



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 (*Gülperembe*)

Ziya Sudançıkırmaz (*student*)

Derya Günaydın (*young woman*)

Levan Gabrichidze (*Ramaz*)

Sweden-Denmark-France-Turkey-Georgia 2024

106 mins

Digital

A MUBI release

No-nonsense Lia, a retired teacher, turns up on the doorstep of affable aimless Achi, who lives in a Georgian backwater. Lia is trying to build bridges with her niece Tekla, a twenty-something trans woman who was regrettably banished years before. Achi remembers his neighbour and believes she has crossed the border. Spying an opportunity for escape, he offers to help Lia in her search. With a half-baked plan and only a little money, tracking down Tekla sparks some soul-searching within them both, while their journey attracts both suspicion and generosity. Their best ally is trans lawyer Evrim, who works in an LGBTQIA+ centre, fighting for trans rights in an environment that forces many into survival sex work. The result is a compelling, character-driven drama and a superb follow-up to Akin's lauded 2019 queer coming-of-age feature *And Then We Danced*.

Zorian Clayton, BFI Flare programmer, bfi.org.uk

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.

NEW RELEASES

Bye Bye Tiberias Bye Bye Tiberiade

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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

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From Fri 5 Jul

Bushman

From Fri 12 Jul

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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.

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