



CHRISTMAS FILMS

Tangerine

Tangerine

Directed by: Sean Baker

©: Tangerine Films LLC

Presented by: Magnolia Pictures,
Duplass Brothers Productions, Through Films

In association with: Cre Films,
Freestyle Picture Company

Executive Producers: Mark Duplass, Jay Duplass

Producers: Marcus Cox, Karrie Cox,
Darren Dean, Shih-Ching Tsou, Sean Baker

Unit Production Manager: Julie Cummings

Location Managers: Andrew J. Areffi,
Melissa Areffi

Assistant Director: Julie Cummings

Continuity: Shih-Ching Tsou

Casting: Sean Baker, Chris Bergoch

Written by: Sean Baker, Chris Bergoch

Cinematography: Radium Cheung, Sean Baker

Camera Operators: Radium Cheung, Sean Baker

Editor: Sean Baker

Costume Designer: Shih-Ching Tsou

Location Sound Recording: Irin Strauss

Re-recording Mixer: Jeremy Grody

Cast:

Kitana Kiki Rodriguez (*Sin-Dee Rella*)

Mya Taylor (*Alexandra*)

Karren Karagulian (*Razmik*)

Mickey O'Hagan (*Dinah*)

Alla Tumanian (*Ashken*)

James Ransone (*Chester*)

Luiza Nersisyan (*Yeve*)

Arsen Grigoryan (*Karo*)

USA 2015©

88 mins

Digital

It's Christmas Eve and at a donut shop in Hollywood a couple of transgender sex workers meet up to discuss a problem one of them faces. Soon, questions of infidelity, the fine line between performance and living, and the importance of family bring together a disparate group of characters. Sean Baker's joyous micro-budget comedy drama was shot on iPhones and is perfect counter-programming to the established festive canon.

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You might assume that the most remarkable thing about Sean Baker's touching and occasionally hilarious neo-screwball is the fact that it was shot on a handful of iPhones. The phones in question were only slightly modified – fitted with Kickstarter-funded lens adapters and software that allowed Baker to lock exposure and focus to his own specifications – but the result sits very comfortably on the big screen and never feels like a home movie. In fact, this zero-budget work-around produces a dreamlike, colour-saturated effect that perfectly matches the drug-tinged hyperreality of its protagonists' lives on the seedier streets and corners of Tinseltown. Likewise, working with minimal equipment allowed the small crew to roam around their locations without drawing attention to themselves, giving the film an edgy, guerrilla feel.

But just as impressive is the quality of the performances, and the sheer big-heartedness of the story, which traces one incident-packed Christmas Eve in the lives of two transgender sex workers. The immediacy of the handheld camerawork – coupled with the actors' semi-improvised dialogue, which is mostly drawled out in long strings of slang-peppered invective – plunges the viewer straight in at the deep end of their hardscrabble existence, where they eke out a precarious living while battling to maintain some dignity in the face of the ridicule and disgust of mainstream society. The result is so grippingly watchable that the type of camera being used is really neither here nor there.

As played by Kitana Kiki Rodriguez and Mya Taylor – both appearing for the first time on film – best friends Sin-Dee and Alexandra are both heroic and deeply flawed. Taylor plays Alexandra as the quieter, more cautious of the two, though her sweetness has a flinty edge that becomes more apparent as the plot thickens. In contrast, Sin-Dee, as played by Rodriguez, is a tornado of rage and emotional venting from the very first scene: having learnt that her pimp and supposed fiancé Chester (talented character actor James Ransone) has been cheating on her with a cisgender woman, she sets off to find them both and bring hellfire raining down on those who dare to disrespect her.

Interwoven with this love-rat revenge plot is another domestic drama: Armenian cab driver Razmik (regular Baker collaborator Karren Karagulian) is a long-term john of Alexandra's and is, perhaps, in love with her. His own Christmas Eve has brought about a crisis in his marriage as he walks out on the suffocating festive meal prepared by his wife and overbearing mother-in-law (Luiza Nersisyan and Alla Tumanian respectively) and goes in search of Alexandra. For

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Tangerine

Fri 8 Dec 21:00; Fri 15 Dec 20:40; Fri 22 Dec 18:10

Tokyo Godfathers (Tokyo goddofazazu)

Sat 9 Dec 20:45; Thu 14 Dec 18:30 BFI IMAX (+ intro by Ghibliothèque podcast creators Michael Leader and Jake Cunningham); Wed 20 Dec 18:15; Sat 23 Dec 21:00

Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas

Sun 10 Dec 13:30; Wed 13 Dec 20:45 BFI IMAX

The Polar Express 3D

Sat 16 Dec 10:00; Sun 17 Dec 10:00; Sun 24 Dec 11:30 (all BFI IMAX)

Miracle on 34th Street

Sat 16 Dec 12:40; Sat 23 Dec 15:30

Die Hard

Sat 16 Dec 20:45 BFI IMAX

Carol

Thu 21 Dec 20:40; Sat 30 Dec 17:20

The Bishop's Wife

Fri 22 Dec 14:40; Sat 23 Dec 18:20

The Muppet Christmas Carol

Sat 23 Dec 12:00

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her part, Alexandra can think only about her big debut as the singer in a local bar; she has invested everything into what she hopes will be a life-changing opportunity, but will Razmik get there in time to show her some support?

By bringing these two disrupted love stories together, Baker teases out unexpected subtleties in a film that mostly majors on broad farce. The popular image of trans women as trashy, tart-with-a-heart loudmouths in impossible heels is a cliché that he can't dodge and doesn't try to; instead, he allows the context that creates and explains them to gleam around the edges: the precarious poverty that informs their everyday choices, and the emotional vulnerability that makes them a magnet for heartbreak.

Razmik, likewise, begins as a stock character – this time the hardworking but henpecked immigrant – but then becomes far more complex as the film gets under his skin. A series of vignettes supplied by his hotchpotch of taxi customers adds some welcome light relief to the narrative thread of Sin-Dee's intense melodrama, but Karagulian's sympathetic performance brings home the conflicted yearning of his romantic aspirations with the full force of tragedy.

As well as the men who are attracted to Sin-Dee and Alexandra, Baker also insists that we consider the plight of the cisgender woman, Dinah (Mickey O'Hagan), who has taken up with Chester and must now answer to Sin-Dee. Dinah is a sleazy type with a bitchy attitude, but if she were ever invited to check her privilege, she'd have trouble finding any. Her life turning conveyor-belt tricks in a fleapit motel looks a lot worse than Sin-Dee's defiantly freelance existence, and the two women come together in strange moments of mutual understanding as the intersections of their lives are brought to the surface. This generosity towards Dinah is typical of a film that never settles for obvious polarities or entrenches its characters in two-dimensional assumptions about their moral or strategic priorities.

As Sin-Dee drags Dinah through the streets like a medieval scarlet woman, the audience is pulled along just as insistently. *Tangerine* takes you by the scruff of your neck into a parallel world where tattered reality is shot through with neon flashes of colour, clarity and pure emotional honesty.

Lisa Mullen, *Sight and Sound*, December 2015