

# ATLETU (THE ATHLETE)

*The story of legendary Ethiopian marathon runner, Abebe Bikila*

independent feature film



a film by Davey Frankel and Rasselas Lakew

an AV PATCHBAY/CINEMA AETHIOPICA production  
with INSTINCTIVE FILMS

av patchbay, LLC

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# ATLETU (THE ATHLETE)

*The story of legendary Ethiopian marathon runner, Abebe Bikila*

## **synopsis**

Running the streets of Rome in 1960, an unknown, barefoot Ethiopian man stunned the world by winning Olympic gold in the marathon. Overnight, Abebe Bikila became a sports legend. A hero in his own country and to the continent, Bikila was the first black African to win a gold medal. Four years later and just five weeks after an operation for appendicitis, Abebe successfully defended his Rome gold at the '64 Tokyo Olympiad, winning by the widest margin in history and becoming the first person to win consecutive Olympic marathons. This soldier and quiet son of a shepherd is considered by many the greatest long-distance runner in history.

But his life story only began with Olympic medals. In 1969, while training for the '72 Munich games, Abebe, 36, was involved in a car accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down. Following surgery and during recovery in England, Bikila fought depression and craved to compete again. In the struggle to maintain the will to live, Bikila discovered a deeper meaning of competition. He first did so in archery at the English Paralympics, and then later, at the invitation of the King of Norway, in a handicapped cross country ski race known as The Ridderrennet in Beitostolen, Norway. Bikila's victory on a dog-sled in this snow-covered wilderness proved to be his final, triumphant race. "Atletu(The Athlete)" is a tale of extraordinary determination and of a singular man, Abebe Bikila. Told for the first time, this true story has been rendered with emotional power and cinematic grace.



## **writers/producers/directors**

"Atletu(The Athlete)" was written, produced and directed by Davey Frankel and Rasselas Lakew.

**Davey Frankel**, 38, is a NYC filmmaker and aural-visual artist based in Berlin. His work in film and with music has been shown in museums and numerous film festivals worldwide. Davey has created visual pieces for Academy Award winners, Ang Lee, Tan Dun, and Howard Shore. He has performed these aural-visual creations with symphony orchestras and cellist Yo-Yo Ma, all around the globe and in the world's greatest concert halls; Carnegie Hall, Royal Albert Hall, and the Sydney Opera House to name but a few. Also the film's editor, "Atletu (The Athlete)" is Frankel's debut feature film.

**Rasselas Lakew**, 39, an Ethiopian-American, attended Montana State University film school in early 90's, and is now a NYC-based filmmaker. Also playing the lead role, "Atletu(The Athlete)" is Lakew's debut feature film.

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## the production

“Atletu(The Athlete)” is one of the first truly global low-budget independent feature films. Made jointly by American and Ethiopian filmmakers, Davey Frankel and Rasselas Lakew, the movie has been shot on 35mm film from the Arctic Circle to the Equator, by a crew representing 10 nations.

Having raised initial funding and with just a crew of five, Frankel and Lakew began shooting in Beitostolen, Norway. Following the success of the Nordic experience, the team was able to raise additional funding and organized the next piece of the production. An even more ambitious undertaking than Norway, Frankel and Lakew brought only 12 experienced crew members to Ethiopia to shoot the next portion of the script. Building a production and production-services from scratch in Ethiopia, the crew trained Ethiopians to assist, developed its own craft-service company, and, in a garage in Addis Ababa, even built its own process trailer (a specialized car-trailer used in driving shoots). This unique Ethio-American collaboration successfully captured the essence of the film’s main character and his world of ancient serenity and majestic landscapes.



Now armed with a beautiful and evocative trailer, Frankel and Lakew obtained additional funds to complete principal photography and begin post-production. In October, the story of Abebe’s time in a hospital in England was filmed in Sofia, Bulgaria. Two months later the production returned to Ethiopia, again with a small crew, to complete filming. Once more Ethiopia proved magical and giving in all of its locations; deep in the Ethiopian countryside under star-filled night skies, in an old art-deco movie theatre filled with 600 Ethiopian extras, and on the scenic country roads that skirt along the Great Rift Valley. With principal photography wrapped, the film moved to Berlin for post-production.

“Atletu(The Athlete)” premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival to completely sold-out audiences, and was chosen “Best of Fest”. The film then went on to show at the Montreal World Film Festival where it received a glowing, full-page review in the Montreal Gazette, and received a strong recommendation from Time Out Chicago at the Chicago International Film Festival while U.S. premiering in conjunction with the Chicago Marathon.

At the International Film Festival Rotterdam, “Atletu (The Athlete)” won the “Lions Award,” and was selected for Rotterdam’s Volkskrant Program (Best of Fest). This would be only the beginning of the film’s amazing festival run where it screened at 51 international film festivals and garnered 16 festival awards worldwide. In the run-up to the 2012 London Olympic Games, “Atletu(The Athlete)” begins its U.S., UK and global theatrical release.

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**There is no film at  
the World Film Festival  
more unexpected  
or more satisfying  
than *Athlete*.**

**-John Griffin  
THE MONTREAL GAZETTE**

Davey Frankel and Rasselas Lakew's debut collaboration is a visually ravishing, revelatory mixed-medium narrative of the great Ethiopian marathon runner Abebe Bikila.

Seamlessly interweaving extensive footage from Bikila's miracle gold medals at the 1960 Rome and 1964 Tokyo Olympic games with recreated scenes starring Lakew as Bikila in the years after his triumph, *Athlete* chronicles Bikila's journey from national hero to tragedy, and back.

At once biopic, international travelogue, personal biography, drama and documentary, *Athlete* redresses the incredible story of the barefoot "innocent country boy" who broke records to become Africa's first gold medalist, and broke more when he came back four years later to do it again.

Because it's the Olympics, there is great archival material, and as an A-list editor, U.S. filmmaker Frankel makes full use of it. Ethiopian Lakew's contributions range from original idea, extensive research, development, script, and years of passionate commitment to give the "athlete of the millennium" his due, and he embodies Bikila in the final years of his life.

Frankel is a New York aural-visual artist, now based in Berlin with his German partner and their two kids. His CV reads like a who's who of downtown NYC culture, running from working with music vid guru Jem Cohen and editing indie films under Ang Lee's Good Machine banner to creating the visual accompaniments to Tan Dun's *The Crouching Tiger Concerto*, with Yo-Yo Ma and Howard Shore's *The Lord of the Rings* symphony. The latter toured the world and played the High Lights Festival here in 2004.

"The film promo tag," he says, "is, 'Shot independently from the Arctic Circle to the Equator, with a crew representing 10 nations.' It's a global indie film." A global indie film that could have been made by David Lean - it's that quietly epic in scope and ambition, a 35-mm project all the way.

"It has been an amazing process and learning experience. People who have seen it have been really interested, and had very emotional responses."

"I had someone come up after the Edinburgh screening and say, 'I'm at a point in my life where I really need courage. This movie gave it to me.'"



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THE ATHLETE

Chicago International Film Festival Screenings

Saturday 10 October, 5:00 pm

Tuesday 13 October, 7:00 pm

Saturday 17 October, 12:20 pm

@ AMC River East 21 (322 E. Illinois St.)

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**Davey Frankel** is an aural/visual artist based in New York and Berlin. Born in New York City and raised in Miami, Davey left the sunny shores to attend Amherst College in Massachusetts, where he created his own major in Environmental Studies, Development Studies, Anthropology, and Film. This major was focused around his senior honors thesis which was a documentary film, *Aserian Ake*, which he made in Kenya where he had previously studied. For this film, he received highest honors.

Frankel began his work in the film business on the early movies of Ang Lee and James Mangold. His work with filmmaker Jem Cohen has been shown in museums in NYC (The Whitney Museum's 2002 Biennial) and Paris (Fondacion Cartier), as well as numerous film festivals around the world. After working as an editor of independent films for ten years, with success at festivals such as Sundance and multiple theatrical releases, and then focusing more specifically on movies that concentrated on music, Davey was asked by director Ang Lee and producer James Schamus to create a visual accompaniment for *The Crouching Tiger Concerto*, written by the film's Academy Award winning composer Tan Dun. Next, having appreciated his work for Lee and Schamus, Tan Dun requested Frankel to join him in the creation of a new concerto commissioned by the Boston Symphony for world-reknowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Performing live on stage with the orchestra, Davey accompanies the cellist and orchestra with both visual imagery and audio playback; sometimes four independent sounds and images simultaneously. This new piece, *The Map*, has been performed around the world from Boston Symphony Hall and Carnegie Hall, to The Shanghai Grand Theater and the remote Hunanese village of Fuenhuang. Following the success of *The Map*, he was invited by Academy Award winning composer Howard Shore to be the visual director and live visual artist for a symphony based on the music from *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy. This symphony, having toured most of the greatest concert halls of the world (Sydney Opera House, Royal Albert Hall, The Odeon at the Acropolis), celebrated its one hundredth performance in just two years; unheard of for a piece of classical music in such a short time. His 2005 docu-animation film, *Ten*, made its New York City debut in Chelsea at the Remy Toledo Gallery, and its European premiere at the Berlin Sony Center in summer 2007. This work has been described by NYC-based art critic, William S. Wilson, as "one of the best movies about painting ever made", and is the latest in a decade long collaboration with artist Jonathan Cramer. Davey then returned to documentaries and Africa, where he had been a student, making a film for the United Nations about water resource management and life in the Chalbi Desert of Kenya.

Returning to narrative film, Frankel was Director/Producer/Editor of the independent feature film "The Athlete(Atletu)". Shot independently from the Arctic Circle to the Equator, with a crew representing 10 nations, this narrative film tells the story of the great Olympian, Ethiopian marathon runner Abebe Bikila. The film premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival to completely sold-out audiences, and was chosen "Best of Fest". The film has gone on to win 16 international film festival awards, and was Ethiopia's entry for the Foreign Language Academy Award. "The Athlete(Atletu)" is Frankel's debut feature film.

**Rasselas Lakew** was born and raised in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. His early life was that of an athlete. He travelled to the United States to attend university and play Division I NCAA tennis. After finishing his undergraduate studies, Lakew became interested in filmmaking and attended the University of Montana for post-graduate film studies. It was here that the seed for telling the story of Abebe Bikila, Ethiopia's first great marathon champion, was planted. After years of research and development, Lakew co-directed, produced, wrote, and acted in the starring role of a film based on the life of Bikila, "The Athlete(Atletu)". The film premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival to completely sold-out audiences, and was chosen "Best of Fest". The film has gone on to win 16 international film festival awards, and was the Ethiopian entry for the Foreign Language Academy Award. "The Athlete(Atletu)" is Lakew's debut feature film.

# World Film Festival: Running hard for Abebe

By JOHN GRIFFIN, The Gazette



**Davey Frankel (right) and Rasselas Lakew on set in Sofia, Bulgaria. Lakew plays the role of Abebe Bikila in the film the Athlete.**

There is no film at the World Film Festival more unexpected or more satisfying than *Atletu* (The Athlete).

Davey Frankel and Rasselas Lakew's debut collaboration is a visually ravishing, revelatory mixed-medium narrative of the great Ethiopian marathon runner Abebe Bikila.

Seamlessly interweaving extensive footage from Bikila's miracle gold medals at the 1960 Rome and 1964 Tokyo Olympic games with recreated scenes starring Lakew as Bikila in the years after his triumph, *Atletu* chronicles Bikila's journey from national hero to tragedy, and back.

At once biopic, international travelogue, personal biography, drama and documentary, *Atletu* redresses the incredible story of the barefoot "innocent country boy" who broke records to become Africa's first gold medalist, and broke more when he came back four years later to do it again.

Because it's the Olympics, there is great archival material, and as an A-list editor, U.S. filmmaker Frankel makes full use of it. Ethiopian Lakew's contributions range from original idea, extensive research, development, script, and years of passionate commitment to give the "athlete of the millennium" his due, and he embodies Bikila in the final years of his life.

Frankel has been in town for the festival screenings of his collaboration, only the second since its world premiere at the 2009 Edinburgh International Film Festival in June, where it played to sold out crowds and won the Best of Fest audience award.

Lakew, however, is back in New York, so Frankel brings his considerable technical expertise to bear on a cellphone hookup so that his dear friend and creative partner will not be left out of an interview.

It's still a shaky connection, however, so Lakew gets in a few early quotes, then signs off.

"We met through mutual friends in New York," the former Division 1 NCAA tennis player at the University of Montana says over the speakerphone. It was a felicitous connection. Lakew was ready to make his film. Frankel was ready to capitalize on the time he'd spent in Kenya shooting a documentary, *Aserian Ake*, for his thesis at Amherst College in Massachusetts. "I came of age in Africa," he says.

"Ras understood where I was coming from as a filmmaker. I wanted to make this a movie about what a hero this guy was for Ras. It had to be true to his vision as an African."

Frankel is a New York aural-visual artist, now based in Berlin with his German partner and their two kids. His CV reads like a who's who of downtown NYC culture, running from working with music vid guru Jem Cohen and editing indie films under Ang Lee's Good Machine banner to creating the visual accompaniments to Tan Dun's *The Crouching Tiger Concerto*, with Yo-Yo Ma and Howard Shore's *the Lord of the Rings* symphony. The latter toured the world and played the High Lights Festival here in 2004.

A subsequent documentary, about water resource management in Kenya that Frankel made for the United Nations, brought him back to his first love and what would become *Atletu*.

"The film promo tag," he says, "is 'shot independently from the Arctic Circle to the Equator, with a crew representing 10 nations.' It's a global indie film." A global indie film that could have been made by David Lean - it's that quietly epic in scope and ambition, a 35-mm project all the way.

"We'd start shooting as soon as we raised some money. We shot in Norway, the most expensive place on Earth, before the script was even finished, in 2006. I made a trailer to raise more money, then we shot in Ethiopia in natural light in 2007. I made another trailer, we raised more money in 2008 and shot in Bulgaria, standing in for 1960s and 1970s London.

"It has been an amazing process and learning experience. People who have seen it have been really interested, and had very emotional responses."

There also have been responses from the indie arms of major Hollywood studios. Frankel and Lakew, however, are making them wait until they can see it on the big screen.

"It doesn't fit any box," Frankel explains. "It's not art house-y, and not Hollywood, either. But it seems to have mass appeal.

"I had someone come up after the Edinburgh screening and say, 'I'm at a point in my life where I really need courage. This movie gave it to me.' "

*Atletu (The Athlete)* screens in Ethiopia's Amharic language and English, with English subtitles, at *Quartier Latin*, Sunday, Sept. 6 at 7:20.

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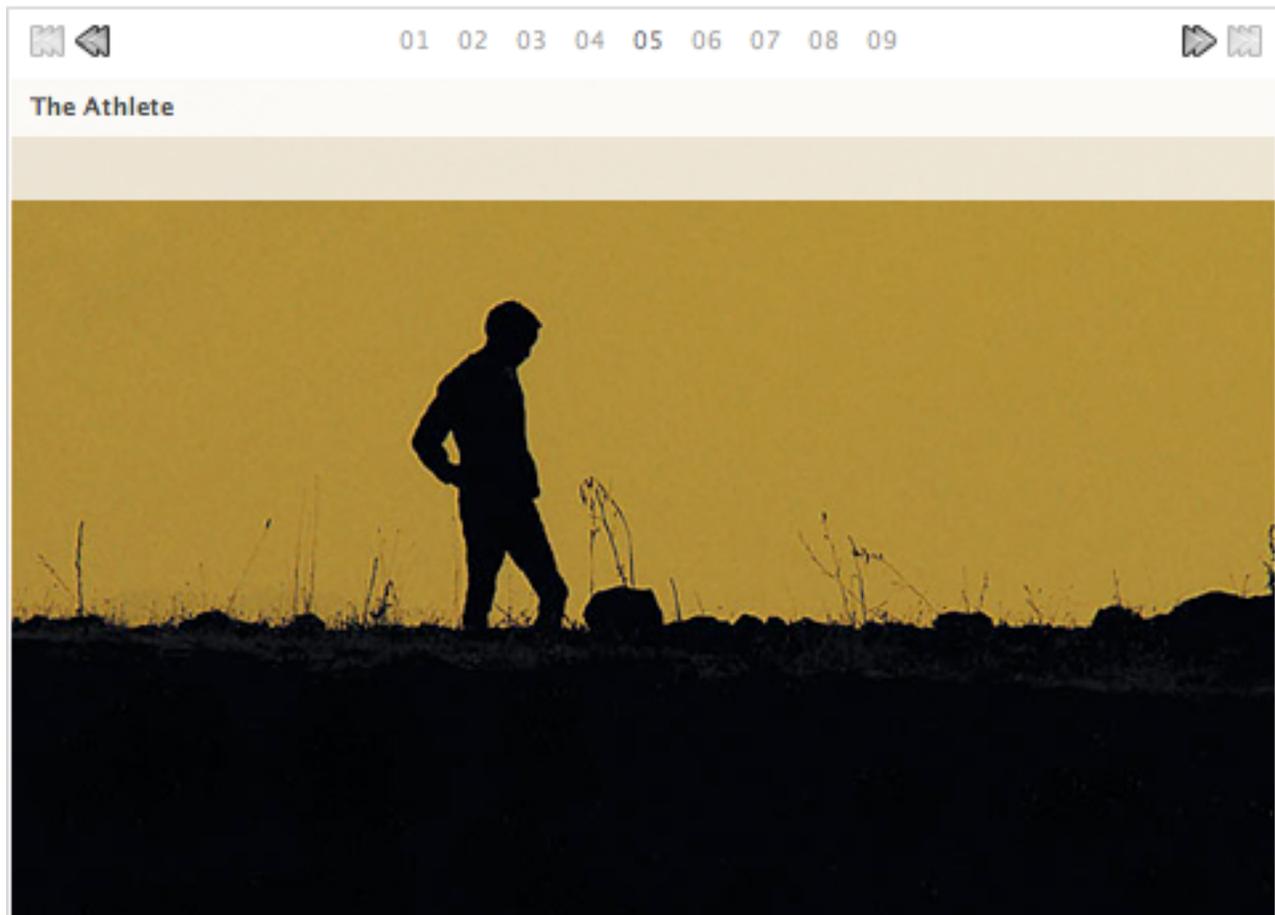


# Film

## Cinematic survey

A day-by-day guide to the Chicago International Film Festival.

By TOC staff



\* *Recommended titles*

If you go Where: [AMC River East](#) 322 E Illinois St Tickets: call Ticketmaster at 312-902-1500, or go to [ticketmaster.com](#). For more information, call 312-332-3456 or go to [chicagofilmfestival.org](#).

## Saturday 17

### 11am Cineyouth

11:15am **Will Not Stop There** Dir. Vinko Bresan. 2009. 110mins. Croatia/Serbia. A Croatian war vet brings a Serbian porn star to his apartment with motives that are gradually revealed.

Noon **Videocracy** See Fri 16.

12:15pm **Shorts 1: Illinois(e)makers** Various dirs. and years. 79mins. USA. As you might guess, all the films in this program have an Illinois connection.

\* 12:20pm **The Athlete** Dirs. Davey Frankel and Rasselas Lakew. 2009. 93mins. USA/Ethiopia. Based on the true life story of Africa's first Olympic gold medalist, *The Athlete* switches between incredible archival footage of the real Abebe Bikila in action with dramatic and gorgeously shot scenes starring Ethiopian Rasselas Lakew. It deserves a permanent place in the runner's movie pantheon. —John Dugan

12:30pm **Effi Briest** Dir. Hermine Huntgeburth. 2009. 118mins. Germany. In 19th-century Germany, the young bride of an older man has a fling with a dashing young officer.

1pm **Made in Hungaria** Dir. Gergely Fonyó. 2009. 109mins. Hungary. Imagine *Grease* with some broad Eastern European humor and political jokes thrown in, and you have a pretty good idea of what to expect from this glossy musical set in Hungary in the 1960s, when American music was creeping into the culture and young people were rebelling in the most harmless way, swiveling their hips.—Hank Sartin

\* 1:45pm **Tomorrow at Dawn** Dir. Denis Dercourt. 2009. 96mins. France. As he did in *The Page Turner*, Dercourt delivers a carefully calibrated mix of psychological drama and thriller elements in this look at the subculture of historical reenactors.—Hank Sartin

2pm **Shortchanged** See Fri 16.

2:30pm **Soundtrack for a Revolution** Dirs. Dan Sturman and Bill Guttentag. 2009. 82mins. USA. This doc looks at the folk music that was a central part of the civil-rights movement.

2:45pm **Mississippi Damned** See Thu 15. \* 3pm **Tales from the Golden Age** Various dirs. 2009. 141mins. Romania/France. Inconsistent, but this multipart portrait of life in Ceausescu-era Romania (spearheaded by *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* director Cristian Mungiu) is about as solid as omnibus films get. Best part: the exploding pig.—Ben Kenigsberg

\* 3:30pm **Air Doll** Dir. Hirokazu Kore-eda. 2009. 125mins. Japan. Kore-eda's *After Life* used videotapes to explore the subject of memory; this time, an inflatable sex doll who comes to life discovers what it means to be human. Oddball wit and Bae Doo-na's performance keep it from turning into *Mannequin 3*.—Ben Kenigsberg

\* 4pm **Who's Afraid of the Wolf** See Fri 16.

4:30pm **Hidden Diary** See Thu 15.

5pm **Lovely, Still** Dir. Nickolas Fackler. 2009. 90mins. USA. When a lively widow enters the life of a lonely, big-hearted bachelor, a tender Christmas-time love story unfolds. The elderly couple's sweet romance builds quickly, like a beautiful blizzard. The plot is serene—almost unsettlingly conflict-free—until a shocking twist makes the film poignant in new and unexpected ways. —Liz Plosser

# Ferdy on Films, etc.

Film reviews and commentary, random thoughts on the world around us, blatant promotion of favorite charities, and other ponderables.

## Chicago International Film Festival



### The Athlete (Atletu)

Directors/Screenwriters: Davey Frankel and Rasselas Lakew

By Marilyn Ferdinand

This Sunday, October 11, the annual running of the Chicago Marathon will take place. Part of the route surrounds the theatre where the CIFF films are being shown, which will make it very difficult for moviegoers to navigate their way to any screenings before 5 p.m. (just another reason we shouldn't have gotten the 2016 Olympics—bad handling of multiple events and traffic). However, if any of this weekend's marathoners want some inspiration, CIFF has, like last year, booked a marathon-related film whose first screening will be the day before the big race. *The Athlete* is a biopic that tells in a rather unique way the story of Abebe Bikila, the Ethiopian who burst onto the world stage by winning the 1960 Olympic marathon race in Rome in his bare feet. Rasselas Lakew, in addition to cowriting and codirecting this film, also plays the lead, offering as much grace and internal fortitude as the real Bikila must have had to face the challenges his short life held for him.

The film opens with a striking close-up of Lakew as Bikila, his chin buried in a white fleece collar. He begins a narrative of his life as a can of film is opened and the film mounted and threaded through a projector. *The Athlete* moves backward and forward through time, as Bikila is shown going about his business or speaking to friends and people he meets—a strategy of both showing important incidents in Bikila's life and having Bikila or others relate them in a slightly awkward expository fashion that the actors, nonetheless, still seem to pull off fairly well.



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– Arbogast, [Arbogast on Film](#)

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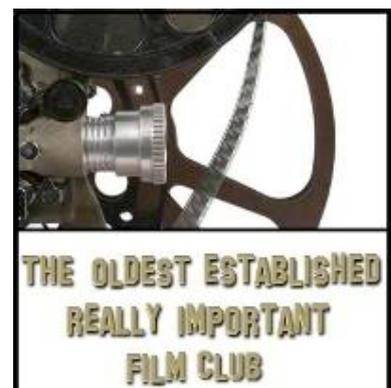
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nonetheless, still seem to pull off fairly well.

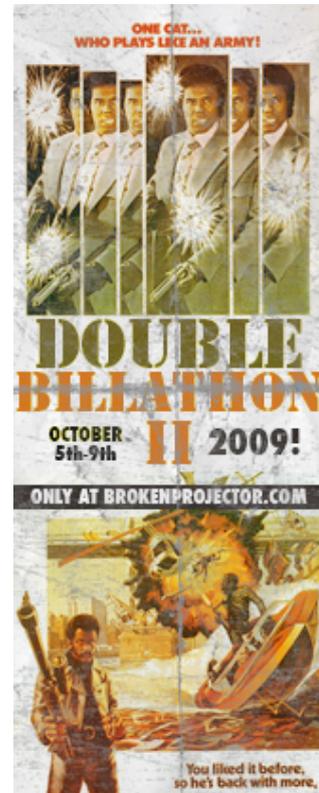


Bikila is a national hero. When he is stopped on the road leading from his home village of Jato to his current home in Addis Ababa for an identity check, he complies willingly and gives two bottles of honey to the soldiers at the checkpoint. One upbraids the other for stopping a great man like Bikila and then tells her that he has gotten honey from his home village to help heal his wounds. Bikila, after his historic wins in Rome—sweet victory in the land whose fascist regime had invaded his country in 1936 and sent him fleeing into the mountains—and in the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games only 5 weeks after having his appendix removed, was forced to drop out of the Mexico City race at the 18-mile mark due to injuries. He feels the pang of an unfinished race and hopes to compete the 1972 Munich Games.



Bikila visits the training camp for Ethiopian athletes. The coach is skeptical about his return to form, but his old friend Onni (Dag Malmberg), a transplant to Ethiopia from Sweden, gives Bikila hope and tells him that he needs more rest between races now that he has gotten older and more injury-prone. Bikila had earlier encountered a horse that had been blinded and abandoned by an owner who no longer wanted it. He went out to shoot it before it was killed by hyenas, but changed his mind. “I met one who was at the end of the road. He could not see but his legs still had the will to carry him forward.” This is Bikila in a nutshell.

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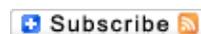


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The film is filled with quiet, poetic moments like this, often using parallel images to communicate the circle of life. For example, Bikila is in a car accident that sends his VW Beetle onto its side. Bikila lays on his back, half in half out of the car, looking at the sky until some men find him in the morning. The accident costs him the use of his legs, but his competitive drive takes him into archery and then into Norway's Ridderrennet cross-country sit-ski race—source of the opening close-up—in which he is pulled on a sled by dogs while he and an able-bodied man pole and steer. The sled goes out of control at one point and flips on its side. Bikila is again on his back looking at the sky. This time, however, Bikila sees the sun shine through a brief break in the clouds and insists on righting the sled himself. This is a subtle way to suggest that Bikila has progressed past the race he never finished and found grace in accepting his condition and the things he can do.

The film ends at the end of the screening of the film we saw being threaded onto the projector at the beginning of the film: sports documentarian Bud Greenspan's *The Ethiopian*. Emperor Haile Selassie, for whom Bikila had served as an Imperial guardsman, approaches Bikila to shake his hand as the dignitaries in the audience rise to give him a standing ovation. I was tempted to do the same myself.



*The Athlete* has created a new approach to biopics that finds a way to weave flashbacks into present time (even when the exposition feels a little stiff), suggest the beginnings of not only the circumstances, but also the character of its subject, and produce visual metaphors that are subtle and powerful. The landscapes of Ethiopia and Norway are breathtaking and woven into the story, the archival footage well chosen, and the use of music (I'm buying the soundtrack if I can) superb. If I were running on October 11, I'd want to watch this on October 10 to learn about the heart of a champion. †

***The Athlete* shows Saturday, October 10 at 5 p.m., Tuesday, October 13 at 7 p.m., and Saturday, October 17 at 12:20 p.m. Screenings will be held at the AMC River East 21, 322 E. Illinois St.**

[Castle \(1997\)](#)

[2009 CIFF: A Frozen Flower \(Ssang-hwa-jeom, 2008\)](#)

[Samurai \(aka, Samurai Assassin, 1965\)](#)

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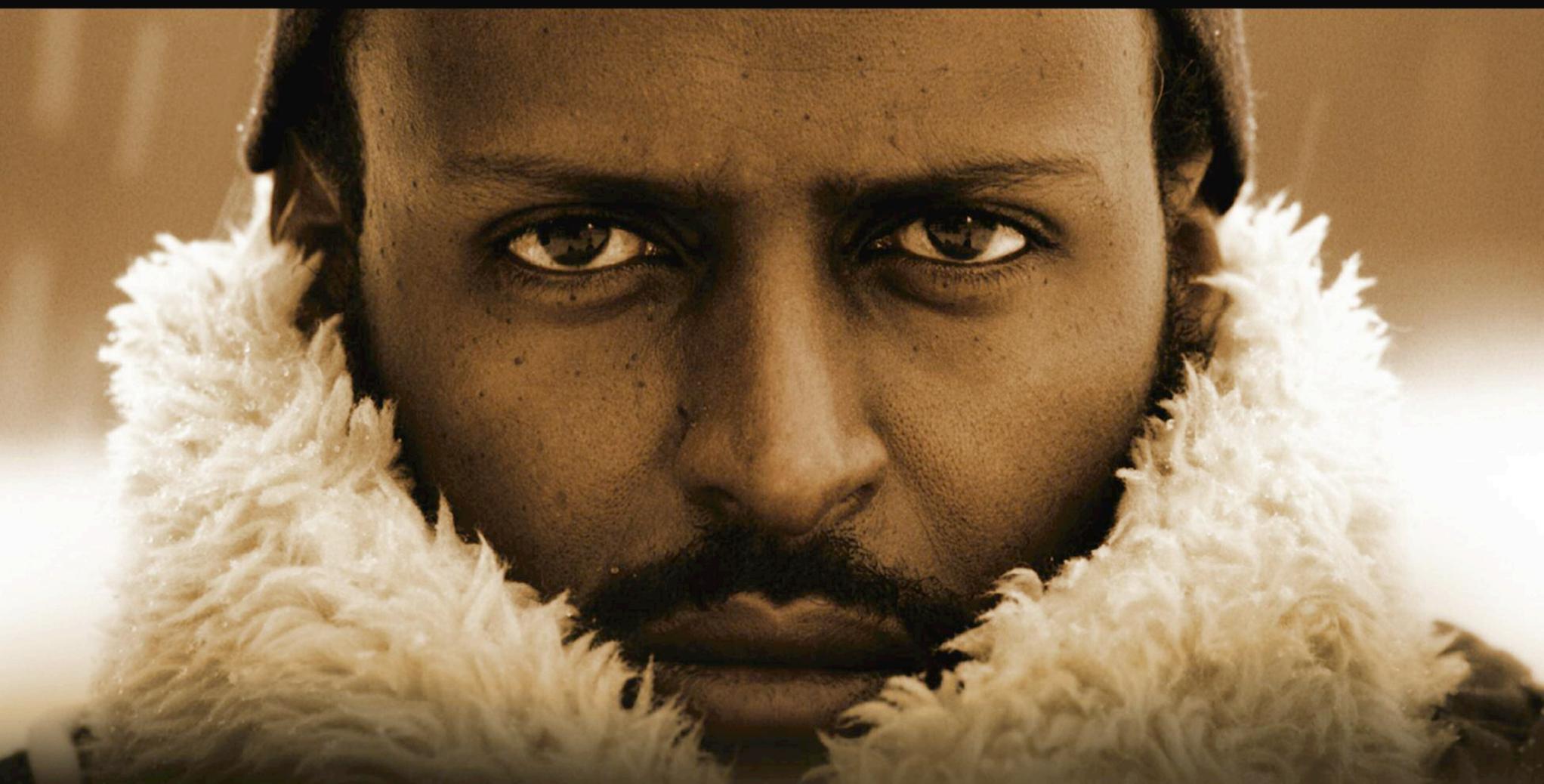
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“CINEMATIC SPORTING HISTORY.”

- VARIETY

“A GLOBAL INDIE FILM THAT COULD HAVE BEEN MADE BY DAVID LEAN”

- MONTREAL GAZETTE

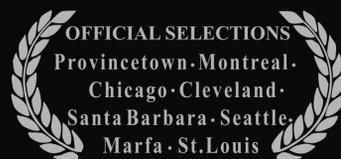


# THE ATHLETE



THE FINISH LINE WAS JUST THE BEGINNING

BASED ON THE TRUE STORY OF ABEBE BIKILA



A FILM BY DAVEY FRANKEL AND RASSELAS LAKEW

ARROW ENTERTAINMENT AND INSTINCTIVE FILM PRESENT AN AV PATCHBAY/CINEMA AETHIOPICA PRODUCTION A FILM BY DAVEY FRANKEL AND RASSELAS LAKEW  
“THE ATHLETE” RASSELAS LAKEW DAG MALMBERG RUTA GEDMINTAS ABBA WAKA DESSALEGN SCREENPLAY BY RASSELAS LAKEW DAVEY FRANKEL MIKAEL AEMIRO AWAKE  
EDITED BY DAVEY FRANKEL MATT MAYER MUSIC BY CHRISTIAN MEYER DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY PHILIPP PFEIFFER RODNEY TAYLOR RADOSLAV SPASSOV TOBY MOORE  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER CHRIS OUWINGA PRODUCED BY DAVEY FRANKEL RASSELAS LAKEW DARRYN WELCH DIRECTED BY DAVEY FRANKEL AND RASSELAS LAKEW



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# THE ATHLETE

ATLETU (THE ATHLETE)

*a film by Davey Frankel and Rasselas Lakew  
an AV Patchbay / Cinema Aethiopica production*

Running the streets of Rome in 1960, an unknown, barefoot Ethiopian man stunned the world by winning Olympic gold in the marathon. Overnight, Abebe Bikila became a sports legend. A hero in his own country and to the continent, Bikila was the first African to win a gold medal and, four years later in Tokyo, the first person in history to win consecutive Olympic gold medals in the marathon. This soldier and quiet son of a shepherd is considered by many the greatest long-distance runner in history.

But his life story only began with Olympic medals. One evening while returning to his home in Addis Ababa after training in the Ethiopian countryside, fate would present this remarkable champion with his greatest challenge; to dig deep within, not just to run the next mile, but to find the will to live. The race of his life had a new beginning and would lead him to places he could never have imagined.

Shot in 35mm from the Arctic Circle to the Equator, "The Athlete (Atletu)" is an extraordinary narrative feature that seamlessly blends autobiography, biopic, drama, and documentary. This beautiful and moving independent film tells the true life tale of a man who is ceaseless in his journey for greatness.

At the International Film Festival Rotterdam, "Atletu (The Athlete)" won the "Lions Award," and was selected for Rotterdam's Volkskrant Program (Best of Fest). This would be only the beginning of the film's amazing festival run where it screened at 51 international film festivals and garnered 16 festival awards worldwide. In the run-up to the 2012 London Olympic Games, "Atletu(The Athlete)" begins its U.S., UK and global theatrical release.



