



Guria

A film by Levan Koguashvili

WORLD PREMIERE · VENICE SPOTLIGHT · 83RD VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

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GEORGIA 2026 118 MINUTES BLACK & WHITE GEORGIAN



WORLD PREMIERE · VENICE SPOTLIGHT

83rd Venice International Film Festival

Wed 9 Sept	14:15	Sala Giardino	PASS HOLDERS
Wed 9 Sept	21:00	Sala Giardino	PUBLIC & PASS HOLDERS
Thu 10 Sept	09:00	Sala Giardino	PUBLIC & PASS HOLDERS

SYNOPSIS

Hazelnuts, and no buyer worth the name

The Soviet Union has collapsed, but the promised prosperity has not reached Guria, in western Georgia. Electricity flickers between light and darkness, policemen steal trolleybus cables to sell as scrap, and the widower Zuriko, a forty-five-year-old hazelnut farmer, refuses the paltry sums the Italian buyers offer for his harvest.

His best friend Gela helps him search for better buyers and introduces him to potential wives, who inevitably fail to satisfy Zuriko's disapproving ex-mother-in-law. After surviving a highway robbery, Zuriko pursues Maya, the village music teacher. Meanwhile Zuriko's son Achi suffers his own heartbreak when the girl he loves, Eka, is "kidnapped" and marries his rival, Beso.

In Guria, Zuriko's world shifts constantly between hardship and absurdity, beauty pageants and violence, love and sadness.



BESO AND HIS FRIENDS. GURIA, THE MID-1990S.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

A state of mind, not a place on the map

Guria is about ordinary people who live under harsh conditions yet manage to preserve their humanity. They are far from perfect — in fact, they often behave quite badly. But they are capable of friendship and empathy. They cry, they laugh, they shout, they fight, they love — and in our increasingly sterile times, that already means a lot.

They live in Guria, a region in western Georgia — though in our film it is more than a geographic location; it is a state of mind. Guria is one of the poorest yet most talented regions in Georgia. Elsewhere in the country, songs are sung in three-part harmony; here, they sing in five, and sometimes even more.

Poverty is a real-life hardship, but for cinema it is a rich source of stories. Raw poverty alone, though, is not enough. Inspiration requires something more — call it lightness, lyricism, humour, the absurd, sadness. Guria has all of these in abundance: a blend of impoverishment and self-irony, sadness and laughter. It is a natural cradle of tragicomedy, the genre I love most.

I wanted to make a film about ordinary people without ideological trends or political agendas. Just pure living. Just pure cinema. Just pure Guria.

IN CONVERSATION

Levan Koguashvili

On a book bought in a supermarket, two years at the front, a tank taken down from its plinth, and why the sad stories have to be told as comedies.

How did this film come about?

I bought a book in the supermarket about Guria by the writer Giorgi Kekelidze, about his childhood there in the 1990s. I liked the tone: it was nostalgic and sad and funny all at once.

The problem was that it had no story. Rather it was notes and reminiscences about his father and school. I got his number and called him to ask if he had anything more adaptable about Guria from this period. He didn't, but suggested we go there together to see what we could find.

We travelled together, he left after a few days while I stayed for a couple of months by myself, collecting stories. I saw people selling hazelnuts in the market and loved that texture of life. I met a widow with a son, who became the seed of the main character. I even met a man who used to organise beauty contests in Guria in the '90s. I made over a hundred little notes.

What happened when you took those notes to your co-writer?

I went to Latvia, where my scriptwriter Boris Frumin spends every summer. He was born there and now lives in Florida.

I told him what I had. We have this widow, we have hazelnuts, we have poverty, we have humour, we have a beauty contest. Boris is a very good writer and he understands construction. He was the one who found the shape of a story in all of it.

The script was originally set in the present day. What made you move it to the 1990s?

We already had our financing from the Film Center for a contemporary version. Then I met a man who had run a small city in Guria in the '90s, and he started telling me about being a government official at that time. Robberies on the

road, that sort of thing. The stories were so strong they could make another film entirely.

Listening to him, I thought: everything should move to the '90s. So Boris and I rewrote it. The period simply seemed more interesting. Wilder, funnier, more bitter. It had more life in it.

Was there a practical advantage to the period as well?

There was, and it's a strange story. While I was still writing the contemporary version, I asked the man who used to run the beauty contests whether we could stage one now, a small one in a village, so I could observe it. He said, why not.

Then he tried to organise it. Because he is still a state bureaucrat, he was told that if he held a beauty contest for girls he would have to hold one for boys too. Gender balance. He could see how much the times had changed.

That was when I understood that in the '90s I have no such obligations. It is before political correctness, before any of it. People didn't care about anything, they were just living. I could do whatever I wanted.

Why tell the story through a rural community?

I'm drawn to rural places. There is a nostalgia in them, and the people are more open, more human. They are different from city people and easier to talk to.

There is also more Georgian flavour out there. Cities everywhere are more or less the same now, it's hard to tell one big city from another. The villages and the provinces have kept something traditional, and having that flavour matters to me. It is what makes a film unusual.

The stories themselves are traditional. A love story, a friendship story. But put them somewhere with that much flavour and you are telling the same story another way.



"ROBBERIES ON THE ROAD, THAT SORT OF THING."

You lived through the '90s in Georgia yourself. What do you remember?

It was crazy. I started film school in 1990, and by the end of 1991 there were tanks in front of the building. Our school was on the main avenue in Tbilisi, right in the centre. So there was a war going on outside my school a year and a half after I enrolled.

Then the war in Abkhazia started, which was really a war between Georgia and Russia, with Abkhazia as a proxy on the Russian side. That changed everything. No more film school. A lot of people from my generation went to fight and a lot of them died. Very good actors. A director whose films I loved.

And you went to the front yourself, as a reporter.

I felt I had to take part somehow, but I knew that being a soldier was not something I would do well. So I decided to become a war reporter, with absolutely no experience of reporting. I walked into a Georgian independent TV channel and asked them to send me. It began as an internship and I stayed two years.

It was a hard time, but it is where I discovered the joy of the work itself. Shooting, editing, writing a text. I was nineteen, twenty years old. Just a boy who had read a lot of books and seen some films and thought he had something to say. Then you interview men coming back from the front without hands or legs, and that is a completely different education.

Tbilisi wasn't safe either. Men with guns, shootings, no electricity, queues for bread, all of it at once. But for a filmmaker, a strong personal experience of life is crucial. Think of the directors of the 1920s. They had been pilots in the First World War, they had crashed their planes, and they arrived in Hollywood already knowing what life was. After two years I went to film school in Moscow, and by then I had ideas in my head and something behind them.

How did you find the structure, the two parallel love stories?

I believe in strong scenes. When I'm working on a script I count how many good scenes the story might give me. If I can see ten or twelve strong ones, I know I have a film. After that it is a question of how to connect them, and Boris is very good at connecting.

The parallel love story came out of the notes. I had told him about boys falling in love at school, and I had other notes about grown-up love. At one point I had so much material about the school romance that I wondered whether I needed the father at all, whether the son should carry the whole thing.

Structure gives a film its muscle. It is what holds everything together. In the first half of Guria the structure isn't obvious, but in the second half it catches up and

pulls together.

And the friendship at the centre of it?

Friendship feels like an important subject right now, because you don't see much of it in films any more. You rarely see a good relationship with no side-motives, just the pure thing.

It is nostalgic too. In the '90s people were not so spoiled. They could afford to be unconditional about each other.

How did you approach casting the characters?

The screen presence of the person — actor and non-actor alike. He or she either has it or does not. That is the most important thing. Then you do a video test and it tells you everything. I also prefer to work with friends, or with people I like. That atmosphere of friendship and camaraderie is a very important factor in the shooting process.

What were you looking for from the actors in terms of performance style?

The range. From comedy and laughter through to drama, to tears. And honesty. Honesty is the crucial element. Honest acting is the best acting, for me.

Given how brutal that period was, why is the film a comedy?

Because I believe sad stories have to be told as comedies. Tragedies especially. That is my approach.

Watch Godard's first eight or nine films. They are all comedies about tragedies. I rewatched *Alphaville* yesterday and it is a comedy about a very sad life. Or Cassavetes. *Husbands* is a comedy about three ridiculous, wonderful men chasing something in London, a midlife crisis played as farce.

And I remember a lot of funny moments from that time. Guria gives you material for comedy. Finding the irony doesn't make a dramatic story less dramatic, it adds a dimension. It makes it deeper, gives it more layers, and makes it easier for an audience to take.



ZURIKO AND GELA. "YOU RARELY SEE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH NO SIDE-MOTIVES, JUST THE PURE THING."

The film moves between comedy, romance and a much darker social reality. How did you find the balance between those tones?

The ironic tone is the key approach, no matter how dark or heavy the subject or the scene is. Also lightness in the storytelling. The rest is finding the cinematic location and the physical activity.

Ambiguity is an important quality too — ambiguity of the character and of the situation. By an ambiguous situation I mean the seamless shifting of moods within a single scene.

The film also deals with bride kidnapping. Why include it?

Because it was part of life. It happened constantly in the '90s, and probably long before, especially in the provinces, though I know plenty of cases in Tbilisi too. It happened to people I knew, to girls I knew. Fortunately it has more or less stopped now. It surfaces here and there and people are arrested for it.

It is also true to the material. The winner of the beauty contest I researched was kidnapped, and she told me the story herself. Although she rather liked the man, so when it happened she didn't mind too much.

The bureaucracy in the film is as absurd as the people caught up in it. Was it really like that?

It was a time of no law, absolutely. The man who ran that little city gave me extraordinary material. I couldn't use most of it, because then he would have had to become the central character.

One story. He gets a call from the president of the country asking him to take the tank off the war monument, fit it with an engine from a new car and send it to the front. They start dismantling it. Then the president is out and has to flee the country, so the tank just sits there on the ground, and they have to lift it back onto its plinth.

So yes, it is Kafka's world. But Kafka has more bitterness in it, more depression. Guria is funnier, because this is still a southern country, a Mediterranean culture, with more self-irony. The absurdity is skyrocketing in every direction. The hospital, the school, everywhere.

How did you approach the shooting?

We don't do precise storyboards. Maybe only for a few complicated scenes. The rest is done on the set. I usually know the first shot of the day.

I don't usually use a handheld camera. In Guria there are some long takes, but mostly it is coverage dictated by the action and the location.

Choosing locations always takes me a long time, because a location is more than the place where the action happens. It is a mood, an experience of life. And a good location does the work for you. However well a scene is written, in the wrong place it won't play. The location has to have depth and texture.

What were the biggest practical challenges of shooting in Guria?

The lack of a sufficient budget. We had to stop shooting, raise more money and then continue the process. It is always better to shoot something in one go. The pause does give you the chance to cut the footage and realise what you are missing, but it has more drawbacks than that. It is difficult to go back into the same mood after several months.



MAYA, THE VILLAGE MUSIC TEACHER.

And the decision to shoot in black and white?

That came out of a problem. I wanted an autumn film, with bare trees. But Guria sits between the sea and the mountains, it is subtropical, and it is very green. We started at the end of October expecting autumn by early November, and that year it didn't arrive until December. Green kept popping out of every corner of the frame. The grass, the lemon trees, everything.

I was irritated, so I started switching the monitor to black and white to see what would happen. I liked the texture immediately. I even liked the acting better, it felt more convincing.

Then we had a pause between the two shooting blocks while we raised more money, and by the time I had looked at the footage in the editing room the decision was made. For the second block we were framing and lighting for black and white.

Tell me about the music.

Georgia is a very musical, very polyphonic country. Folk singing is highly developed here, with all those different voices, and Guria is probably the most gifted region of all for it. So we always knew there would be a lot of singing in the film.

I met a young composer from Guria who works with folk singers, and I asked him for something that was neither modern nor folk. Something in between, written in the tradition of Gurian polyphony but doing something else with it. He came back with melodies I liked straight away.

It was one of those rare cases in my career where I had the music while I was still shooting. I could listen to it on set, sometimes during the scene itself.

The first woman he meets is almost a comic interlude, the modern woman out of place in this world. Was that a statement about modernity?

There was no particular thought behind it. I just liked the scene. An unsuccessful love, and a portrait of the kind of lonely people who turn up to those meetings. For me it was a way into the characters and the life of the place.

You often seem more interested in observing a situation and letting the audience find its meaning than in explaining it. Is that how you approach your films?

I don't believe it's necessary to explain everything. I just try to capture an interesting, original, cinematic slice of life and trust the audience to find their own meaning. Quite often, I discover that meaning myself along the way.

Is there more of that period you still want to put on screen?

I don't think I have said everything I have to say about Guria in the '90s. If I'm lucky I'll have another try, maybe a crime film. I know some remarkable crime stories from those years and I remember those men. That would be a very different picture.

The film seems to describe a society caught in the middle of a profound transition. How do you see that aspect of the film?

I remember it happening, and how it happened.

The film is a nostalgia for those people, but they are already caught in the transition. They are changing. Guria in the 1980s had been a different place. Peaceful, prosperous in its way, though behind the Iron Curtain. No wars, nothing. Then all of it was destroyed in a very short space of time and people were simply lost. They didn't know what to do or how to face it.

That is the moment Guria is describing. People slightly adrift, not quite sure what they are doing, adjusting. We don't explain it much. It is the texture of the film.

THE DIRECTOR

Levan Koguashvili

Levan Koguashvili was born in Tbilisi, Georgia. He began his training at the Georgian State Film Institute until the civil war interrupted his studies, and he spent those years working as a television journalist. He went on to graduate from the All-Russian State University of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow under the mentorship of the Soviet auteur Marlen Khutsiyev, and later earned a Master's degree from the New York University Graduate Film Program.

His work moves between documentary and fiction. His debut feature, *Street Days*, premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and was hailed by critics as a turning point for modern Georgian cinema. *Blind Dates* premiered at Toronto and screened at the Berlinale, going on to win more than twenty international awards. His documentary *Gogita's New Life*, about a man hoping to marry after a long prison sentence, premiered at IDFA. His tragicomedy *Brighton 4th* — a deeply humane portrait of a father's devotion, set in Brooklyn's Georgian diaspora — won three awards at Tribeca, including Best Film, and was Georgia's official entry for the Academy Awards.



LEVAN KOGUASHVILI

2010	<i>Street Days</i> FEATURE · WORLD PREMIERE, INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM
2013	<i>Blind Dates</i> FEATURE · TORONTO · BERLINALE · 20+ INTERNATIONAL AWARDS
2016	<i>Gogita's New Life</i> DOCUMENTARY · IDFA
2021	<i>Brighton 4th</i> FEATURE · TRIBECA, BEST FILM · GEORGIAN ENTRY, ACADEMY AWARDS
2026	<i>Guria</i> FEATURE · VENICE SPOTLIGHT, WORLD PREMIERE

CREDITS & SPECIFICATIONS

The film

DIRECTED BY	Levan Koguashvili
SCREENPLAY	Boris Frumin, with Levan Koguashvili and Giorgi Kekelidze
MAIN CAST	Kakhaber Tcholadze, Natia Nikolaishvili, Vamekh Jangidze, Davit Natsvaladze, Anamaria Kamladze, Sergi Kvitoria
CINEMATOGRAPHY	Gigi Samsonadze, Giorgi Shvelidze
EDITING	Pia Dumont
MUSIC	Giorgi Gordeladze
SOUND	Patrick Becker, Vano Gvaradze, Oswald Schwander
PRODUCTION DESIGN	Kote Japaridze
COSTUME DESIGN	Eka Bichinashvili, Ketikalandadze
MAKE-UP	Eka Chikhradze, Nino Dashniani
PRODUCTION	Kino Iberica (Olena Yershova, Levan Koguashvili, Boris Frumin), Cineworx Filmproduktion (Pascal Traechslin), Tarantula Luxembourg (Donato Rotunno), Art Fest (Stefan Kitanov), TatoFilm (Olena Yershova), Maya Film (Kanat Doğramacı), Staer (Elisa Fernanda Pirir), Red Sea Fund
COUNTRIES	Georgia, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Türkiye, Norway, Saudi Arabia
YEAR	2026
RUNNING TIME	118 minutes
LANGUAGE	Georgian
FORMAT	Black and white · 1.66:1
WORLD PREMIERE	83rd Venice International Film Festival, 2026 — Venice Spotlight

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GURIA · A FILM BY LEVAN KOGUASHVILI
STILLS AND FURTHER PRESS MATERIALS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



“ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY, SONGS ARE SUNG IN THREE-PART HARMONY; HERE,
THEY SING IN FIVE.”