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WILLOW

A film by Milcho MANCHEVSKI
101 min, Macedonia/Hungary/Belgium/Albania, 2019
Color
Macedonian



LOGLINE

Three women cope with issues of control over their bodies, tradition and adoption. They have not set out to change the world, but their struggle to become mothers makes them unlikely heroines. Three stories set in Macedonia - one medieval, two contemporary - exploring themes of love, trust and motherhood.

SYNOPSIS

A medieval couple in Macedonia cannot conceive. An old woman offers help – but only if they give her their firstborn. A year after they have a baby, she pays them a visit.

A taxi driver hits a man in the street. The ambulance and neighbors come and go. Seated alone on the curb in the rain, he waits for the police. Taken with his honesty, Rodna brings him an umbrella. Three years later they are married, but can't conceive – until they try in-vitro. She gets pregnant with twins, but turns out one of the babies will be deformed. Knowing that he opposes abortion, she faces a tough choice.

Rodna's sister has adopted a 5-year-old boy. He is very intelligent, but does not say a word. One day he goes missing.

Three stories, three unlikely heroines.

DIRECTOR' STATEMENT

Love, trust and motherhood are issues that three families in our film – one medieval and two contemporary – deal with. Our characters are faced with moral and personal dilemmas that end up redefining their roles in their communities. They have not set out to change the world or society, but their search for love, trust and motherhood makes them unlikely heroines. On the surface, the beliefs and lifestyles of our characters in the Middle Ages and in contemporary Macedonia could not be more different. Still, there is something in the essence of who we are that has not changed that much over time. The dilemmas our medieval characters face, their pain and joy are clearly reflected, contrasted and complemented by how our contemporaries deal with similar predicaments. I don't think that art can or should solve social dilemmas and conflicts, but it certainly has the power to shine a light on them in a way that no one else in society can. I am drawn to complex narratives that seem simple at first glance. In Willow I continue to explore this.



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Milcho Manchevski's acclaimed *Before the Rain* is considered "one of the greatest debut feature films in the history of cinema" (Annette Insdorf) and "one of the most important films of the decade" (Ann Kibbey). The New York Times included it on its list "Best 1,000 Movies Ever Made". It won the Golden Lion in Venice, Independent Spirit, an Academy Award nomination and 30 other awards.

"Manchevski continues down his distinctive artistic path" (Hollywood Reporter) with the award-winning features *Dust* (which opened Venice 2001), *Shadows*, *Mothers*, *Bikini Moon*, the short forms *The End of Time*, *Thursday*, *Macedonia*, *Timeless*, *1.73*, *Arrested Development's Tennessee* and an episode of HBO's *The Wire*. "His work stands out in world cinema for its unique way of playing with space, time and emotion" (Keith Brown).

Roger Ebert said, "Work like this keeps me going. A reminder of the nobility that film can attain." "His unique blend of experimentation, poetry, emotion, and a demand for the active participation of the viewer in the construction of meaning are highly praised." (Conor McGrady). His work is part of the curricula at numerous universities and is the subject of many essays and books.

Manchevski holds an honorary doctorate from VGIK in Moscow. He is a member of the Directors Guild of America, European Film Academy and the PEN Club.

He has published books of photographs, essays and fiction; he has also taught and lectured extensively (NYU, Feirstein, EICTV, Babelsberg, London Film School, VGIK, Chicago University, etc.).

NOTES FROM THE PRODUCERS

A tale of three tales – all built on the very essence of life – love, procreation, loss and surviving. Manchevski is a master storyteller of stories that go beyond the boundaries of their own narrative. They start simple and small and then expand on the story of life itself – as all good tales do!

One medieval, the others contemporary – the stories echo and vary one another. Although centuries separate them, the characters have similar worries, joys and dreams. And, all is masterfully connected in the symbol of the willow tree.

Willow is more about the persistence of life itself. Withstanding the greatest of challenges like the branches of the willow tree – bending in outrageous poses without breaking and even thriving in some of the most challenging conditions. Through grief and sadness, through tears, dealing with the consequences of love and loss, they are still able to grow and even be happy.



Manchevski makes no compromises in the storytelling. Built on his thoughts and observations of life, small stories and memories, with exhaustingly deep research in development – with thousands of photos, books, real life stories and on constant look out for what life itself could whisper – his stories present a multi-layered journey to embark upon. We are in awe of the complexity of the meaning of his stories, and at the same time – their simplicity.

They are like simple haiku poetry to be rediscovered by the viewer.

“Time never dies. The circle is not round.” from Manchevski’s *Before the Rain*

ABOUT THE PRODUCER

Nik Powell

Nik Powell formed Scala Productions with Stephen Woolley in 1992. In the early 2000s, Stephen set up his own shingle Number 9 Films, and Ian Prior joined Scala as Nik’s partner. One of the UK’s top film producers, Powell remains Chairman of Scala, having embarked on an entrepreneurial career in the 1960s, when he set up Virgin Records with Richard Branson. His long partnership with Woolley, with whom he founded Palace Pictures prior to Scala, brought an unrivalled slate of award-winning features to the screen, including Neil Jordan’s *Company of Wolves*, *Mona Lisa* and *The Crying Game*.

Nik’s later films include the award-winning *Little Voice*, US box-office smash *Calendar Girls* and UK hit *Ladies in Lavender*, starring Judi Dench and Maggie Smith. Other Scala productions include Iain Softley’s *Backbeat* which was recently adapted into a hit West End musical, Shane Meadows’s debut feature *Twenty Four Seven* which won the FIPRESCI Prize at Venice and Fred Schepisi’s *Last Orders*, starring Michael Caine, Bob Hoskins, Ray Winstone and Helen Mirren. Nik was an executive producer of Martin Koolhoven’s Venice premiere *Brimstone* starring Dakota Fanning, Kit Harington and Guy Pearce.

In addition to stints as Chair of the BAFTA Film Committee and Chairman of the European Film Academy, Nik was Director of the world-famous National Film and Television School from 2003 to 2017, Vice Chairman of the European Grouping of Film and Television Schools from 2006 to 2012 and is a member of both the British Screen Advisory Council and AMPAS. He was made an OBE in the UK’s 2018 New Year honours and awarded France’s Chevalier dans l’Ordre des Arts et Lettres.



ABOUT THE ACTORS

Sara Klimoska, as Donka

Sara Klimoska is a young, gifted Macedonian actress. Already highly regarded for her extraordinary talent and screen presence, amongst her previous credits is the lead role in the short film *Would You Look at Her*, winner of the Short Filmmaking Award at the Sundance Film Festival and Grand Prix nominee at Clermont Ferrand in 2018.

Natalija Teodosieva, as Rodna

Natalija Teodosieva is an exceptional talent who has already won acclaim for her performances on stage and screen. She made her debut in *Dracula* at the Macedonian National Theatre.

Having been selected for the prestigious Berlinale Talent program as well as Sarajevo Talents, Natalija's feature film credits include Gjorche Stavrevski's multi-award-winning *Secret Ingredient* and the lead in Marija Dzidzeva's *Second Chance*.

Kamka Tocinovski, as Katerina

An award-winning and versatile actress, Kamka Tocinovski's work across cinema, television and theatre span some two decades. Kamka's honors include Best Actress at the Vojdan Cernodrinski Theatre Festival in Macedonia and Best Young Actress at Croatia's International Theatre Festival Rijeka.

Big Screen roles include Nina in Vladimir Blazevski's acclaimed *Punk's Not Dead* which won the East of West Award at Karlovy Vary and the Audience Award in Sofia. Other credits include Locarno winner and Berlin Golden Bear nominee Igor Ivanov Izi's *Upside Down* and the forthcoming US genre film *Angels Fallen*.



TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Country	Macedonia
Duration	101 minutes
Language	Macedonian
Image	Color
Screening Format	2K DCP / 5.1 Surround Sound / Flat 1.85:1
Shooting Format	Arriraw 2,8K
Shooting Location	XXX

CAST

Donka	Sara Klimoska
Rodna	Natalija Teodosieva
Katerina	Kamka Tocinovski
Milan	Nikola Risteski
Branko	Nenad Nacev
Kire	Petar Caranovic
Grandma Srebra	Ratka Radmanovic
Stavre	Petar Mircevski

CREW

Directed by	Milcho Manchevski
Written by	Milcho Manchevski
Edited by	Nicolas Gaster
Produced by	Jane Kortoshev, Milcho Manchevski
Executive producers	Nik Powell, Ian Prior
Co-producers	Ildikó Kemény, Eleonóra Peták, Hubert Toint, Agron Domi
Director of Photography	Tamás Dobos
Costume Designer	Györgyi Szakács, Zaklina Krstevska
Makeup Designer	Barbara Kund
Production Designer	David Munns
Casting	Milka AnchevskaSound
Sound editor	Gervaise Demeure
Sound mixer	Philippe Charbonnel
Music Composer	Kiril Dzajkovski
Additional music	Igor Vasilev Novogradska, Nikola Parov, Attila Pacsay