

Strand Releasing presents

**THE OFFICIAL GREEK ENTRY
FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM
88TH ACADEMY AWARDS®**

XENIA

A FILM BY PANOS H. KOUTRAS

Starring Kostas Nikouli, Nikos Gelia and Aggelos Papadimitriou

Official Selection:

Cannes Film Festival, Un Certain Regard

Toronto International Film Festival

Winner, Chicago International Film Festival, Gold Hugo Best Film

Miami and Fort Lauderdale Gay and Lesbian Film Festival

Seattle International Film Festival

Frameline Film Festival

Country of Origin: Greece
Format: DCP/1.85/Color
Sound Format: Dolby Digital
Running Time: 128 minutes
Genre: Drama
Not Rated
In Greek with English Subtitles

National Press Contact:

Jenna Martin / Marcus Hu

STRAND RELEASING

Phone: 310.836.7500

jenna@strandreleasing.com

marcus@strandreleasing.com

Please download photos from our website:
<http://strandreleasing.com/films/xenia-2/>

SYNOPSIS

XENIA follows two young brothers in search of their birth father across the colorful landscape of Greece. Dany, 16, leaves Crete to find his brother Odysseus who lives in Athens and they journey to Thessaloniki where they think their father is living. When the handsome Odysseus isn't protecting his daydreaming, gay younger brother, he auditions for the television talent show "Greek Star" where he pursues his fantasy of becoming a singing star. A comic and touching road trip of two brothers connecting and searching for their dreams.

INTERVIEW WITH PANOS H. KOUTRAS

How did this film come about?

The film could be a farewell to my younger self. I felt the need to speak about adolescence before it was too late. My years as a teenager were amongst the most intense I have ever lived. I rebelled against the system, and my only trinity was sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. I felt different, out of place. My homosexuality clearly had something to do with this. The years when I was 14 to 18 were the most crucial of my life. Without my knowing, all the choices and decisions I made back then, as to my behavior, love, values, politics or arts, have had an impact of varying scale on the rest of my life.

I believe that youth is a beautiful age to shoot, yet I think that young people are those who suffer the most these days. They are born in a hostile world and find themselves helpless, lost. I find this moving. Besides, I wanted to tell the story of the love between two brothers. Both blood brotherhood and spiritual brotherhood have been paramount in my own experience, especially as a gay man.

Finally, I wanted to deal with the issue of stateless children, especially in my country where birth right, *jus sanguinis*, prevails over *jus soli*. With the emergence of the far right in Greece, and more broadly speaking in the whole of Europe, the issue now reaches dramatic proportions. I am convinced that immigration is the great tragedy of our times.

Why did you name the film Xenia?

“Xenia” could be translated as “hospitality”, though the meaning of this ancient Greek concept is much more complex. The Greek gods abided by this law, which commands us to honor and welcome strangers wherever they come from. Zeus, the father of all gods, is also sometimes referred to as *Xenios Zeus*, “Zeus the hospitable”. Hospitality was a major founding principle in Ancient Greece. Xenophobia is a relatively modern concept. Today, not only has Greece forgotten its duties towards foreigners, but it also deceives and misleads its people. “Xenia” is also the name of a chain of luxury hotels built in the late fifties by great architects throughout the country. People were discovering tourism; it was a time of great economic prosperity in Greece. Today, more than 90% of these luxury hotels are abandoned and condemned.

Producing Xenia in such a crisis context probably wasn't easy...

I have never experienced a film that was easy to produce, and I have always been plagued by financial angst while shooting. Making a film of a considerable budget today in Greece seemed like a crazy thing to do. So, together with our Greek co-producer, Wrong Men, we searched for European funds to make it a co-production. MPM Film in France and Entre Chien and Loup in Belgium helped us. With their support and that of the Greek Film Center, we made it. France has played a major part in this, and I am very grateful for that... Later on, though, production met

with a tragic incident that could have been fatal. One of our main backers, state broadcaster ERT, shut down overnight, halfway through the shooting, and as a consequence our whole financing was put on hold. Thanks to the brave, if hazardous, decision by all the co-producers to move on and keep the production going, the film was completed. Today though the production is still running a considerable deficit...

You often work with non-professional actors. Why is that?

I like to mix professional and non-professional actors. The father, the mother and Tassos are professional actors who are quite famous in Greece. But for Ody and Dany, this was never an option. When the film deals with characters who belong to a minority group with a specific claim, a cause (like the deaf people in *Real Life*, my second film, or the transsexual woman in *Strella*, or the two young second-generation Albanian immigrants in *Xenia*), I feel I have to choose people who are facing the problem themselves and who can rightfully represent their community. It is a matter of coherence and accuracy. I don't do topic-centered or militant films, but to me, casting is a real political choice.

Xenia is about two Albanian brothers, both minors, who find themselves strangers in the country they were born. In Greece, there are about 200 000 young people matching this profile! I was persuaded that I could find two young actors full of talent to play these parts and I did, even though the casting process took more than a year... I started looking for actors before production began. Then we rehearsed with Kostas and Nikos in my apartment and then on location for 7 months, 4 times a week, before we even started shooting.

Strella was about a father looking for his son, while Xenia follows two boys' quest for their father. Family as a theme in the film always collides with the issues of History, nationality and identity. Do you think that today Greece is a bad father to its children?

We have been living in a patriarchal world for more than 2000 years. "Fathers" have their share of responsibility as to the state of the world today, don't they? Not only Greece, but also Europe, Syria, Russia, and many other countries... The world has always eaten its children, the weak get crushed, minorities get dismissed. It has become worse these last few years. Immigrants are the new victims in this world of ours. We should side with them, help them and listen to them. After all, our privileged countries are partly responsible for their dire situation. I stand for *jus soli* with all my heart. I am against the very idea of a nation. Human beings must be free to choose their own nationality, especially when they were born and raised in a state they consider their country of adoption, and being deprived of this right seems outrageous to me.

As for family, it is a recurrent theme in my films because it is the subject that worries me the most in life. Family, in all its different forms, is the cradle of the world. I cannot picture my life without my parents, without my blood brothers and sisters or those I have chosen for myself...

Strella could be seen as a tribute to Stella, by Michael Cacoyannis, with Melina Mercouri. Hanging over Xenia is the presence of another diva, Patty Pravo. Who is she?

The music was there right from the script. Patty Pravo is a great singer, an Italian diva from the seventies to this day. As a child, I was addicted to the Italian musical variety show “Canzonissima”, and she was a regular. I was fascinated by Patty Pravo. Years later, in Naples, in 2006, I got to listen to her music again and it was just like taking a trip down memory lane. I bought all her records, I wanted to pick up things where I left them and make up for lost time.

Dany loves Patty Pravo because she was his mother’s favourite. He sees and idealizes her through his mother’s eyes; Patty Pravo isn’t just a star any more, she is a saint with beneficial powers.

Music, dreams of glory and the singer’s ghostly presence all seem connected to the mother figure: is it the comforting answer to the absence of a father?

Although the mother isn’t there any more, her ever-present phantasmal shadow haunts and leads the whole film. At the end though, a real mother appears, and this other mother leaves Dany baffled. In a way, all the adults have forsaken these children to their fate. They are orphans, condemned to face a cruel world so as to grow up.

The quest of two brothers, a family feud, a character named Odysseas... Greek mythology and tragedy haunt Xenia and hold a prominent place in your films...

I am Greek, and in Greece, they teach you about Greek mythology from primary school. There is no getting away from it. Although to me, mythology has more to do with popular culture than with some noble academic discipline for the happy few.

One particular sequence in Xenia is an allusive nod to Charles Laughton’s The Night of the Hunter. Why did you make that reference?

When I wrote the scene where the two brothers get lost in the woods, I couldn’t help but think about *The Night of the Hunter*. I find this film particularly moving, probably because it is about children who are hurt. All my films deal with that. But I cannot explain much further why this film, which I love so much, has forced itself on me like that. Cinema has been with me all my life, and sometimes it has even saved me. To this day I feel indebted to some films or filmmakers.

Who wrote the score for Xenia?

The score was written by a French musician of Greek origin, Delaney Blue, Daniel Darc's guitar player and composer. His music evoke images of lost childhood; it is melancholic and elegiac. Delaney Blue only used acoustic instruments for the score.

Your films often verge on fantasy. The way you combine present-day realism (immigration, crisis...) with fantasy is pretty unique.

Fantasy is vital to me, it is a need, not an aesthetic choice. Reality and dream often get mixed up in my daily life. I don't see why it could not be so in films. To me, it is the best way to come closer to reality. For *Xenia*, it seemed only natural to resort to fantasy to build Dany's character. Traumatized children find often refuge in the realm of imagination.

Could you elaborate on your choice to mix reality TV with the noblest references from Greek culture? Do you think that the essence of cinema lies within this tension?

When I start a script, I don't set limits. I grew up watching TV. My childhood was split between television and movie theatres. I discovered many things on TV, films of course, but also *Star Trek*, which is still one of my big references, or shows like "Canzonissima", which introduced me to Patty Pravo. Pop culture and gay culture constitute my fundamental culture. From reality TV to Jean Genet, my references, my universe, my language come from there.

A gay club called "Fantastiko", a lawyer named Antigone, the Greek Star... Xenia is constantly filled with humour, parody and irony, as an answer to tragedy. Will humour save Greece?

Will humor save Greece or the world? Humor holds reflection in itself. It provides a certain distance, and distance is an incredible luxury. I don't think cinema is going to change the world. But I am sure it opens perspectives that can help us to see and understand. I totally subscribe to André Bazin's statement, which has become a cliché but is still so true and beautiful: "*Cinema is a window opened to the world*".

PANOS H. KOUTRAS' BIOGRAPHY

Born in Athens, Panos H. Koutras studied filmmaking at the London Film School and at the Sorbonne in Paris. From 1985 to 1995, he kept going back and forth between both cities and made several short films screened in festivals throughout the world. In 1995, he founded in Athens his own production company, 100% Synthetic Films, and started writing his first feature film, *The Attack of the Giant Moussaka*, an “unidentified filmic object” released 4 years later, quickly achieving cult status. He made a complete turnaround with his second film, *Real Life*, a drama which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and won the National Critics Award in Greece in 2004. His third film, *Strella*, was selected in the Panorama section of the 2009 Berlin Film Festival and in many other international festivals. *Xenia* is his fourth feature film.

CAST

Kostas Nikouli	Dany
Nikos Gelia	Ody
Aggelos Papadimitriou	Tassos
Romanna Lobach	Maria
Marissa Triandafyllidou	Vivi
Yannis Stankoglou	Lefteris
Patty Pravo	as herself

CREW

Directed by	Panos H. Koutras
Produced by	100% Synthetic Films and Wrong Men
In co-production with	MPM Film Entre Chien Et Loup Arte France Cinema Greek Film Center Nerit and Nova
Screenplay	Panos H. Koutras Panagiotis Evangelidis
Cinematography	Helene Louvart (AFC) Simos Sarketzis (GSC)
Production design	Pinelopi Valti
Costume design	Vassilis Barbarigos
Sound	Fabrice Osinski
Music	Delaney Blue
Editor	Yorgos Lamprinos
Casting	Christina Azkoti Alex Kelly Maria Laina

Editorial staff

Elias Moustakis
Thomas Bouffioulx
Celine Canard