

song of my mother

klama dayika min

by EROL MINTAS



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Director & Script:

Erol Mintaş

Cast:

Feyyaz Duman (Ali)
Zübeyde Ronahi (Nigar)
Nesrin Cavadzade (Zeynep)
Aziz Çapkurt (Teacher)
Cüneyt Yalaz (School Principal)
Mehmet Ünal (Mustafa)
Sabiha Bozan (Sanem)
Ferit Kaya (Police Captain)
İncinur Daşdemir (Merve)
İbrahim Turgay (Bazaar Seller)
Selahattin Bulut (Bookshop Owner)
Enginay Gültekin (Doctor)
Rewşan Çeliker (Mizgin)

Producers:

Aslı Erdem, Erol Mintaş

Co-Producers:

Guillaume de Seille, Mehmet Aktaş

DOP:

George Chiper-Lillemark

Art Director:

İsmail Durmaz

Music:

Başar Ünder

Sound:

Fatih Aydoğdu

Editing:

Alexandru Radu

Line Producer:

Kaan Kurbanoglu

Assistant Director:

Burak Müjdeci

2014 • 103 min. • Turkey, France, Germany • Kurdish, Turkish • 1:1.85 • Color • 5.1 • DCP

World Premiere: 20th Sarajevo Film Festival – Feature Film Competition (2014)

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MINTAŞ FILM

arizona
prod.

mitos film

KULTÜR VE TURİZM BAKANLIĞI

Sinema

INSTITUT
FRANÇOIS

REPUBLIQUE
FRANÇAISE

Koçak ve Uluslararası

FILM

100 VOLT

BASKA
SİNEMA

ANADOLU KÜLTÜR

VOLKAN
SÜT

agora

if

SYNOPSIS

Young teacher Ali lives with his aging mother Nigar in Istanbul's Tarlabası district; home to many Kurdish immigrants since the 90's. When the ongoing gentrification of the old city forces them to move for a second time, they end up in the soulless concrete desert of the city's furthest outskirts. Nigar is convinced that her old neighbours have all moved back to their village in Eastern Turkey. Every morning she packs her belongings and sets out to return to her village. She roams the city, in search of her village and in search of the song that keeps returning in her dreams. All Ali can do is be kind to her; he buys her gifts, feeds her sweets, takes her on motorcycle rides and tries to help his mother find that song. Meanwhile Ali discovers that his girlfriend is pregnant and that he is not ready to become a father. Torn between the two women in his life, Ali has to choose his own path.





INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

EROL MİNTAŞ

Your short films were the start of the Mother and Son Trilogy. “Song of My Mother” is the last part of the trilogy. How did this idea come to life? Can you tell us about the story behind your short films as well?

On a winter night, I had a dream... there was a young man rushing his bedridden mother to the doctor by pushing her on his garbage cart. It was snowing when I woke up and across my house there was a garbage cart lying under snow. This image chased me for some time after that day up until a point where the line between reality and dream became blurry.

Then, I started thinking about mothers and sons. This is how the story of my first short film “Butimar” came to life. I wrote the script and showed it to my professor. He suggested that I watch Sokurov’s “Mother and Son” and “Ballad of Narayama”. I was astonished by “Ballad of Narayama”, but it was quite different from my story. However, it crushed me to see the similarities between my idea and Sokurov’s film. After that, I stopped working on the film for a while, but I couldn’t keep my mind away from the image of the garbage paper collector man taking his mother for a ride in the city on his cart. So, I decided to pursue this story and inevitably including a reference to Sokurov. In “Butimar”, the man finds a DVD of “Mother and Son” in the garbage. He watches it right before finding his mother dead.



“Butimar” was the first story of the trilogy. While I was working on it, I was already thinking about two more stories. The first seeds of my second short film “Snow” and debut film “Song of My Mother” were thrown at that time. I met my producer Aslı Erdem after my first short film and worked together since then.

Can you explain the mother and son story behind “Song of My Mother”? How was the mother character Nigar inspired?

Building is always harder than destroying... I witnessed this since my childhood. My mother used to rip hand-knit sweaters and knit them again. She would work for months on knitting something, but it would only take half an hour to rip it apart. She would sigh... This is how life is: your long and hard work may be destroyed in seconds with a flip of your hand.

In contemporary Istanbul, displaced Kurdish populations from the rural areas of Eastern Turkey by forced immigration often form communities according to villages (or areas) they come from. They try to preserve their native language and cultural heritage. This story was inspired by my conversations with an old woman in such an association. One of her sons was lost by the state under police custody, the other had died on the mountains, and her other three sons were in prison. She told me in tears how she is longing for her village. Her husband had lost his mind. He was asking me if their son had returned from the mountains. After that day, I knew I had to make this film.

Then I met many women around Tarlabaşı, one of the gentrified neighborhoods in Istanbul. People had moved to certain neighbourhoods in Istanbul after forced immigration 30 years ago. They have been building a life and a community in those neighbourhoods ever since. They were crushed when their lives are dismantled one more time in Istanbul. A second forced immigration caused them to fall into nostalgia. I personally knew some people, like Nigar, who bizarrely



died short after experiencing such a trauma. This is basically how Nigar's story was created. Tossed aside to the outskirts of the city to a remote district, Nigar experiences difficulties to adjust to her new environment. From then on she dreams nothing but to go back to her old village.

The main inspiration of this film is people's stories behind the curtains of a changing and modernizing city. The film is based on an old Kurdish woman, Nigar, who is unable to form an attachment with the changing face of İstanbul, her longing for her village and a once again getting in touch with the past.

Cultural identity and belonging are two very strong themes in this film. Generations seem to interpret them differently. So, how are the young generations represented around these themes? How is their relationship with the past and Kurdish identity?

Then there are the kids... Packed one day behind immigration trucks like furniture, looking up to their parents in fear, unaware of how much pain adults are capable of causing each other. These kids arrived in big cities after forced immigration, but they grew up with their parents' painful stories. Some couldn't adapt to life in the city, some ended up on the streets, and some were able to get education.

Hearing about the stories of younger generations, Ali's character started to shape in my mind. In a way, Ali is stuck between the past and the future. He is not detached from his past but not stuck there either. On the other hand, he is also not able to overcome his anxiety and take strong decisions about the future. As I have mentioned before, building is always harder than destroying, so building a life and a strong future on a past of pain and trauma is not easy for Ali.



While writing the script, language was also a very important issue for me. Ali teaches Turkish in an elementary school to make a living in İstanbul, but at the same time he volunteers to teach Kurdish language to little kids in his neighbourhood. He tries to preserve his mother's legacy through delivering Kurdish to younger generations. He also wants to entertain the kids by telling fairytales – just like his teacher used to. As a result, Ali has two different worlds: one in Kurdish with which he communicates with his mother and that strengthens his roots and the other in Turkish with his friends, literature circles and his assimilated Kurdish girlfriend.

Zeynep is a character who also came to Istanbul after forced immigration and grew up there, but unlike Ali she did not fight against assimilation. Being with Ali, she is also finding a way to connect with her past, identity, and her native language that she perhaps deliberately chose to stay away in the past. This could be the reason that she is putting up with Ali's inconsiderate attitudes and for her persistence to build a future together with him.

Ali's daily life is burdened with his mother's problems. While he wants to follow his dreams in the city, he also tries to work on their problems with his girlfriend Zeynep. Ali imagines a future together both with his mother and Zeynep, but he also wants to integrate his own dreams into this future.



“Song of My Mother” starts with a bold scene from the past and it starts again in İstanbul with a move. İstanbul is currently undergoing a big construction that was the starting point for Gezi protests as well. Can you explain more about the link between gentrification and forced immigration for the Kurdish community?

Certain cities in Turkey became metropolises after the post-war Kurdish immigration and the migration from Anatolia due to economic conditions. However, this process happened randomly and in a very messy way. Shantytowns and illegal houses were built quite fast. The city foundation and the skyline changed rapidly.

Now, in the name of correcting this, people’s lives are destroyed and their houses torn down. Gentrification is interpreted as police entering a neighbourhood with bulldozers, emptying its residents and building new ugly concrete buildings instead. Gentrification causes much destruction, because it is not prserving the culture and the way of life in that area.

Tarlabaşı has been one of the hot spots of gentrification in İstanbul. Our film may be one of the last historical documentations of the neighbourhood before it loses its cultural and historical uniqueness forever. Nigar has moved to Tarlabaşı after her village has been burned in the 90’s. For 30 years, she has convinced herself that this is her new home and supported each other with her neighours in tough conditions. A second forced move from their new neighbourhood causes Nigar to feel like she is in exile. Even though they are moving to a new district together with other victims of gentrification, her neighbours are all spread through the city. They arrive at Esenyurt: 35km away from the city center with the biggest construction projects in the city. High skyscrapers and gated communities have replaced other form of neighbourhoods in Esenyurt. Nigar feels literally like a bird in a cage.



Nigar’s dream and the song she is searching for is like a nostalgia to the past. In the whole film, you are using Dengbej music quite often. Can you elaborate more on Dengbejs with relation to this film?

There is a great phrase by Abbas Kiarostami: “When you take a tree that is rooted in the ground, and transfer it from one place to another, the tree will no longer bear fruit. And if it does, the fruit will not be as good as it was in its original place. This is a rule of nature. I think if I had left my country, I would be the same as the tree.”

Nigar is exactly the same as that tree. This tree is glorious but it is all dried up now. Her only possibility to blossom is the Dengbej image in her mind. She hangs onto this idea of finding Dengbej Seydoye Silo... a song that perhaps never existed or is a forgotten archaic echo from the past. Approximately 30 years ago, performing or recording songs in the Kurdish language was banned in Turkey, but there were always available underground radio stations and recordings.

Dengbej actually has double meaning in Kurdish. Other than its musical meaning, it also means storytelling or like being a messenger. So, this Dengbej music could be considered as a messenger of the eternal journey that Nigar will be taking very soon.



Can you tell us about the camera work? Visually it is different from your short films. How did you work with your DOP on this film?

I worked with George Chiper-Lillemark. I shut my last short film “Snow” with him as well. I have shared the story with George about two years ago and we decided to work together again. From the start, we knew that this story had specific locations that required a different approach. Most of the shootings were carried out within the authentic urban texture of İstanbul: bringing together emptied neighbourhoods and slums such as Tarlabası and the new rising skyscrapers, modern business centers, and the new silhouette of the outskirts of the city such as Esenyurt. The contrast of these two settings was used as the main visual material. Different to my shorts, while we were thinking on the visual language of this story with George, we chose to use a following camera. Mainly, we intended this decision to make contrast in the different rhythms of Nigar and Ali’s lives to deliver the story in the best way. Nigar is usually portrayed in the closed or narrow spaces, more static but camera is on the shoulder. This should give the audience a feeling of being stuck in small spaces. Ali, on the other hand, is always on the run, so is the camera, traveling with him in different parts of town, trying to find its way, having no time to breathe.

EROL MİNTAŞ

DIRECTOR

He was born in Kars, Turkey in 1983. After graduating from Marmara University, Department of Computer and Teaching Technologies, he completed his graduate studies in cinema. He wrote his thesis about the cinema of Tarkovsky. In 2008, his first short film *Butimar* was screened in various film festivals and received four awards in Turkey. Mıntaş's second short *Snow*, completed in 2010, received the Golden Orange for best film in Antalya Film Festival that is one of the most prestigious awards in Turkey. *Snow* has competed in various film festivals (Montpellier FF, Boston Turkish FF, Timishort FF, Brno Sixteen FF, Tangier Mediterranean Short FF, Istanbul IFF, !f Istanbul Independent FF) in the country and around the world and won eight different awards. His debut feature *Song of My Mother* was selected for co-production markets and work-in-progress sections in Meetings on the Bridge at Istanbul IFF, Agora at Thessaloniki IFF, Sundance Script Lab at !f Istanbul. It received the post-production and distribution awards at Meetings on the Bridge. The film was supported by Turkish Ministry of Culture and CNC Cinema du Monde.

FILMOGRAPHY

2014 Song of My Mother (Klama Dayika Min)

2010 Snow (Berf)

2008 Butimar



ASLI ERDEM

PRODUCER

Born in Istanbul in 1984, Aslı Erdem graduated from Robert College High School. She studied Cultural Studies at Sabancı University and completed her graduate studies at Boğaziçi University. She produced with Romania the Golden Orange-winning short film *Snow* directed by Erol Mintaş. The short film received eight different awards in the country and internationally. She was an Associate Producer on the Eurimages-supported film *In Flames* with 110,000 viewers and released in seven countries. She produced Melisa Önel's debut feature *Seaburners* that premiered in 2014 Berlinale Forum 2014. Aslı recently completed *Song of My Mother*, the first feature by Erol Mintaş, supported by Turkish Ministry of Culture and CNC Cinema du Monde. The film is a Turkish-French-German co-production. She is currently working on the acclaimed director Semih Kaplanoğlu's new feature *Grain*, a four-country co-production between Turkey-Germany-France-Sweden. Aslı was selected for EAVE European Producers Workshop 2014. She is a member of the New Cinema Movement (Yeni Sinema Hareketi) in Turkey composed of leading industry professionals.

FILMOGRAPHY

2014 Song of My Mother (Klama Dayika Min) by Erol Mintaş

2014 Seaburners (Kumun Tadı) by Melisa Önel

2011 In Flames (Yangın Var) by Murat Saraçoğlu

2010 Snow (Berf) by Erol Mintaş

CO-PRODUCERS

Arizona Productions [FR]

Paris-based Arizona Productions was created by Guillaume de Seille and Rémi Roy to produce art-house feature films mainly directed by emerging talents; Bénédicte Thomas is handling domestic theatrical distribution for most of the films and a couple of acquisitions every year.

Mîtosfilm [GER]

Mîtosfilm is an independent Berlin-based production company which aims to support authentic storytelling, producing thought-provoking feature and documentary films. From 2004 to 2011 mîtosfilm released 16 arthouse films as a distributor for the German cinema-theatres.

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MİNİTİŞ FILM

arizona
prod.

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KÜLTÜR VE TURİZM BAKANLIĞI

Sinema

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KOPRUCİ AKADEMİ

100% FILM

VOLT

BASKA
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ANADOLU KÜLTÜR

VOLKAN
SÜT

agora
winners

if