

The High Sun - Soleil de plomb

ZVIZDAN

Written and directed by Dalibor Matanić

THREE DECADES
TWO NATIONS
ONE LOVE



OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES
Jury Prize

SYNOPSIS

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In the first story, set in 1991, a romantic attraction is forced underground when love becomes a forbidden luxury in the pre-war atmosphere of madness, confusion and fear.

In the second story, set in 2001, the war is over but the lovers find it impossible to turn their infatuation into an ongoing relationship: the scars of the war are still too fresh and cannot heal that easily.

The third story takes place in 2011, when love can finally take root, if the lovers can break free of the past. Evil and suspicion have not completely vanished from their lives and catharsis is not easy to achieve, but it is possible once again.



THE HIGH SUN

Director's note

The *High Sun* celebrates selflessness and love – the very best of human nature that is still struggling to re-emerge victorious in our region. Because there is one thing I am sure about: at the end of the day, politics and extreme nationalism never win. Love does.

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As a filmmaker, I have been long intrigued by the ever-present inter-ethnic hatreds in the Balkan region, and conflicts rooted in war, religion or politics. With this film, I wanted to explore three separate stories of a Croatian boy and a girl from a Serbian family, across three decades. The stories all take place in the same location, in the sun-scorched villages, and the young lovers are always in their early twenties. Using the lens of these three stories, I wanted to tease out the accumulated atmosphere of evil that smoulders among the damaged communities in this region.

I am by no means the only one who thinks that in our young century, the problem of hatred towards “the other” is particularly serious, worrying, and actually alarmingly dangerous. There is no shortage of examples – Islamophobia, neo-Nazism, chauvinism, racism, and the rejection of previously accepted immigrant groups. I believe that there is no better way to make a film about this subject than by making a love story, and by contrasting intolerance with acceptance, and fear and hatred with hope, forgiveness and love.

My aim as a director was to contrast the lush natural world and the carefree certainty of youth with human actions that are the fruit of long-standing hatreds, history, tradition, confusion and fear, and to use cinematic storytelling to analyze the conditioned changes that influence the lives of young people in this region.

In terms of performance, I wanted every character in the film who opposes the notion that love is all-important to be forced to confront the reasons that prevent them from acting humanely.

From the initial story's light-hearted lack of restraint, we move to the war-ravaged and traumatised couple in the second story. In the final story we come to the present day and the hope that this time round, the young lovers, and their families, friends and neighbours, can raise themselves above the horrors of the past.

I have always wanted to make a film that would act as a mirror for all of us in these regions; that would bring us face to face with the moments when we allowed ourselves to act, not as ordinary decent people, but as a community controlled by darker, pre-conditioned urges. I want to show what happened when people followed a path that led to shameful euphoria in the short term, but that ultimately caused deep unhappiness and unnecessary suffering.

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PRODUCTION NOTES

The High Sun was filmed in autumn 2014, on location in the Dalmatian hinterland where the consequences of war are still visible. Writer-director Dalibor Matanić entrusted the main roles to very young actors with almost no experience of working in film. The project was presented at several international markets during its development and post-production stages.

Project development was supported by MEDIA and the Croatian Audiovisual Centre. Kinorama, the lead producer, made the film in co-production with Gustav Film (Slovenia) and SEE Film Pro (Serbia). Production was supported by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, the Slovenian Film Centre, fs Viba Film Ljubljana, the Serbian Film Centre and the European fund Eurimages. International sales are handled by the Dubai-based company Cercamon.

You lived through the three decades depicted in the film – how did this affect the way you approached it?

The main trigger for this film was something my late grandmother used to say when we talked about girlfriends: "...as long as she isn't one of them..." She meant that I should avoid Serbian girls. My grandmother always gave me unconditional love and support, so I was rather confused by her attitude. I have personally witnessed national, religious, political and social intolerance, which is deeply engrained in many generations, and has caused so much misery and pain over the years. I wanted to see whether it was possible to place love above everything else in an environment like that, whether it was possible to plunge into the purest, most essential human state. In other words, I wanted to deal in a cinematic way with that chilling statement uttered by someone so close to me.

What prompted you to tell this particular story – and what prompted you to tell it now?

The issue of inter-ethnic hatred will never cease to be topical. Five or six years ago, when I started this project, the social environment was calmer. Sadly for us, and luckily for the topicality of this film, hatred is something we witness almost daily, not only in the Balkan region but also everywhere. If it is not hatred for another nation, then it is hatred for another religion, or a different political strategy, a different sexual orientation, a neighbour with a better car, and so on. There are many reasons for intolerance, because it is much easier to express a negative feeling than a noble one, such as love or compassion. I want to bring those who hate face to face with this film; because this film expresses my attitude towards the world, and my conscience is clear. I want them to take a look at themselves in this cinematic mirror and ask themselves if they are really so happy to be caught up in hate for someone – anyone.

Did you research inter-ethnic tension for the script? Or was it a more personal dialogue between you and your own experiences?

Several marriages in my family were inter-ethnic, and they broke up partly because of it. I always notice things around me, sometimes unintentionally, but they always find a way to get under my skin. One can accidentally witness other people's unhappiness, and see how it is rooted in mass conformism, or human weakness which makes people live like sheep, safe within their own flock, unwilling to lift their heads and rise above their everyday existence. Having observed the world around me, I tend to analyze both the noblest and the basest human urges and I tend to tackle painful topics.

The same actors play the three couples – Ivan and Jelena, Nataša and Ante, and Luka and Marija. How did your actors respond to these three very different stories?

It was a challenge for them, naturally, and they were great: hard-working, brave and open-minded – very willing to explore. We searched for subtle differences between the characters, while at the same time underlining the idea, through their identical faces, that our three different couples all share one love. I adore working with actors and I always try to give them ever more difficult tasks, knowing that, no matter how hard those tasks can be, they always enjoy such a process.

You also use the same actors to play the supporting characters in each story.

Many elements in this film are meant to function on a subconscious level, from repeated visual motifs, to the use of the same actors and locations, so that the historical moment can be seen, not as part of a linear story but as part of a recurring cycle. The world keeps changing but every now and then the ghosts from the past can surprise us nastily, just when we have started to believe we are living in a modern, progressive time. The supporting actors were also aware that, in following three couples across three different decades, we are actually following one energy; one romantic urge that challenges itself and tries to raise itself above history.

Q&A

with Dalibor Matanić



Filming the recent past is notoriously difficult – harder in some ways than shooting a film set in the 19th century. What practical challenges did you face?

We were fully aware of the problems that can arise when you want to re-create three not so distant decades, but the location we chose for filming was ideal, since it somehow got stuck in time. You cannot clearly define the years there, you have a feeling you are in the present day, but there is a certain dormant quality in the air, which gives you the impression that you are also in the past. Aside from the ruined factories, deserted pastures, empty houses and above all the absence of people, what shocked me most were the places that still look exactly the same as they looked during the Homeland War. And sadly, you can still smell the intolerance in the air. You can still feel the human tragedies woven into the empty facades. We knew immediately that we had brought the camera to the right spot.

How did the natural landscape influence the film?

The sentence I repeated most during filming was “Enjoy yourselves!” I think it is a true blessing to take the camera into the natural world, to feel its primeval, un sullied rhythm – it is such a powerful contrast to the frenetic pace of modern life. Asking questions about whether love can overcome every obstacle, we went deep into an unspoiled environment, found our inner tempo with the camera and plunged into characters and images. With its defiant, raw beauty and tranquillity, nature itself influenced our photography to a great extent, particularly when we filmed people. Surrounded by centuries-old splendour, we delved into characters, searching for their inner beauty. When you are waiting for the sun to rise above a magnificent mountain at five in the morning, you have enough time to ask yourself what else you can do in your life to make everything and everyone around you happier and more optimistic.

The Irish writer James Joyce once said: “History is a nightmare from which we are trying to awake”. Do you agree?

Joyce spent a part of his life in Croatia. Maybe that statement was partly motivated by his Croatian experience (laughter). I always say that film is not only an entertainment, as some would want; it is also a powerful tool. We just have to raise our standards and question the times we are living in. Having realized that so much misery comes from the past, I have decided to take a stand against it as a filmmaker. Every time an echo from the past stops our young couple, we stop our film and give a new chance to a new couple at another point in time. Art enriches the present day in the same way it enriched the past, and it has to be brave and defiant, and stand against worldly and material ways of viewing life. At the end of the day, there are no nations, no politics, and no material wealth, but just the highest human principles. Love is one of them.

How do you think the film will be received in Croatia, and in the Balkan region?

All those who have let their lives be dominated by intolerance and evil will hate this film, but they will have to face it. That confrontation is exactly what I wanted. And while they are looking at themselves in this cinematic mirror, let them remember every second they have wasted, sending negative energy out into the world. I think it will be very interesting. Unfortunately, intolerance doesn't go away, which makes this film inevitably topical. However, deep down inside I feel optimistic about the humanness hidden deep inside the majority of people, and I think that those who are capable of love will love this film.

And finally, where do you go from here?

The High Sun is just the first part of “The Sun Trilogy”. My next project, *The Dawn*, will question the strength of emotional bonds on one side, and greed as one of the oldest and basest human urges, on the other.



BIOS

Dalibor Matanić

screenwriter, director

Dalibor Matanić was born in Zagreb in 1975. He holds a degree in Film and Television Directing from the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb. He made his award-winning feature debut *The Cashier Wants to go to the Seaside* in 2000, based on his own screenplay. His second feature, *Fine Dead Girls*, won the Grand Prix, Audience Award and Critics' Award at the national film festival in 2002. Other features include *100 Minutes of Glory*; *Kino Lika* (awarded at Montpellier 2008, Alexandria, Noordelijk Film Festival, Festival del cinema Europeo and Pula Film Festival, and screened at thirty other film festivals); *I Love You, Mother of Asphalt* (Grand Prix and two other awards at FIPA Biarritz), *Daddy* and *Handymen*. One of his most successful works is his short entitled *Tulum / Party*, that premiered at Cannes film festival, Critic's Week in 2009 and later won 18 film awards at national and international festivals.

Ankica Jurić Tilić

producer

Ankica Jurić Tilić graduated in comparative literature from the Faculty of Arts in Zagreb. She is a graduate of EAVE, a member of ACE, Producers on Move and the European Film Academy. She founded her production company Kinorama in 2003. Ankica's filmography numbers 20 feature-length films, several TV series and a number of shorts. Some of her films are among the top box-office hits in cinemas, and all of them were screened at numerous festivals around the world, winning more than 100 awards.

Goran Marković

lead actor

Goran Marković was born in 1985 in Split. He graduated from the acting department of Split University Arts Academy. In 2009 he became a member of the ensemble of the Croatian National Theatre in Split. In 2008 he won the Croatian Actors' Guild Award for Exceptional Young Artist Achievement in a drama and in 2010 he won the same award in the operetta/musical category. The main role in Dalibor Matanić's film *The High Sun* is his first prominent film role.

Tihana Lazović

lead actress

Tihana Lazović was born in Zadar in 1990. In 2009 she enrolled in the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb. Her first feature film role was in *The Priest's Children* (directed by Vinko Brešan, 2013) which was nominated for the EFA Comedy of the Year Award, and has been sold worldwide. In the same year, she won the "Breza" Award for best debutant at the 60th Pula Film Festival, for the leading role in the film *Hush...* (directed by Lukas Nola). She acts in EXIT and the Kerempuh Theatre.



TEAM

CAST

Tihana Lazović
Goran Marković
Nives Ivanković
Dado Ćosić
Stipe Radoja
Trpimir Jurkić
Mira Banjac

SCREENWRITER

Dalibor Matanić
Dalibor Matanić

PRODUCER

COPRODUCERS

Ankica Jurić Tilić
Petra Vidmar, Frenk Celarc, Nenad Dukić,
Miroslav Mogorović

CINEMATOGRAPHY

EDITOR

MUSIC

SOUND DESIGN

SET DESIGN

COSTUME DESIGN

MAKE UP

SOUND ENGINEER

1ST AD

Marko Brdar
Tomislav Pavlic
Alen Sinkauz, Nenad Sinkauz
Julij Zornik

Mladen Ožbolt
Ana Savić Gecan
Mojca Gorogranc Petrushevska,
Taliya Ivančič

Mladen Pervan
Dragan Jurić

The High Sun - Soleil de plomb

ZVIZDAN

GENRE Drama

RUNNING TIME 123 minutes

2015 © Kinorama, Gustav film, SEE Film Pro
Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia

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