *******

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

- 1 Direction: Kim Nguyen (male) 2nd Unit Direction: Nicolas Fransolet**
- 1 Editing: Richard Comeau**
- 1 Cinematographer: Nicholas Bolduc**
- 1 Lighting: Trésor Maluka**
Special Visual Effects: Marc Morissette (Supervisor), Alexandra Vaillancourt
Animator: Robert Pellerin
- 1 Screenplay: Kim Nguyen**
- 2 Music: Extracts from the release SOUL OF ANGOLA — ANTHOLOGIE DE LA MUSIQUE ANGOLAISE 1965 / 1975: "Tia," Fazer Bem," "Kibela Kiame," "Muxima," "Kisua Ki Ngui Fua," "Nzambi"**
- 2 Production Design: Emmanuel Fréchette**
Set Design: Floyd Kwendisa
Set Decoration: Josée Arsenault

Props: Bruno Lalaye (Prop Master), Louis Cyr
Costume Design: Eric Poirier
Makeup: Bijou Onya* (Key), Olivier Adekoudé, Tintin Gombot,
 Merve Muthio, Mbo Shindani
1 Sound: Claude La Haye, Martin Pinsonnault, Bernard Gariépy Strobl
1 Supervising Sound Editor: Martin Pinsonnault **Sound Design:** Martin Pinsonnault
Sound Effects: Simon Meilleur
Dialogue Editor: Claire Pochon
Sound Recordist: Daniel Bisson **Narration Recordist:** Francois–Xavier Bonnard
Narrator: Diane Uwamaharo
Casting: Josa Mole (Quebec), Kiripi Katembo Siku (R.D. Congo)
1 Acting
1 Creativity
12 total points

Cast: Rachel Mwanza (j) (Komona, a girl, ages 12-14), Alain Bastien (Commandant Rebelle),
 Serge Kanyinda (j) ('Magician,' the boyfriend and later husband of Komona), Ralph Prosper
 (The Butcher, uncle of 'Magician'), Mizinga Mwinga (Grand Tigre Royal),
 Starlette Mathata (Komona's mother), Alex Herabo (Komona's father), Dole Malalou
 (Mineral Mining Dealer), Jupiter Bokondji (Sorcerer for Grand Tigre Royal), Karim Bamaraki
 (Man on Motorbike), Sephora Françoise (Butcher's mother), Jonathan Kombe*
 (Considerate Gendarme), Marie Dilou (Exorcist), Gauna Gau (Albino's Enforcer),
 Renate Wembo (Upset Man at Clinic), Nicolas Fransolet (ONG Man), Kazadi Zadio
 (Strong Man), Bonaventure Kabamba (Mocking Farmer), Angèle Okito
 (Wife of Mocking Farmer), Agnes Mujinga (Old Lady Camion), Moise Ilunga (Chauffeur),
 Jordan N'Tunga (Jordan), Diplome Amekindra (Tigre Royal Guard), Papa Michel
 (Child Soldier at School Camp)

Directed by Canadian Kim Nguyen, **REBELLE** takes viewers into the heart of a civil war in an unnamed African country. Though filmed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, music used as accompaniment comes from an Angolan pop anthology release.

A preteen girl, Komona, is twelve years old when rebel fighters come to her village and compel her to shoot father and mother as proof of complete loyalty to their cause. This is nonsense. The consequences are ghastly and real. She and other children are hauled off by the attackers, first by river in canoes equipped with motors, then proceeding on foot into the jungle. They leave behind unburied corpses of relatives and ruined houses.

Komona and other captives are introduced to rifles, guerilla fighting tactics, and "magic milk," a hallucinogenic mixture which produces visions not necessarily inspiring. In the girl's

case, what appears are ghosts of people she or comrades have already murdered. Sometimes these provide timely warnings of danger. At other intervals, they serve as grim reminders of the past.

The rebel detachment is led by a man devoid of humane instincts who styles himself Grand Tiger. To enlist spiritual support, this depraved individual calls upon a selected “witch,” someone he judges to have unusual powers of self-preservation in battle. If the witch wrongly predicts victory, she is dispatched and replaced. This has happened several times prior to Komona’s appearance in his camp.

A fellow child warrior known simply as “Magician” takes a liking to Komona and decides to protect her. He provides his credulous companion with a charm to ward off death, something he further reinforces by watching her back when fighting occurs. His own position depends upon a capacity to supply talismans to other insurrectionists. Albino pigmentation separates the boy from others, making him appear distinct and magical. “Magician” knows these unique characteristics will not preserve him forever. Mulling over the situation after an unexpected gunfight with government troops, he convinces Komona to take advantage of momentary disorder and flee with him.

To the girl this proposal suggests more adventure. Why not? She allows herself to be persuaded by her benefactor. So off the duo hustles to what hopefully will be safer territory. Along the way, courtship tentatively develops, with Komona ultimately insisting her boyfriend obtain a white rooster before she will agree to marry him. The concept of dowry is maintained even though no elders are present to monitor their activities.

A series of comical attempts to locate that legendary creature leads them from one village to another. Again and again, the two travelers are met with mockery and admonitions to abandon their hopeless quest. That they obstinately refuse to do. Komona is unrelenting, because her father has indoctrinated her into believing poultry sacrifice is a necessary precursor to marriage. It is virtually all that remains of parental authority for his increasingly disillusioned daughter. “Magician” doggedly continues to humor her. It seems the only way she will consent to physically unite with him.

Their obstinacy finally pays off in a scene where aspiring husband demonstrates publicly passage into full manhood. Caught and cooked, the rooster provides a tasty nuptial feast.

Eventually, boy and girl wanderers seek refuge in the home of the former’s uncle, who appears to be a Christian butcher. For a brief period, two adolescents experience a joyful honeymoon.

Then the past overtakes them. A small squad from the rebel army comes into town to bring the “witch” back to its leader. Unwilling to comply, Komona is once more issued an ultimatum: shoot her husband dead or watch him slowly bleed to death from a machete wound. This time, more experienced, she situates herself beside intended victim and

encourages double homicide. The intruders foil this plan by dragging her away, then administering a death blow to unrepentant husband and accomplice.

Back again with undesired mentor, Komona is compelled to become his lover. Since that status has always been only a temporary honor, she resolves to escape his attentions permanently through preplanned castration as they bed together. Pregnant with her victim's child, she once more must hazard flight. To where this time?

No place comes to mind except the home of her late spouse's uncle. Famished and bedraggled, Komona staggers back to it and, to her astonishment, is warmly received.

Attempting to settle back into civilian existence, the refugee experiences nightmares in which Father and Mother, their bodies still unconsigned to graves, appear and silently condemn her. She resists attending to that neglected duty until after the birth of a son. Dare Komona then risk return to her native village with an infant she simultaneously loves and loathes? It seems impossible to live on in tranquility with the Butcher. Going back home is equally unsettling, almost incomprehensible to imagine. Which should she attempt?

Music, production design, and makeup achievements generate something more than just another drama about chaotic warfare in sub-Saharan Africa. They are attractively presented, tempering a story soaked in pessimism and gloominess.

REBELLE's plot follows an unconventional curve, ending neither with full Christian pardon nor bleak, gory bloodbath. All dramatic extremes beyond what is essential for purposes of establishing realistic background are scrupulously avoided. A reticence to wallow in graphic bloodshed is welcome.

Is it valid to duck political issues producing the kind of savagery witnessed here? By beginning in the middle of a conflict rather than examining its sources, does the director neglect an obligation to educate as well as document? More background on insurgency leaders, their claims, careers, and goals, would produced a compelling drama provoking thought, discussion, and potential reforms instead of mere wringing of hands and shedding of tears. REBELLE generates strong emotional responses at the expense of cerebral ones.

Acting effectively depicts personalities without allowing for more than superficial inspection of philosophies and ethics. There's a kind of fatalism hanging over the pair of protagonists, despite a modestly promising final act. It is not an indifferent or hostile universe at fault in this conflict, though. Blame for conditions observed here rests solely on men contending for power in complete disregard of collateral damage done to persons or property. So it is the task of other men to undo that folly, not simply accept it as inescapable. If REBELLE promotes political and social action, then it is ultimately worthwhile as reform prod if not as cinematic art.

Bonuses on this Cinedigm dvd release are scene selections, subtitles, a terse minute-and-one-half documentation of the Story Behind The Scene, and a four-minute promotional clip to

generate interest in the theatrical release from voting members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

REBELLE, titled in English WAR WITCH, is solely adult viewing. It incorporates brief scenes of simulated sex, castration, and parricide. These elements are not utilized only to shock. Rather they are integral to the story being told.

Rachel Mwanza's performance in the lead has been widely acclaimed by critics. See if you agree with them.