



## Eastern Plays

18 May, 2009 | By [Mike Goodridge](#)

*Dir/scr Kamen Kalev. 2009. Bulgaria/Sweden. 89 minutes.*

**An accomplished debut feature from Bulgaria's Kamen Kalev, *Eastern Plays* begins as if it were just another slice of gritty realism from eastern Europe but evolves into a sensitively observed portrait of a young man struggling to find himself after years as a drug addict.**

Already picked up for sales by Memento Films International, it's a moving, uplifting tale which should draw attention to Kalev as a talent to watch. Virtuoso arthouse independents might be tempted to buy it on the back of strong reviews, festival play and awards wins.

Tragically, the lead actor Christo Christov, a childhood friend of Kalev's whom he cast essentially to play himself, died in an accident a few days after shooting ended. The film is dedicated to him; his strong performance, and his untimely passing will only serve to fuel interest in the film.

*Eastern Plays* is not just a story of recovery but delves into the unpleasant world of neo-Nazism and racist violence in Sofia.

The drama focuses initially on Christo's younger brother, the shaven-headed Georgi (Torosian), who escapes his miserable home life with his domineering father (Nalbantov) and stepmother by hanging out with a group of skinheads and neo-Nazis in heavy metal bars.

Christo himself is a frustrated artist, earning a pittance in a furniture-making shop and prone to bouts of severe depression and anxiety as he tries to pull his life together after years as a heroin addict. One night, he gets drunk at a restaurant after ditching his needy girlfriend (Yancheva) and while stumbling home witnesses a Turkish man, his wife and daughter being beaten by Georgi's gang. He successfully intervenes to stop the attack, although has his face smashed in the process.

After visiting Georgi to warn him off the gang, he develops a relationship with the Turkish girl Isil (Aksoy) while she stays in Sofia by her father's hospital bedside. Her exuberant spirit and inquisitive mind raise his spirits but her sudden departure back to Istanbul leaves him desolate once more.

Kalev and Christov do a terrific job in illustrating Christov's plight and the tormented feelings which plague his existence. He takes refuge in his art – and a daily visit to the clinic for methadone – but feels little sense of self or self-esteem.

He isn't a pathetic character so much as a complicated one, and Kalev injects humour, intelligence and moments of warmth into Christo that lift the characterization beyond cliché.

The story ends in an uplifting way and notably Georgi looks to have abandoned his involvement with the neo-Nazis by finding a girlfriend and an interest in art. As a hint of the corruption at play in Bulgarian society, Kalev throws in a couple of scenes implying that the gangs spreading racial hatred against Bulgaria's Turkish neighbours are merely paid pawns of politicians attempting to further their right-wing agendas.

Production companies  
Waterfront Film  
The Chimney Pot  
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International sales

Memento Films International  
(33) 1 53 34 90 20

Producers  
Stefan Piriyov  
Kamen Kalev  
Fredrik Zander

Cinematography  
Julian Atanassov

Production designer  
Martin Slavov

Editors  
Kamen Kalev  
Stefan Piriyov  
Johannes Pinter

Music  
Jean-Paul Wall

Main cast  
Christo Christov  
Ovanes Torosian  
Saadet Isil Aksoy  
Nikolina Yancheva  
Ivan Nalbantov  
Hatice Aslan  
Kerem Atabeyoglu

## Related images

