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Berlinale 2018: Silent Storytelling in Wolfgang Fischer's Powerful 'Styx'

by [Alex Billington](#)
February 26, 2018



Sometimes you don't need to actually say anything to tell a powerful story. **Styx** is a remarkable film that uses minimal dialogue to tell a very powerful story. We've seen these kind of films before, but they're still effective, and if the filmmaking is up to par, they can leave a lasting impression. *Styx* is a drama directed by German filmmaker **Wolfgang Fischer** that's about a woman who embarks upon a solo sailing voyage from Gibraltar to an island in the middle of the South Atlantic. She's interrupted when she encounters a boat full of refugees. To be curt, *Styx* is essentially a mix of *All is Lost* (the Robert Redford silent sailing film) meets *Fuocoammare* (the Berlinale Golden Bear-winning documentary film about rescuing refugees from boats).

Wolfgang Fischer's film *Styx* opens with a very clean, wide shot of a car crash, following the victim as he is taken to a hospital. At first I didn't understand what this had to do with the story, but it adds an additional layer of sorrow regarding the actual main character we meet next. **Susanne Wolff** stars as Rieke, a German woman preparing her sailboat for a journey across the Atlantic Ocean. The film follows her closely without any dialogue, only a few moments of speaking on the radio. Instead, it's all about the visuals, and most of it is shot so realistically it feels like a documentary. This film shows just how powerful silent storytelling can be, all we need is to watch what's happening and look closely at the details, and it will all make sense. When a film does this well, it's incredibly moving and exhilarating to watch (especially for those who love cinema).

Here, it seems, Rieke is traveling alone because she lost her partner (the crash from the beginning) and is taking this journey to escape from it all, down to a lonely little island oasis. And most of the

film allows her to do this, without anyone else involved, until that moment where we all realize the world is bigger than just us. And at that moment, we have to decide whether to help others or not, even if we don't want to. But that tiny bit of help can change everything, it can save someone else's life. And everything that happens from this point on, that's where this film speaks the loudest. There's moments here that if you watch closely, should really hit hard - they show how hypocritical and insensitive this world really is, despite all the surface-level attempts to do good. I'm impressed by how this worked into the film so well, integrated right into the story.

Styx is also an exceptional achievement in terms of visual storytelling, with stunning camerawork. There are a few shots of her tiny sailboat drifting along the water that must've been shot by drone or helicopter, as they're very far away. But the detail on the waves and the boat and everything is awe-inspiring, and these are only just a few of the remarkable shots found in the film. Everything about this film is remarkable, to be honest. I should mention it's awesome to see a woman sail solo, as it never attempts to make a big deal out of this, because of course she can do this with ease. And she's damn good at it, too. For the first half of the film, I thought we'd just be watching her deal with the challenges of the ocean in order to get to this island, and that would've been a great film by itself. There's plenty in her story that is worth exploring on its own.

This film was chosen by moviegoers [as the 3rd place winner](#) of the Panorama Audience Award at the Berlin Film Festival. I expected it to be good, but it was even better than I was hoping. I really loved *Styx*, not only as a captivating, exhilarating cinematic experience, but as a film that has something to say, with a powerful message hidden within. And don't worry, you won't roll your eyes, this isn't the kind of blatantly shameless filmmaking where the message hits in that way. It's nicely integrated into the story and connects with what's happening on screen, and hopefully the frustration you feel will be something to translate into actual action once the lights come back up at the end. I hope this film finds an audience, it's a voyage we should all take.

Alex's Berlinale 2018 Rating: 9 out of 10

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Bo • 9 hours ago

Good review, Alex. Thanks for the head's up. I shall keep an eye out for this film and hope too that it finds distribution.

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DAVIDPD • 10 hours ago

Sounds very good.

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