

MOTHERS

A New Film by Milcho Manchevski



A
BANANA FILM PRODUCTION
IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH
CINÉ-SUD PROMOTION
AND
ELEMENTS FILM
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
THE MACEDONIAN FILM FUND
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AND
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MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES ET EUROPÉENNES (FRANCE)
PRODUCED BY
CHRISTINA KALLAS

Press & Industry Screenings at Toronto International Film Festival:

September 11, 2010 at 6:30pm at Scotia Bank Theater 11
September 17, 2010 at 11:30am at Scotia Bank Theater 2

Public Screenings at Toronto International Film Festival:

September 12, 2010 at 8.30pm at Bell Lightbox Theater 1
September 13, 2010 at 9:15pm at Scotia Bank Theater 4
September 18, 2010 at 3:15pm at Scotia Bank Theater 3

To download photos from the film please visit www.manchevski.com and click for "mothers"

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SYNOPSIS

Two nine-year-old girls report a flasher to the police even though they never saw him. Three filmmakers meet the only residents of a deserted village - an elderly brother and sister who have not spoken to each other in 16 years. Retired cleaning women are found raped and strangled in a small town.

The fiction slowly turns into a documentary.

Marking the return of Milcho Manchevski, *MOTHERS* portrays all types: dedicated, neglectful, loving, absent. Through these women, Manchevski renders the faces of human tragedy and joy.

Employing an innovative structure, the three stories in *MOTHERS* highlight the delicate relationships of truth and fiction, of drama and documentary. What is the nature of truth?

Directed with a keen eye for contemporary Macedonia, the film eschews neat narrative devices and pushes the viewer to confront their own definitions of filmic reality.

MOTHERS consists of three stories, a structure that the precociously talented Macedonian filmmaker, Milcho Manchevski, used to great effect in his superb debut film, the award-winning *Before the Rain*. Placed in three locations – Skopje, Mariovo and Kicevo – it is, as its title suggests, a film about mothers. But it is also about much more than that, as Manchevski composes a kind of report card on the present state-of-mind of his country.

The trilogy of episodes he has assembled in this always thoughtful, often provocative, and finally unsettling film allows Manchevski the freedom to wander through very different facets of contemporary Macedonia. The first episode – centered on a willful and wonderfully independent child who, outraged that a schoolmate has been “flashed,” goes off to the police station to report the “crime” – contains a deeper sense of moral conflict. The second episode, which follows a filmmaking crew in search of old rural traditions, concerns two very old, flinty peasants. The only inhabitants of a village that was almost entirely abandoned, their ghostly lives act as a living thread to the past. And the third episode, by far the most disturbing, moves into pure documentary as it chronicles the shocking deaths of a number of women, all middle-aged mothers, killed at the hands of a psychopath who seems to suffer from a mother-complex.

MOTHERS begins with fiction, indeed with the fabrication of a lie, moves on to an attempt at the fabrication of a myth and ends in the shattering imagery of the real, where no fabrication is possible. Lying below the surface of all the episodes is a small web of fibs and betrayals, minor on the whole, but gaining an awful power in the final act, where a man respected by the community turns out to have deceived them all. There is no easy reading of *Mothers*, only a need for us to work with the filmmaker to uncover its many meanings.

- Piers Handling, Toronto International Film Festival Director

An Interview with Director Milcho Manchevski

Q: With *MOTHERS* you come back to the *Before the Rain* (1994) territory, where three seemingly unrelated stories intertwine in one whole. *MOTHERS* is two parts fiction and one part documentary. How do these three parts hold together?

A: The film works like the triptychs you see in churches or museums, where the three paintings function as one unit and work off of each other. The three paintings are not complete on their own, but only when seen as a whole. When you put them side-by-side, their differences are emphasized, as are their similarities. We are asked to consider them in new light.

Q: How are the three stories linked?

A: By tone and theme. I am not interested in narrative devices where one story neatly dovetails into another. I was more interested in a Spartan, austere piece, where the connections are made in the mind of the beholder, and they are not necessarily narrative. In the end, it is the complex feeling created in the mind of the viewer who is looking at all three, seemingly unrelated stories, together.

Q: What are the stories about?

A: They are about the nature of truth. All three stories deal with the truth seen in a broken mirror. We learn something, and then we later learn that what we know may not be the real truth. The more we learn about the truth, the less important it is what the factual truth is, and the more important it becomes what the emotional truth of this living person is. The facts are important, but in the end, the love and the suffering are more important than the facts.

Q: You are visiting a dark territory, as if updating a Dostoyevsky or a Gogol to a contemporary Southeastern Europe.

A: I love a good tragedy. There is a line in a book by the Bosnian writer Mesa Selimovic, which goes something like this (and I quote by memory): "In the end every man ends up losing." I would like for this line not to be true. And I made *MOTHERS* as an attempt to figure out how to live and not be on the losing side – at least for a moment. Perhaps we need to embrace our sadness and our fears.

Q: What inspired you to make *MOTHERS*?

A: The truth. All three stories in this film are true. They are not only based on real events, but they often follow actions and dialogue verbatim, as they happened. One of the stories is a documentary. Yet, we don't know more about what happened in the documentary. If anything, the truth in the documentary is more elusive, even confusing.

Q: What distinguishes fiction from reality?

A: A writer once said: "The difference between fiction and reality is that fiction has to make sense." And, even better: "Fiction is the truth inside a lie."

Q: Do you think the triptych form with all its interactivity possibilities can also be too much of a challenge for the viewer? Would this affect one's ability to communicate with the piece of art?

A: We should not underestimate our audience. We desperately need stories. Perhaps they give us comfort, tell us that other people, stars and gods behave and feel the way we do. Stories make us human. Perhaps these stories – legends, myths, fairytales, fables, soap operas, newspaper articles, anecdotes, reality shows, novels, songs, jokes, history tomes – tell us how to behave ourselves and how to justify our feelings.

In this search for the story which expresses my feelings, it was not important whether it was told as drama or as a documentary. These genre divisions have been imposed from outside (the same way that the way we should tell a story has been imposed from the outside, and the way that the tone of most films has been dictated by non-creative forces). I try to challenge the predictable and the reactionary. Working with truth and fiction, with found objects and created artifice has never been an issue for Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Beuys, Marcel Duchamp, W.G. Sebald, Julio Cortasar or Dusan Makavejev.

Q: Yet, this approach is rare in mainstream narrative cinema.

A: That does not disqualify it. On the contrary, I am tired of narrative films taking back seat to literature, art or music when it comes to being innovative - only because the audience supposedly will not get it. There is enough audience for *Titanic*, as there is enough audience for an inventive piece of filmmaking. I am afraid the corporate way of thinking is devouring everything, even the creative minds, so we often end up censoring ourselves on behalf of some imagined wide audience. The industrial, corporate way of doing things too often runs against the grain not only of art, but also of human spirit and human experience. There is no excuse for allowing the corporate mindset to dictate how we make art.

Q: All of your films are perceived as political. This film goes deeper into examining the way a contemporary Macedonian society works: we see neglectful and absent urban mothers, children running amok with credit cards and accusing people of sex crimes, we see an old mother dying forgotten in the middle of nowhere, we hear about elderly cleaning women (someone's mothers) raped and strangled by a neighbor. Is this a political statement about Macedonia or the Balkans?

A: Every good film is a political statement. In my work I don't talk about one country or one region, I am interested in the human condition in general. *MOTHERS* is a film from Macedonia, rather than a film about Macedonia.

Q: What drove you to make a documentary about such a bizarre event, the case of the crime reporter-turned-suspect Vlado Taneski?

A: The ordinariness of evil. The victims were all retired cleaning women. They disappeared as they were doing their daily chores – cooking lunch, making baklava, going out to buy bread. The person who kidnapped, raped and killed them was someone who knew them well, perhaps a neighbor they shared gossip and jokes with. A person in the film says: "In Macedonia everyone knows everything about

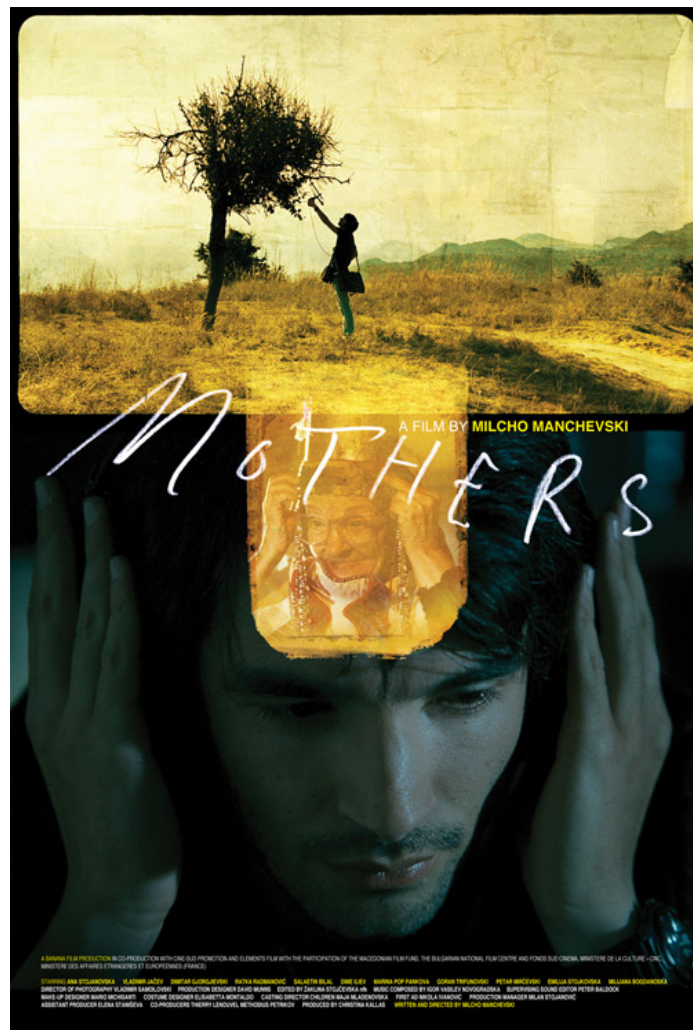
everybody at all times.” And you begin to wonder if this kind of claustrophobic environment is more murderous than the crimes themselves.

Q: As in all of your films, you are introducing new faces to the audience, the radiant Ana Stojanovska and Dimitar Gjorgjievski and the two young girls. You like working with new actors?

A: I like working with good actors. I don't care if they are “names” who can open a movie or unknowns. As always, we went through a rigorous and long casting process, saw hundreds of actors, and in the case of the two nine-year-old girls, we saw more than a thousand candidates. In the end, we picked the best actors for the parts.

Q: You seem to be in love with the Macedonian landscape?

A: I love the possibilities it gives: expressing the inner world of the characters or contrasting the landscape with their inner state. Yes, it is magnificent, and I am sad that hydroelectric power plants and the new lifestyle will change it forever.



PRODUCER'S NOTES

MOTHERS is a painfully beautiful and honest portrayal of a society of neglectful and neglected mothers where children run amok with credit cards accusing innocent people of sexual molestation, where old people die abandoned, and where elderly cleaning women are victims of a serial rapist/killer who happens to be their neighbor. All stories are true, and the fact that the film employs intriguing structure, where fiction turns into a real documentary only makes the film more charged and controversial.

MOTHERS is an experimental film in its format, although it is viewed and appreciated as a regular narrative film. It uses classical narrative techniques and a narrative approach. Through the way the three stories are put together, it experiments with our perception as an audience – and challenges the way we feel and think, making us engage in this ascetic, interactive piece.

The film actually makes us experience these issues instead of making us think about them: truth and fiction, subjective truth and half-truth. The cerebral part happens only once the film is over.

There are threads that run through the three stories - mothers and motherhood, crime and punishment. There is a gradual descent into human hell: the first part talks about casual evil with humor, the second part delves into the emotional and subtle, the photography focusing on beauty, the third part grows into something real, a dark fable on truth and objectivity.

Each of the three contains the seeds of the next.

People who see the film for the first time create in their head their own connections between the three stories while watching. The audience becomes a creative audience, as in interactive narration. It turns into a detective who is out to discover the truth of the stories. Here, rather than the movie going linearly to one thing, and at the end telling you what the movie's about, we have a conversation with the audience - with each individual member of the audience.

The film blurs the lines between fiction and documentary stylistically. Indeed, watching this film you do not understand where fiction ends and documentary begins. But this, again, has to do with our perception rather than with the director's intention to manipulate you – as a matter of fact this film is completely devoid of such intentions.

Doc and drama are inching closer to each other with cameras being everywhere and with the evolution of the internet. Add to this true stories and confessions and other elevated offshoots of reality television, which paradoxically is itself a form of fiction. The combination and comparison of fiction and fact is becoming a real issue. This film will contribute to it in a most unique way.

State funds are closing, there are less and less distributors... Yet, this is not the time to hunker down, this is the time to experiment. It is obvious that something new shall be born, is being born. It takes more courage than ever before to go against the wave of

fear and conservatism, but on the other hand, the motion picture industry has always had a great tradition of appropriating the narrative structures and the means of expression of the avant-garde and using them in commercial movies. Someone has to dare and challenge what we know and what we are used to.

After the big success of his Golden Lion-winner and Academy award-nominated, *BEFORE THE RAIN* Milcho Manchevski was involved in several Hollywood productions (*THREE KINGS*, *THE DEVIL'S OWN*, *PERFECT MURDER* and *RAVENOUS*), and in HBO's *THE WIRE*, but he always ultimately made his films in Europe. Europe's gain.

What attracted me most to this project is exactly that it did not have these characteristics: folklore, the fulfillment of certain stereotypes, appealing to feelings of pity towards a people stricken for many years by war and poverty, being cute etc.

The film is blunt and universal. It is gut-wrenching, even for us who made it. And to me that is the most important thing about it.

It depicts ordinary, everyday violence that affects and is perpetrated by everybody, regardless of age or sex, and for this reason it is tougher. In a way it functions as a wider portrait of humanity – isn't this why we reached the point we reached as a society? When are we going to wise up?

Christina Kallas, Producer

CREW

Milcho Manchevski, *Writer-Director*

Milcho Manchevski has published fiction (in *New American Writing*, among others), including a book of conceptual fiction, *The Ghost of My Mother* (1980-1998); staged performance art (founding member of the 80's post-conceptual group 1AM); published books of photographs accompanying his photo exhibitions *Street* (1999) and *Five Drops of Dream* (2010); and written and directed four features and over 50 short forms for which he won over 40 international awards.

His filmmaking credits include as writer-director *Before the Rain* (1994), *Dust* (2001), *Shadows* (2008), *Mothers* (2010) and over 50 short forms (experimental, shorts, music videos, etc. 1978-2010). As director, *Game Day* on HBO's *The Wire* (2002).

He has won more than 40 awards, including Golden Lion in Venice, FIPRESCI, Independent Spirit, Academy-Award nomination, David di Donatello, Silver Horse, Golden Bug, Silver Condor, film of the year in Turkey, Argentina, Sweden, New York Times' *Best 1,000 Films Ever Made* (*Before the Rain*); best MTV hip-hop video (*Tennessee*); Best Experimental Film (*1.72*); Best TV Spot (*Macedonia Timeless*), Mother Theresa (for humanitarian work), etc.

Academic conferences in Florence and Leipzig were dedicated to his films, as well as numerous essays, chapters and articles. He has also taught, lectured and answered questions at NYU, Binger Film Lab, FDU Belgrade, SIU, Yale, Harvard, Brown, University of Chicago, University of Texas at Austin, Lee Strasberg Institute, etc. He lives in New York City.

Christina Kallas, *Producer*

Christina Kallas is a producer and a writer working in three languages. She is a member of the European Film Academy and of the German Film Academy, and since January 2006 president of the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe (FSE). Credits as a writer and/or producer include features *i.d* (Parallax/Polygram, 1994), *Love Lies* (First Film Award at the Munich Film Festival, 1997), *The Commissioner*, starring John Hurt and Armin Mueller-Stahl (official competition of the Berlin Film Festival, 1998) and *Mothers* (Toronto Film Festival, 2010), TV Movie *Männer sind wie Schokolade* (ARD, 1999), Best German TV-awarded series *Edel & Starck* (2001-2003) as well as TV series *Danni Lowinsky* (Sat1, 2009-2010) and a number of documentaries. Kallas has written five published books: *European Co-productions in Film and Television* (Nomos, Baden-Baden 1992), *Screenplay. The Art of Invention and Narration in Cinema* (Nefeli, Athens 2006), *Creative Screenwriting* (uvk, Konstanz 2007), *Bio/pic or The Lives of the Few* (Patakis, Athens 2009) and *Creative Screenwriting. Understanding Emotional Structure* (Palgrave, London/New York, 2010); as well as numerous chapters, essays and articles.

She is the founder and artistic director of the Balkan Fund, since 2003. She was a member and then the chair of the commission for the financing of script development of the German Federal Film Board FFA from 2003 to 2008, and from 2006 to 2008 a

member of the commission for the financing of film production. After completing her PhD on the subject of European co-productions at the Berlin University in 1992, she has been teaching screenwriting at the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin, at the International Film School in Cologne and at the Scuola Holden per le Tecniche Narrative in Torino. Since 2007 she is associate professor at the Cinema Department of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. As president of the FSE, she organized two major conferences for writers and writer-producers, the First Conference of European Screenwriters in 2006 and the First World Conference of Screenwriters in 2009, and was one of the authors of the much discussed and acclaimed *Manifesto of the European Screenwriters*.

Vladimir Samoiloovski, Director of Photography

Vladimir Samoiloovski served as director of photography on *Father* (2009), *Illusion* (2004), *Joy of Life* (2001), *Good-bye 20th Century* (1998), *Macedonian Saga* (1993) and *Light Gray* (segment *Devil in the Heart*). He won a cinematography prize for his work on *Illusion* at the Avanca Film Festival.

Zaklina Stojcevska, Editor

Zaklina Stojcevska was educated at the Norwegian Film School and has edited numerous Scandinavian feature films, documentaries and drama series, including the internationally acclaimed films *Kissed by Winter*, *The Art of Negative Thinking* and *North*. Her work on *Kissed by Winter* earned her the Kanon film Award (2006) and she recently was awarded both the Kanon award and the Amanda award for her work on the feature film *Upperdog*.

David Munns, Production Designer

David Munns has worked as a production designer for *Shadows* (2007), *Six Shooter* (2004), *Goodbye, Cruel World* (2003), *Dust* (2003) and *Before the Rain* (1994).

Elisabetta Montaldo, Costume Designer

Elisabetta Montaldo has worked as a costume designer for *I demoni di San Pietroburgo* (2008) and *Shadows* (2007), and the television shows *Callas e Onassis* (2005), *Maigret: L'ombra Cinese* (2004), and *Maigret: La Trappola* (2004). Elisabetta received the David di Donatello Award for Best Costume Design in 2001 for *I Cento Passi* (2000).

Mario Michisanti, Make-up Artist

Mario Michisanti worked as a make-up artist on *Duplicity* (2009), *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and *Gangs of New York* (2002).

CAST

Ana Stojanovska, Ana

Ana is still a student at the drama school in Macedonia. She beat dozens of more experienced actors in the casting process for the part of Ana - her first professional role. Her parents, her grandfather and her sister are actors.

Dimitar Gjorgjievski, Simon

Dime's first professional experience was in Manchevski's *Shadows*, while he was still in drama school in Skopje. Since then he graduated, and has appeared mainly on stage in Macedonia.

Vladimir Jacev, Kole

Vladimir acted in all of Manchevski's films. Most of his work, however, is at the Macedonian National Theater, including: Heiner Muller's *Hamletmaschine* and *The Mission*, Harold Pinter's *Birthday Party*, *The Lover*, Gogol's *Dead Souls*, etc.

Ratka Radmanovic, Granma

Ratka is a living legend of the Bitola Theater, with more than 150 stage roles to her credit before retiring. Winner of a number of awards for her work.

Salaetin Bilal, Grandpa

Salko is a graduate of the Theater Conservatorium in Istanbul. At the Turkish theater in Macedonia, he appeared in Moliere's *Don Juan*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Goldoni's *Servant of Two Masters*, Miller's *All My Sons*, winning a number of awards. His film credits in local and international productions include *Takva*, *Behind Enemy Lines*, *Mirage* and major parts in Manchevski's *Dust* and *Shadows*.

Dime Iliev, Sergeant Janeski

After bursting on the scene in 1977 as the male lead in *Stand Up, Delfina*, Dime has been in over 90 plays, films and TV films. He has also directed a number of stage productions.

CREDITS

Ana
Kole
Simon
Granma
Grandpa
Bea
Kjara
Sergeant Janeski
Mrs. Matilda
Zoki
Raspusto
Laze
Baterija
Officer Iljov
Džagure
And the people of KIČEVO.

ANA STOJANOVSKA
VLADIMIR JAČEV
DIMITAR GJORGJIEVSKI
RATKA RADMANOVIĆ
SALAETIN BILAL
EMILIJA STOJKOVSKA
MILIJANA BOGDANOSKA
DIME ILIEV
MARINA POP PANKOVA
GORAN TRIFUNOVSKI
PETAR MIRČEVSKI
BLAGOJA SPIRKOSKI – DŽUMERKO
BORIS ČOREVSKI
TAMER IBRAHIM
MLADEN MOMČILOVIĆ

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PRODUCED BY
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
PRODUCTION DESIGNER
EDITED BY
MUSIC COMPOSED BY
SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR
MAKE-UP DESIGNER
COSTUME DESIGNER
CASTING DIRECTOR – CHILDREN
CASTING DIRECTORS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

CO-PRODUCERS

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER
ASSISTANT PRODUCER
PRODUCTION MANAGER
1st ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

MILCHO MANCHEVSKI
CHRISTINA KALLAS
VLADIMIR SAMOILOVSKI
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