



NEW RELEASES

Crossing

Crossing

Director: Levan Akin

Producers: Katja Adomeit, Nino Chichua, Anna Croneman, Charlotte Denward, Omar El Kadi, Anna Khazaradze, Nadia Turincev, Ersan Çongar

Screenplay: Levan Akin

Director of Photography: Lisabi Fridell

Editors: Levan Akin, Emma Lagrelius

Sound Design: Sigrid Aalbæk Jensen

Cast:

Mzia Arabuli (*Lia*)

Lucas Kankava (*Achi*)

Deniz Dumanli (*Evrin*)

Tako Kurdovanidze (*Tekla*)

Bünyamin Değer (*Izzet*)

Sema Sultan Elekci (*Gülpeembe*)

Ziya Sudançıkırmaz (*student*)

Derya Günaydın (*young woman*)

Levan Gabrichidze (*Ramaz*)

Sweden-Denmark-France-Turkey-Georgia 2024

106 mins

Digital

A MUBI release

NEW RELEASES

Bye Bye Tiberias Bye Bye Tibériade

From Fri 28 Jun + Q&A on Fri 28 Jun 18:00

Kinds of Kindness

From 5 July

Sleep Jam

From Fri 12 Jul

Crossing

From Fri 19 Jul

About Dry Grasses Kuru Otlar Üstüne

From Fri 26 Jul

Sky Peals

From 9 August

Kneecap

From 23 August

RE-RELEASES

Network

From Fri 28 Jun

The Conversation

From Fri 5 Jul

Bushman

From Fri 12 Jul

Alma's Rainbow

From 2 August

Werckmeister Harmonies Werckmeister

Harmoniak

From 2 August

Istanbul is a place people go when they want to disappear. At least, that's how it seems to Lia (Mzia Arabuli), a retired history teacher who travels from Georgia to search for Tekla (Tako Kurdovanidze), her estranged trans niece. She reluctantly brings along Achi (Lucas Kankava), a restless teen whose mother went to work in the Turkish capital and never returned. The lives of the unlikely duo change after they meet Evrim (Deniz Dumanli), a trans rights lawyer who helps them to navigate her world. As they experience the city's hidden corners, they realise that leaving home is not only an act of severance, but an opportunity for self-expression and new connections.

Crossing is the emotionally rich, deeply humane and politically resonant fourth feature of Swedish-Georgian director Levan Akin, whose *And Then We Danced* (2019), Sweden's Oscar entry, faced a harsh conservative backlash in Georgia because of its storyline of romance between two men in a traditional dance ensemble. *Crossing* gives timely visibility to an exodus of LGBTQ+ Georgians who feel there is no safe future for them in their home country.

Through Tekla's backstory, which emerges gradually, we understand the precarity of trans lives and the daily risk of violence in Georgia's very patriarchal society, where her family drove her out of home. She got away alive, but a boy in the next village whose identity fell under scrutiny was shot dead by his father, who claimed it was an accident.

In this difficult terrain, Akin creates a beautifully poetic sense of place. From the wooden coastal houses of Batumi, a long bus ride takes Lia and Achi over the Bosphorus Bridge, and they settle into a low-end Istanbul hotel room flooded with neon light. Long weaving shots lead us through the uneven, cat-filled streets and cramped corridors of the city, where the ezan is called out from mosques and homeless kids try to hustle a few lira from passers-by. Dancing in restaurants recurs as a spontaneous way for the character to bond, and a soundtrack of Turkish pop and folk classics entwines with their emotions. It's a testament to Akin's empathetic respect for difference (and his family's connection to Turkey) that none of this feels voyeuristic or exploitatively touristic.

Strong performances across the board bring to life multifaceted characters whose flaws and quirks are key to their disarming vulnerability. The stern Lia makes sanctimonious comments about refinement and shuts down callow but resourceful Achi's chatter, but her plastic bottle of Georgian brandy is always close for a sly swig, and the armour around her feelings of fading desirability soon falls away. Evrim is warm-hearted, canny and resilient. As a trans woman, she is used to the romantic and professional obstacles thrown in her way by society. Recently qualified in law, she works for next to nothing at an NGO, Pink Life. She endures coldly averted gazes while her documents are being authorised for female status, and helps her fellow trans residents, who have few viable employment options and predominantly resort to sex work. Their guarded, protective evaluation of Lia's enquiries about Tekla's fate, questioning – in a witticism-filled gathering of tea and cigarettes – whether she would even want to be found, reveals a network of care within a void of institutional disdain. An unexpected bloom of romance appears for Evrim by way of a cute pirate taxi driver, offering upbeat respite.

Tekla proves hard to track down in the dense, transient environment of Istanbul's margins, and her absence remains haunting and palpable. Akin does not offer a sentimental ending for easy solace, but an unexpected fantasy twist that honours both the power of the imagination and the reality of grief. Lia's quest becomes as much an internal reckoning with her own prejudices and mistakes as it is an attempt to find Tekla and re-establish a relationship to fulfil her sister's dying wish.

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Akin offers a moving portrayal of the bonds that can form between people who, on the surface at least, have little in common. In the rooming houses of Istanbul's red-light district, where women shout down from the windows and camaraderie unites them through the walls, the director explores alternative means of belonging. The beating heart and hope of *Crossing* lies ultimately with collective activism rather than with family.

Carmen Gray, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound, 18 July 2024

Director Levan Akin on 'Crossing'

You've described Crossing as being a love letter to Istanbul. What is your personal connection to the city and what does it mean to you?

I was born in Sweden but my parents have Georgian heritage. But they were born in Turkey, so they are part of a Georgian diaspora. My grandparents lived in Turkey. We'd visit them in Istanbul and then we'd go on to Georgia. So, I've seen Istanbul in the 1980s, I've seen Istanbul in the 1990s, in the 2000s... It's a city that's always evolving and changing. I have a deep affinity for the city. I love Turkish music, which comes across in *Crossing*.

In Crossing, despite its hectic nature, Istanbul is shown as a shelter and a refuge.

Yeah. I met a lot of queer people there. When I made *And Then We Danced* I met several trans women who told me that they go to Istanbul for work. So that's where I got the start of an idea for this film. I definitely think it's a place queer people gravitate to. But it's also a really big city so you can live whatever life you want to live. You can be anonymous in Istanbul. Which I think also fits this story.

I read that in the research for And Then We Danced, you heard a touching story about a grandfather which fed into the writing of Crossing...

And Then We Danced and *Crossing* are in some ways companion films. *Crossing* wouldn't exist, in this shape, if it wasn't for *And Then We Danced*. That film made me think about this intergenerational aspect, because of all the turmoil that happened with *And Then We Danced* [far right groups in Georgia picketed the release of the film]. There were lots of older generations finger-wagging, showing their homophobia. Then I heard this story about a Georgian grandfather, who wasn't transphobic and who was his trans granddaughter's biggest supporter. It inspired me to show that support in a film.

Is it important for you to show scenes where queer characters, though marginalised, don't face physically violent oppression?

Yes definitely. That's a deliberate choice. We chose to play with the tropes, like the final scene with Merab and his brother in *And Then We Danced*. To show that another reality that can exist.

Because film is important. Film has power. Images have power, they inspire us to behave in different ways. In films like *And Then We Danced* or *Crossing*, we show these alternatives. For example, the taxi guy in *Crossing* [who offers the character Evrim a ride] is just a nice kid, who is just really charmed by her, they had a connection, you know. I hope this film can maybe inspire people to live their lives differently. To go with the flow.

There are so many films with queer characters where I am like [wincing at imagined violent scene] – I really hope nothing bad is going to happen. And then, it doesn't, and I'm so relieved. Sometimes I'll even ask my friends when they recommend a film and I ask, 'is anyone going to get beaten up?' Because I want to know before.

It's important. I wish other filmmakers would acknowledge this. Of course there's trauma in *Crossing*. But it doesn't have to be on screen.

Interview by Alex Davidson, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound, 23 July 2024