

Yaaba

By **Dwight Brown**

Producers: Fredd Denaes, Michel David,
Pierre-Alain Meier, Idrissa
Ouedraogo

Director: Idrissa Ouedraogo

"Yaaba," winner of Cannes' International Critics Prize, is also one of the more charming selections in this year's Mew' York Film Festival. Setting his film in a small desert village in the West African nation of Burkina Faso, filmmaker Idrissa Ouedraogo has crafted an allegorical work that should leave audiences enthralled.

Sana (Fatimata Sanga), an old toothless woman, lives on the edge of a village that condemned her for being a witch and have cast her out. Two local Youths, Bila (Noufou Ouedraogo) a boy and his cousin Nopoko (Roukietou Barry), a girl, befriend the elder. In fact Bila, bewitched as it were, takes to calling Sana "Yaaba" (grandmother).

One day a group of mean children menacingly surrounds the two cousins as they return from visiting the old woman. Bila and Nopoko don't back down, and there's a scuffle. The little girl is cut. Fever and great sickness follow. A Charlatan witch doctor blames Sana, and says her vile spirit has entered the girl's body. Sana thinks more likely that the illness is tetanus. She wants to help. The village won't let her. Bila, who's known as a rebellious brat, feels that she is the only one who can save Nopoko.

This wonderful movie is set on the landscape of Burkina Faso, with it's taupe huts and terra cotta sands that are dotted by green shrubs and bordered by muddy rivers is a wonder to behold. The setting is simple but splendidous and it gives Ouedraogo an alluring place to tell his tale.

His script is filled with distinct characters: Naive-courageous kids, an impotent drunk, his unsatiated wife, her lover, the village gossip, honest parents and a dishonest witch-

doctor. Also present are enough conflicts and subterfuge to spawn an African "Peyton Place." The lone kid who believes an untouchable can save the day. Clandestine meetings between a cheating wife and an unscrupulous sex partner. An angry mob hunting an innocent person. A house is torched. The characters develop and the plot pieces fall like a deck of tarot cards.

Ouedraogo casts relatives (Bila and Nopoko are his wife's cousins), and fills scenes with local villagers. Veering from a script, which was written more to attract investors than to detail the Film's actual storyline, he weaves his tale, guides his very natural actors and keeps the dialogue to a precious minimum. The resuly is a captivating film which leaves viewers ample aesthetic distance.

The relationship between the elder and the little rebel, particularly as seen through the eyes of the innocent Bila, is enough to melt anyone's heart. In fact, it's the film's emotional hook. Their kinship will make the audience think back to a time when they were young and may have befriended someone who was not so popular.

Illuminating the subtle tones of tan, brick and brown is director of photogrpahy Matthias Kalin. Francis Bebey's musical soundtrack features flute and percussion music that delicately captures Africa's spirited rhythms. Editor Loren-dana Cristelli expertly cuts and splices this 90 minute fable.

Co-produced by French, Swiss, Italian and German production companies, and shot by French, Swiss and Burkinabe crews, this touching work underlines the great talent and judicious wisdom of Idrissa Ouedraogo —an ardent filmmaker/storyteller who has wistfully adapted a tale he once heard when he too was a little boy in a desert village.