

Tokyo International Film Festival 2013—Part 2

***Blind Dates* from Georgia and *Nobody's Home* from Turkey**

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This is the second of two articles on the recent Tokyo International Film Festival, held October 17-25.

Blind Dates

Georgian director Levan Koguashvili's second film *Blind Dates*, screened at the recent Tokyo film festival, is charming and truthful, and leaves a sad aftertaste.

As Koguashvili himself put it at a press conference in Tokyo: "This is not a pure comedy. What I wanted to make was a film about real life. And real life is a mix of tragedy and comedy." Reality is certainly something that infuses *Blind Dates*, with characters, relationships and situations that are believable and convincing for the most part.

Sandro is 40. A school teacher in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, he is reserved, pensive and perhaps a bit timid. To his parents' considerable dismay, Sandro is still a bachelor. So is his friend Iva, coach of the school football team, who is also something of a womanizer. Iva takes the initiative in organizing a double date for himself and Sandro with two women from the countryside. The women are trying to escape their own oppressive conditions.

While Sandro's date is not too fruitful, he eventually meets a woman through Iva's football connection, and falls strongly for her. She does respond emotionally, but she also comes with her own set of complex circumstances: Manana is married to Tengo, a highly jealous, impulsive guy serving his second term in jail.

When Tengo gets out, we learn that he is having an

affair with Natia, a poor, vulnerable refugee helping out in Manana's hair salon. Tengo got Natia pregnant and is desperate to find some cash for an abortion, getting Sandro involved in his schemes too. A couple of unexpected twists lead to a conflicted ending in which little is resolved, perhaps again resembling "real life."

All the characters are treated sympathetically, and even Tengo, by far the least likeable, is not beyond redemption. Sandro sacrifices a great deal for him, but it is difficult to conceive of a realistic alternative, under the present social circumstances, that would produce a happier result for everyone involved. *Blind Dates* was shot in dilapidated, run-down locations for the most part, showing the present reality for the majority of Georgians. There is no tinge of nationalism here, a considerable feat in light of the political atmosphere in Georgia since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the 2008 US-backed war with Russia. The scene in which Sandro teaches a class about some supposedly great Georgian feudal ruler is anything but reverent.

At the press conference, Koguashvili further said: "When I shoot a film, it has to reflect reality. What does it mean, how it's interpreted, I don't think about [that] when I'm shooting. But it has to reflect reality." Even though one senses the filmmaker may not yet have a consciously worked out historical and artistic position, judging from this commendable film, his work on "reflecting reality" is generally on the right track.

Nobody's Home

The directorial debut of Turkish filmmaker Deniz Akcay (born 1981), *Nobody's Home*, is, in her own words, “semi-autobiographical.” Akcay apparently lost her father while still a teenager—and how a family copes with such a loss is a central theme of her film.

The mother of the family, Nurcan, is especially hard hit. She becomes almost dysfunctional, depending more and more on her eldest daughter Feride, both practically and emotionally. Feride, 32, works full-time and the responsibilities now forced on her increasingly encroach on her personal life.

Seventeen-year-old Ilker is rebellious and hot-headed. After an unsuccessful attempt at hijacking the family vehicle, he runs away from home to stay with a friend, largely wasting time and smoking weed. Ilker even starts a sexual relationship with his friend's mother. While this part feels slightly strained, overall, the relationship is treated in a credible way. However, that situation only further destabilizes Ilker in the long run. Meanwhile, the youngest daughter, Ozde, is craving everyone's attention, but is often left neglected.

When Feride, on top of everything else, loses the attention of an attractive co-worker because of her demanding mother, she almost breaks down. “Which one of you do I deal with first?!” she yells at Ilker in exasperation. Her way out is to seek refuge in marriage. She suddenly reveals that she accepted a proposal from the older, traditional and unexceptional Gulaga—another co-worker who sometimes comes over to fix things around the house. It is equally clear to the viewer, as to everyone on the screen, that she is just settling for him. “You must have been in a hurry to marry,” says Nurcan, hitting a nerve.

In any event, the prospective marriage threatens the family's shaky co-dependency, and different members react in different ways. Nurcan's emotional blackmail culminates during the final wedding scene, which is particularly forceful. One is inevitably hit with the question: What will become of them all after this? From what we've witnessed, not one of the possible scenarios is very promising.

A certain powerlessness in the face of relentless social and economic pressures permeates the film. That said, it does not strike one as pessimistic or defeatist. Perhaps the autobiographical elements helped Akcay present her story with a degree of truthfulness and insight. It will be interesting to see if she can create

works of similar quality treating themes outside her direct experience.

Concluded



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