

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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Wednesday 3rd April: [Under The Fig Trees](#)

Tunisia 92 mins 2022

Director: Erige Sehiri

Writers: Erige Sehiri; Ghalya Lacroix; Peggy Hamann

Cast:

Ameni Fdhili (*Sana*); Fide Fdhili (*Fidé*); Feten Fdhili (*Melek*); Samar Sifi (*Mariem*);
Abdelhak Mrabti (*Abdou*); Fedi Ben Achour (*Saber*)

Erige Sehiri's gorgeous, wistful film is set in the country's languid fig orchards, where a group of teenage girls are spending a sun-dappled summer helping to gather in the harvest.

Over the course of one hot day, the girls dream up new worlds for themselves (and bemoan the one they live in) while picking the fragile fruit. There are crushes to be reviewed, marriages to fear and fantasise about, family obligations to discuss, social changes to debate, and – away from the watchful eyes of their parents – boys to flirt with. A modern and varied group of young women living in a patriarchal society, some of them are more accepting of the demands they may face as future wives and mothers, while others seek to repudiate them.

Dramas large and small unfurl in the shade of the fig trees, drawing you in via a sound design of rustling leaves and birdsong and cinematographer Frida Marzouk's close-up camerawork. Sehiri has crafted a gentle, soulful, and naturalistic portrait of contemporary girlhood in rural northwestern Tunisia, its authenticity enhanced by her use of non-professional actors, who helped develop and improvise the script and who enjoy a convincing, affectionate and evocative chemistry with one another. The consistency of the performances by the cast of first timers, all operating with unshowy nuance even in dialogue-heavy roles, is utterly astounding.

Though a seemingly minor concept, *Under The Fig Trees* is certainly bountiful in its power to unearth the unspoken codes that reign over this community, where some men demand reverence from women solely for their gender-based status in the social hierarchy, where the notion of absolute loyalty to one's extended family guides every decision, and where romantic companionship remains mostly transactional. Yet perhaps things are changing, suggested in exuberant shots of the young women, hair to the wind, singing and dancing with abandon, as their contemporary men join them instead of judging them.

Please join us after the screening for a brief discussion about the films shown this season.

Our next presentation:

Our final film, [Return To Seoul](#), will be shown on Wednesday, 17 April, starting at 8:00pm.