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## 'The Rescue List': Film Review | San Francisco 2018

10:35 AM PDT 4/23/2018 by Stephen Farber



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## THE BOTTOM LINE

*Stirring tale of children rescued from modern-day slavery.* 

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## This doc executive-produced by Steve James exposes children sold into slavery on Lake Volta in Ghana.

Documentaries exposing social injustice around the world are nothing new, but *The Rescue List*, which had its world premiere at the San Francisco Film Festival, takes us to a part of the world we rarely see. Set in Ghana, it centers on the battle to rescue children who have been sold into slavery by their parents. Award-winning filmmaker Steve James (*Hoop Dreams*, *Life Itself*) served as executive producer, and the co-directors, Alyssa Fedele and Zachary Fink, also have impressive credits in the field. Their background enabled them to deliver a film of compassion and insight.

It is estimated that some 20,000 children are enslaved on Lake Volta, a huge man-made lake attached to a hydroelectric plant. Many of them were sold by their parents to work in the fishing industry there. One main character in the film named Kwame works with other groups in Ghana to rescue these children and bring them to a shelter for rehabilitation before hopefully returning them to their families. Although most of the scenes take place in this shelter, there are also scenes filmed on Lake Volta and other sequences in the villages where the children were born.

The film wisely focuses its gaze on just a few main characters. We learn that Kwame is motivated because he was trafficked to the lake when he was a child, and he aims to find a positive way to purge that traumatic experience. Two other important figures are Peter, a boy who is determined to rescue his closest friend on the lake, and Edem, a boy suffering from guilt and depression because his best friend was drowned trying to save him. All of the children in the shelter are obviously trying to recover from abuse, so the rescue workers have their work cut out for them.

Cinematography by co-director Fink is one of the strengths of the films, and the movie is tightly edited by co-director Fedele and another experienced documentary filmmaker, Davis Coombe. One flaw in the film is that the reunion process, though acknowledged, isn't probed in enough detail. We do see one of the boys awkwardly hugging his mother when he is reunited with her, an image that speaks volumes. But he declares that he would rather stay with the village chief than with his mother. That decision hints at the deepest psychological wounds affecting these children, but we are left with a lot of questions about how they will ever re-integrate into families that basically sold them into slavery. A bit more background as to what motivated the parents might have added an even deeper scope to the film.

Nevertheless, the doc—which is sure to stir conversation as well as emotion when it screens at other festivals—will open audience's eyes to larger problems of child abuse and exploitation that pervade too many countries around the globe.

*Directors: Alyssa Fedele, Zachary Fink*

*Producers: Alyssa Fedele, Zachary Fink, Davis Coombe*

*Executive producer: Steve James*

*Director of photography: Zachary Fink*

*Editors: Alyssa Fedele, Davis Coombe*

*Music: William Ryan Fritch*

*No rating, 81 minutes*

