

A photograph of two men in profile, facing right, against a bright sunset background. The sun is positioned between them, creating a strong lens flare and silhouetting their heads. They are wearing light-colored t-shirts. The background shows a blurred cityscape.

# EASTERN PLAYS

A FILM BY KAMEN KALEV

CANNES 2009

Quinzaine  
des Réalistes

DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT

## CONTACTS

### PRODUCTION

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## TECHNICAL DATA

89 min | 1.85 | color | 35mm (Shooting format : HD) | Dolby Digital 5.1 | Bulgarian, Turkish, English

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## SYNOPSIS

**TWO BROTHERS WHO'VE LOST ALL CONTACT ARE SUDDENLY BROUGHT TOGETHER WHEN THEY HAVE OPPOSITE ROLES IN A RACIST BEATING** : while Georgi who's recently joined a neonazi group participates in the violence, Itso witnesses and rescues a Turkish family.

Georgi, now being asked to participate in larger events, starts to question his implication in the movement and Itso wonders if the beautiful Turkish girl he saved could be his ticket out from his sad life in Sofia. Only by reuniting will the two brothers be able to assess what they really want from life.



## THE REAL CHRISTO

THE IDEA OF MAKING A FILM ABOUT CHRISTO HAD BEEN ON MIND FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

We grew up together in the same town by the sea. And then we lost touch for a long time. A few years ago we ran into each other and had so much to talk about. He didn't seem to have changed, at least physically; but slowly he began to confide in me and I realized the depths of his despair. The difference between his seemingly peaceful and nonchalant self and his dire inner suffering fascinated me. He had no energy left to confront this destructive force inside.

In the narrative, I used many elements from Christo's real life; most of the scenes actually happened and were shot in the places he lived: his apartment, his streets, his workplace. His girlfriend Niki was his real life partner.

In the beginning, I had no idea who was going to play the character 'Itso'. I wanted the film to feel almost like a documentary, which then made me realize it would be best for Christo to play himself. It became clear that with an actor the film would lose so many of the unique details which fascinated me about Christo – from his physical presence to his spontaneity and non-conformism.

I offered him the role and he accepted without hesitation. His screen-tests were perfect as he remained himself, unfettered by the camera's presence.

From that moment on, I felt energized and ready to trust in the spontaneity of things. The entire crew felt this special energy and we improvised with our



surroundings and things that seemed to appear from nowhere. These unforeseen elements gave body and meaning to the movie.

The spiritual liberation of man remains a personal experience. Christo is no longer with us, but I am certain that his soul is free. Christo is dead. His vibrant force in the film was suddenly cut short in real life. I had left quite a few scenes to shoot with him with a reduced crew in the fall. The shots of Itso in the concert scene are from pieces we shot while in pre-production. We came upon the end of the film in the editing room.

We had so much more to do together, not just for the film.

**“In the narrative, I used many elements from Christo’s real life; most of the scenes actually happened and were shot in the places he lived: his apartment, his streets, his workplace. His girlfriend Niki was his real life partner.”** KAMEN KALEV

## BROTHER & DAUGHTER

THE CHARACTERS OF GEORGI, THE LITTLE BROTHER, AND ISIL, THE TURKISH GIRL, ARE ENTIRELY FICTIONAL. I WANTED TO JUXTAPOSE GEORGI WITH ITSO, IN ORDER TO OBSERVE AND UNDERSTAND HOW CONFUSION AND ALIENATION ARE BORN.

Family, friends, city and country take part in conditioning human beings, and then these conditioned beings are in constant conflict with the very same environment that conditioned them. What interested me in this comparison was to follow how the little brother became like his older brother. Georgi's addiction or Neonazi gangs are mere illustrations of the same thing.

I was looking for a way to illustrate Itso's past, the origin of his suffering, without showing it too directly. The character of Georgi – his 17 year old little brother – illustrates the beginning of Itso's alienation. Everything surrounding Georgi – his parents, his friends and the city Sofia - leave him confused. His spiritually handicapped parents only prolong their suffering through their own children. I find the notion of parental responsibility interesting. When the two brothers meet up again, they finally communicate. They see each other as they would looking into a mirror. One looks into the past, the other into the future – yet both are lost and afraid.

And the reason the two brothers meet is because of the young Turkish girl, Isil. She speaks of strange things, of souls born again and a world that trembles. She is teeming with a different kind of creative energy.

Itso and Isil's relationship is unique. I didn't want them to be physically attracted to each other so that their bond would transform into a typical love story. To me, Isil just had a transformative experience and she needs to share it. Both characters are very open and their positive energy begins to circulate freely. This energy goes beyond nationalities or any other label that people can invent. Many Bulgarians still feel hatred towards our Southern neighbors. Five hundred years of Ottoman rule has weighed heavily. A Turkish girl can easily be poorly perceived. Anything can be imagined: from the Sultan's daughter to an illiterate daughter of *gastarbeiter* (guest-workers) heading to Berlin.





## NEO NAZIS AND BORDERS

**NEONAZI MOVEMENTS ARE NOT MORE PRESENT IN BULGARIA THAN IN ANY OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRY... INTOLERANCE ISN'T EXCLUSIVE TO A SINGLE COUNTRY. INTOLERANCE DOES NOT ONLY BELONG TO RIGHT-WING POLITICAL FORCES. ALL POLITICIANS HAVE THE SAME CHARACTER TRAIT: HYPOCRISY.**

We are not taught tolerance. Quite to the contrary, people expend enormous amounts of energy to differentiate themselves from others and build boundaries. The main mechanisms of existence are focused on the material aspect of things. We are not taught to look inside ourselves.

What interested me was to show today's reality – the world is getting smaller and people meet and really reveal themselves - regardless of history and origins. I am not fascinated by one particular country. What does fascinate me is when borders disappear and when different cultures meet. This always brings joy, opening up and enriching the human conscience.

What interests me is how people wake up; how they transform from sleeping robots to beings that love and rejoice at life once again.

## EXPERIENCE

**AFTER TWO YEARS OF FILM SCHOOL IN SOFIA, I ENTERED THE FEMIS IN THE CINEMATOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT. AT AGE 22 I MOVED TO PARIS AND EVERYTHING WAS POSSIBLE.**

We worked hard and watched lots of movies. I believe that in film school it is important to find nourishment in other people's films. We all make the same mistakes in our first attempts at making movies - and it's good to make many and learn from them! In four years at a school like the Femis a student can gain a great deal of experience. The short film I directed "Orphee" was my thesis project; it traveled to many international film festivals, enabling me to get an idea of young cinema today. Once I finished school, I went back to Sofia. I began writing my first feature, which didn't end up being my first film.

Since then, I have directed quite a few commercials and music videos. I also co-directed two quirky short films with Dimitar Mitovski, both selected at Critics Week in Cannes. The first, "Get the Rabbit Back", was presented in 2005, and the second, "Rabbit Troubles", in 2007

**"We all make the same mistakes in our first attempts at making movies - and it's good to make many and learn from them!"** KAMEN KALEV

## BIOGRAPHIES

### DIRECTOR



**Kamen Kalev** was born in Burgas, Bulgaria in 1975. He graduated from the Femis Film School, Paris in 2002. Kamen's short films ORPHEUS and MALTONIUS OLBREN were presented and received awards at many international films festival such as Berlin, Clermont-Ferrand, NY Film Festival, Locarno, Stockholm...

His short GET THE RABBIT BACK was in competition in Cannes Film Festival in 2005.

Two years later, his last short RABBIT TROUBLES was again selected at the International Critic's Week in Cannes.

He directed over 60 commercials and a number of music videos. EASTERN PLAYS is his first feature film.

### PRODUCERS

**Waterfront Film I** Stefan Piriyov was born in Burgas, Bulgaria in 1974. He studied film in the New York Film Academy. He directed several shorts and produced a number of commercials and music videos. He is currently producing feature film projects.

**The Chimney Pot I** The Chimney Pot is one of Sweden's most experienced and biggest post facilities and the only one to offer a complete chain of services from scanning to sound design. Since 1996 the company has been working on big international projects, both commercials and feature films. Today the company does post production on a little less than 1000 commercials and 15 feature films per year. Our 2000 square meter facility is located in the very center of Stockholm.

**Film i Väst I** Film i Väst is a regional production centre and a public regional film fund. Film i Väst invest in film- and TV-drama productions in Region Västra Götaland (West Sweden). Film i Väst is one of the most successful regional film funds in Europe. Around 200 feature films have been co-produced since 1997.

### MAIN ACTORS

**Christo Christov** (Itso) was born in Burgas in 1969. He studied woodcarving in Triavna and at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia. His works were exhibited in Burgas, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro. EASTERN PLAYS was his first time ever in front of the camera. Just a few days after the last footage was shot, a tragic accident led to his death.

**Ovanes Torosian** (Georgi) was born in Erevan, Armenia in 1986. Since 1993 he has lived in Sofia. He is currently a student in acting at the National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts (NATFA). EASTERN PLAYS is his debut.

**Saadet Isil Aksoy** (Isil) was born in 1983 in Istanbul. She studied English Literature and Western Cultures at Bogaziçi University. She started her first feature film YUMURTA (Egg) by Semih Kaplanoglu (the first film of a trilogy) premiered in 2007 in Cannes at Director's Fortnight. She won many awards such as "Best Actress" and "Best Newcomer" at international and national film festivals like Sarajevo, Valdivia, Antalya, Ankara. She also played in Semih Kaplanoglu's second installment of his trilogy, "SUT" (Milk), which premiered in Venice in 2008. She is working on her masters degree on acting at Kadir Has University.

**Nikolina Yancheva** (Niki) was born in Burgas in 1985. She graduated in acting in 2008 from NATFA as a student of Professor Stefan Danailov, and made her debut in the film EASTERN PLAYS.

**Hatice Aslan** (Isil's mother) was born in 1962 in Sivas, Turkey. She graduated from Ankara University State Conservatory in 1983. She started working at Izmir National Theater in 1986. She also worked at Ankara National Theater in Ankara, where she did the TV series FERHUNDE HANIMLAR. She is known with the TV series EN SON BABALAR DUYAR and FERHUNDE HANIMLAR in Turkey. The last TV series she did was DUGUN SARKICISI. Her first feature film was Nuri Bilge Ceylan's last film THREE MONKEYS, which won the "Best Director" award at Cannes Film Festival in 2008.

## CREDITS

### CAST

ITSO \_\_\_\_\_ CHRISTO CHRISTOV  
GEORGI \_\_\_\_\_ OVANES TOROSIAN  
ISIL \_\_\_\_\_ SAADET ISIL AKSOY  
NIKI \_\_\_\_\_ NIKOLINA YANCHEVA  
GEORGI AND ITSO'S FATHER \_\_\_\_\_ IVAN NALBANTOV  
GEORGI AND ITSO'S STEPMOTHER \_\_\_\_\_ KRASIMIRA DEMIREVA  
ISIL'S MOTHER \_\_\_\_\_ HATICE ASLAN  
ISIL'S FATHER \_\_\_\_\_ KEREM ATABEOGLU

### CREW

WRITER AND DIRECTOR \_\_\_\_\_ KAMEN KALEV  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY \_\_\_\_\_ JULIAN ATANASSOV  
SCORE MUSIC \_\_\_\_\_ JEAN-PAUL WALL  
SOUND \_\_\_\_\_ MOMCHIL BOZHKOV  
BORIS TRAYANOV  
PRODUCERS \_\_\_\_\_ STEFAN PIRYOV  
KAMEN KALEV  
FREDRIK ZANDER  
CO-PRODUCERS \_\_\_\_\_ ANGUEL CHRISTANOV  
THOMAS ESKILSSON  
CASTING DIRECTOR (TURKEY) \_\_\_\_\_ HARIKA UYGUR  
CASTING DIRECTOR (BULGARIA) \_\_\_\_\_ VANIA BAJDAROVA  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER \_\_\_\_\_ MAYA VITKOVA  
UNIT PRODUCTION MANAGER \_\_\_\_\_ MARINA ASENOVA  
1<sup>ST</sup> ASSISTANT DIRECTOR \_\_\_\_\_ INA HADJIEVA  
MAKE-UP \_\_\_\_\_ ELENA GAVRILOVA  
SET DECORATOR \_\_\_\_\_ MARTIN SLAVOV  
EDITOR \_\_\_\_\_ KAMEN KALEV  
STEFAN PIRYOV  
JOHANNES PINTER



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