

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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Mustang

France/Germany/Turkey/Quatar 2016

Director : Deniz Gamze Erguven

Writer : Deniz Gamze Erguven Alice Winocour

Cast :

Lale – Gunes Sensoy

Nur – Doga Zeynep Doguslu

Selma – Tugba Sunguroglu

Ece – Elit Iscan

Sonsy – Ilayda Akdogan

Shot on location in Turkey. 93mins.

Erguven, for whom this is a directorial debut, was born in Turkey but moved at aged 6 months to Paris. Her father was a diplomat and they lived there till she was nine. The family returned to Turkey where Deniz had a very free handed childhood. She later returned to France to live, but all her holidays were spent in Turkey and she felt her family life was completely Turkish. This is important as the opening scene of the girls mucking about in the water with male school friends, and the basis of all the subsequent action, is one that took place in Erguven's own life. She also knew of the practice of punishment beating of children in order of age from her mother's generation.

The action of the film takes place in a village about 100km from Istanbul where the family lives in a sizeable well-furnished home, but they also as a consequence of geography live a century away from any notion of women's rights. The girls' parents are dead and they are being raised by their grandmother, an aunt and a temperamental uncle whose main concern in life is the state of the girls' hymens. The girls' collective beauty automatically makes them morally suspect and in a culture where a woman's worth is measured by their marriageable prospects this is a serious blow to their prospects as independent women.

As part of their punishment and "reprogramming" as suitable wife material all forms of "perversion" are gradually taken away from them. The sisters however share a common passion for freedom and find ways of getting round the constraints. The film never beats you over the head with its feminist message. The tone is light, sweet and funny. Erguven never allows the action to get too gritty for its own good. The most shocking events take place off camera and the humour could be said to actually deflate the anger that builds on the girls' behalf. However we see everything through their eyes and Erguven has commented, "For me it is very important to look at the world through the eyes of the girls. In cinema history we have always been looking at the world through the eyes of men."

These girls are both fierce and provocative in their attempts to escape their lives but they are also unabashedly girlish. They call each other lovingly disparaging names, they giggle about crushes and lounge about in their swimwear. These attitudes contrast with the strident opinions held by men

speaking on the TV and radio. Erguven shows up how with the Turkish men's position of power their views are ostensibly simply conservative, but that this conservatism is also sex obsessed.

The performances are outstanding and the girls hardly seem to be acting. Only one of the cast had acted before. To prepare them for their roles Erguven ran 2 boot camps, one to give them acting tools and to show them films such as Lolita, Beasts of the Southern Wild and Fishtank, and the other to immerse them in the story. "It was also about group building. and it worked. The solidarity between them was amazing, the way they protected each other. They became one body with five heads – a single rebellious entity." When asked if she worried about them and the consequences of being seen in these roles Erguven said, "Yes ----- But we always had their consent and that of their parents."

Understandably the film opened to criticism in Turkey and she has in fact currently withdrawn from filming in Turkey. She feels the situation in Turkey for women is now under Erdogan very grave and she is happy to have the film seen as her contribution for women's rights in Turkey.

After the film, an opportunity to stay behind and discuss the season so far. Meet in the bar area.

Our pre-Christmas screening is 'Sing Street' on 13 December.