



Too Much: Melodrama on Film

Stella

Stella

Director: Michael Cacoyannis

Production Company: Millas Films

Producer: Anis Nohra

Screenplay: Michael Cacoyannis

Based on the stage play by: J. Cambanelis

Director of Photography: Kostas Theodoridis

Art Director: Yannis Tsarouchis

Music/Songs: Manos Hadjidakis

Cast:

Melina Mercouri (*Stella*)

George Foundas (*Miltos*)

Alekos Alexandrakis (*Alekos*)

Sofia Vembo (*Maria*)

Voula Zouboulaki (*Anneta*)

Christina Calogerikou (*Miltos' mother*)

D. Papayannopoulou (*Mitso*)

Tasso Cavvadia (*Alekos' sister*)

Costa Caralis (*Antoni*)

Greece 1955

95 mins

35mm

A BFI National Archive print

Song Translations

Seven Songs

Performed by Voula Zouboulaki

The stars are alight

and young women dressed in white
are strolling around the neighborhood.

All the young men

quit their gambling

and they meet up in the street corners.

Take me to the 'Paradise' bouzouki club

and after all the fun and all the noise stops

I will sing seven songs for you to choose your
favorite tune

to sing for me, to sing for you 'I love you'.

It's the 13th Day of the Month

Performed by Sofia Vembo

It's the 13th day of the month.

It's a cursed day,

I don't want to meet anyone on this day

not even to exchange a good morning.

On the dawn of the 13th

I don't get out of bed,

I lock doors and windows

but sleeping is impossible.

Terrible day it ruined me,

it clipped my wings.

When it comes to love

it always makes me lose control.

They think I am superstitious,

but my fate

made me an orphan on the 13th

and a widow on the 13th.

Red Moon

Performed by Sofia Vembo

The moon tonight is dyed red

and the river is sky blue

and my love in your hands

is a small bright white bird.

The moon tonight is dyed green

and the river is deep,

come by my love, come and dance

till dawn.

Notes from the US press book for 'Stella'

Stella is a landmark in the history of the Greek drama for several important reasons. To begin with, it marks the film debut of one of Europe's most exciting stage personalities, Miss Melina Mercouri, the first lady of the Greek theatre, who has scored numerous personal triumphs in her native city as well as in Paris. Secondly, it has established Michael Cacoyannis, whose second film this is, as one of the most talented and dynamic young directors on the Continent. And, finally, it is the first Greek film to achieve international recognition. Shot on location in and around Athens, *Stella* had its world premiere at the Cannes Festival in France. The stir which was created around this film and its principals was something quite new for a Greek motion picture.

In Greece, the film industry is still in the heroic age, which is to say – in its infancy. The only studio in Athens is about the size of a night club, the tracks and booms are of wood, there is no sound truck. Added to that, everything which pertains to films is considered a luxury and is subject to enormous taxes. The very film, itself, costs twice what it does in France. As for technical skill and experience ... these are practically non-existent and the film laboratories are simply primitive.

Writer-director Cacoyannis, however, has his own philosophy about these difficulties. 'They're such a useful test of one's inventiveness,' he sighs gently and goes on to the positive aspects of filmmaking in his native city.

'Greek light is so wonderful,' he says. 'Our landscapes and our towns are so attractive, so different, and the manifestations of our everyday life so picturesque that I try to take advantage of it all.'

In *Stella*, Cacoyannis' partiality to using real-life backgrounds for some of his most difficult sequences provided him and his crew with a series of challenges. However, by turning Athens into a large open-air studio and avoiding the police, he managed to get what he wanted the way he wanted it. To get a football sequence, for example, Cacoyannis simply appeared in the field during the Greece-Yugoslavia football match with actor George Foundas wearing the colours of one of the competing teams. Before the astonished and infuriated referee could order them off the field, the necessary shot had been manoeuvred. During the grand parade held to honour the anniversary of the Albanian War, Greece's great national holiday, Cacoyannis smuggled Costa Caralis into the parade as a flag-bearer, marching before the Greek king, while he and his cameraman worked alongside covering all angles.

All-night sessions in an open-air café situated right in the heart of Athens, where a great deal of the action in *Stella* takes place, was admittedly a little hard on the neighbours. So Cacoyannis invited the whole district to join the company, whistle the tunes and, of course, to act as extras. All his street and crowd scenes are 'cast from life' in this fashion.

Among the 'routine' requests made of Melina Mercouri during the shooting of *Stella*, was to play a burning love scene in mid-winter in an icy-cold sea, dance, sing (for the first time in her life), stand motionless and smiling while a station wagon hurled itself at her at top speed, pulling up a mere few inches from her. (After the fourth take the chauffeur's nerve broke and a replacement was called in for the last three takes.)

The moon fell in the deep river
and my love turned yellow
like the flame on the candle
Come by my love, come and dance
till dawn.

Love, You've Become a Double-Edged Knife

Performed by Melina Mercouri

Love, you've become a double-edged knife.
Once, you brought happiness in my life,
but now joy has drowned in tears
There's no way out, no medicine to heal me.
Fires are blazing in his two bright eyes,
the stars are falling, when he looks at me.
Turn off the lights, shroud the moon tonight,
when he'll take me, he cannot see my pain.

Translations for BFI Film on Film Festival by
Mihalis Moudoufaris and Emmanuel Stamatakis.

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Really, the toughest of all, she assures us, was the shooting of the beach
scene when she had to look passionate and sensual with bits of broken ice in
her mouth ... at four o'clock in the morning, in January, in the open air! The
reason for the bits of ice in Melina's mouth was the steam caused by frozen
breath every time she spoke.

'We tried everything,' director Cacoyannis explains. 'Hot things and special
pastilles and electric fires all around to heat the atmosphere, but nothing
worked. The nearest remedy was the ice – but it wasn't always effective. It's
funny how a little thing like that can become a major headache in a picture.'
But the kiss, described by Archer Winsten of the *New York Post* as 'the fiercest
kissing yet seen on films' was worth all the trouble!

Melina Mercouri comes from a distinguished Greek family. Her father is a
Member of Parliament, her grandfather was probably the most popular Mayor
of modern Athens. The name 'Melina', which her grandfather chose for her (it is
derived from 'meli' meaning 'honey') soon became the vogue in Athens.

As soon as she finished school, Melina enrolled at the Royal Theatre School,
without her family's knowledge. Not that they could have dissuaded her for
Melina had inherited all her grandfather's drive and determination. The question
was, could she submit to the discipline and harsh work schedule required by
the professional theatre?

That question was soon answered. Melina received her diploma and joined a
company playing small parts while she waited for her big chance. This came
just after the war when she was cast as Lavinia in O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes
Electra*. After that, it was one triumph after another.

When Melina Mercouri visited the Cannes Film Festival this past season, the
Cotopouli Theatre closed its doors until her return. As a leading French critic
remarked, 'There are not many great actresses in Greece, but there is
Melina Mercouri!'

Identified with the leading directors of the post-war Italian school of filmmaking,
it has been noted that Cacoyannis brings to Italian realism the traditions of
Cretan tragedy.

Cacoyannis made his theatrical debut at an offbeat London Theatre playing
Herod in Oscar Wilde's *Salome* in 1945. Finally, however, in 1950, Cacoyannis
determined that he would become a film director. Three years later he got his
chance – in his own country. His first film, *Windfall in Athens*, was chosen for
the Gala Premiere of Edinburgh's Film Festival winning the Diploma of Merit.

Next came *Stella* which had its world premiere at the Cannes Festival where it
created a tremendous stir. During its run in Athens, the film scored a record
attendance mark. It has played steadily to packed houses throughout the
country and its theme song has become one of the top hit tunes of the year.
In London, Belgium and Frankfurt *Stella* has been a smash hit. It was awarded
the Foreign Correspondents' Globe d'Or in Hollywood as one of the best
foreign films of the year.

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