

VENICE 2017 International Critics' Week

Sarah Plays a Werewolf: What it feels like for a girl

by MARTA BALAGA

03/09/2017 - VENICE 2017: In her first feature, shown in the International Critics' Week, Katharina Wyss proves that all these pop songs were right after all: there is nothing quite as hard as being a teenage girl



Sarah (**Loane Balthasar**) has a secret. It's a secret that she can't share with anyone – not with her friends at school, because she doesn't have any, and certainly not with her unstable, opera-obsessed family. What she can do, however, is act it out on stage. When an adventurous art teacher (**Sabine Timoteo**, previously seen in *The Chronicles of Melanie* [+]) encourages students to go beyond reciting the words and push their limits, Sarah takes her advice to heart. Soon, a painfully timid introvert transforms into a fearless performer, capable of taking risks that she tends to avoid in everyday life. But instead of finally opening up to people, Sarah drifts further away.

(The article continues below - Commercial information)

Katharina Wyss' debut film, *Sarah Plays a Werewolf* [+], which has just been shown in Venice's International Critics' Week, is remarkably similar to its oversensitive heroine: very much like Sarah, sometimes it's difficult to stand. Swiss director Wyss clearly doesn't care if anyone will find Sarah even remotely likeable. Watching her do or say all the wrong things at the wrong time is uncomfortable, to say the least, as in spite of her best efforts, Sarah's behaviour is a playbook of how to lose friends and alienate people.

Also because, let's face it, she just can't help herself. She tells one prospective friend that her brother committed suicide (he didn't), blurts out somebody else's secret and finds solace in the stories of young martyrs – especially Saint Barbara, in whose suffering and unbearable torture she is quietly revelling, or Shakespeare's Juliet. Both heart-breaking and utterly annoying, Sarah manages to be over the top *and* strangely realistic. Anyone who has ever been a 17-year-old will surely attest to the latter.

While Wyss tries to go beyond the usual sorrows of Young Werther here, the decision to spell out the reasons behind Sarah's family's odd behaviour could be perceived as misjudged – for a film mostly sketched with delicate outlines, such a bold stroke feels strangely at odds with what came before. But then again, it reveals a filmmaker who doesn't aim to please. Shot as if to deepen the overwhelming sense of claustrophobia, *Sarah Plays a Werewolf* might have ideas crammed together almost as tight as Sarah's neurotic family, but somewhere along the way, it also manages to grasp what it feels like for a girl. Yes – just like in that Madonna song.

Produced by Swiss outfits Intermezzo Films and Mnemosyn Films, and co-produced by the Deutsche Film-und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB), *Sarah Plays a Werewolf's* international sales are handled by Patra Spanou Film Marketing & Consulting.

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