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present



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THE HILL WHERE LIONESSES ROAR

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a film by

Luàna **BAJRAMI**

83 minutes – Kosovo, France – 2021 – Scope – 5.1

PRESS

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SYNOPSIS

Somewhere in Kosovo, in a small remote village, three young women see their dreams and ambitions stifled. In their quest for independence, nothing can stop them: time to let the lionesses roar.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

LUÀNA BAJRAMI

DIRECTOR

"You always come back here, while we only want to leave. "

Quoted from an umpteenth discussion with my cousin, as there have been so many, perched on the hill overlooking our village Pleshina. I turn to her: she does not look at me but stares into the distance, worried. It was then I understood that I was touching on a deep, generalized suffering. This place, this country - Kosovo - which fascinates me, is for her, a prison. By this she was also telling me that I was free.

THE HILL WHERE LIONESSES ROAR is the story of three young friends who grew up in a village where ignorance and boredom reign, and who decide in the prime of their lives to get out of it together. The film is carried by these three striking figures who rebel against the injustice of their condition that they did not choose. We follow the evolution of these three hearts that carry us by their laughter, their ardour, their hopes, and tears. Through them, the film paints this age where we question ourselves, this quest for oneself, for the other, this quest for good, but above all the potential of choices. The whole film is built around the feverish desire of youthful emancipation: this rage to break the bonds which inhabit these three young girls.

This theme for me is universal, so I wanted to untie the film from any temporality. However, I decided to set it in Kosovo.

Why?

When I wrote this story and decided to make a film about it, a crucial question came up - that of legitimacy. I grew up in a small village in Kosovo. Coming from a Franco-Kosovar family I was raised with both cultures while having a curious external awareness of them. Thus, from a very young age, I was sensitive to the different social, familial, financial, and even cultural models. It is important to know that in Kosovo most young people are unanimous, there is no future. Every day, I met up with my sidekick and cousin who lived near my house. Together we explored the village, the empty buildings. When I returned to France, I continued to spend my vacations with her. There, I even went with her to school where I was naturally received as a "guest", something totally inconceivable in France but which fascinated and interested me for a long time. Together, we talked about everything: our fears, our dreams, our daily lives. Despite the obvious differences in our lifestyles, we had many things in common - our fears, our feelings, our quest for identity and our desire for independence. Later I understood, through my encounters with French youth that we were not alone in our thoughts, but they were shared amongst young people all over the world. I wanted to make a film to reflect all these young people, I want them to be heard, I want us to be heard.

This village in Kosovo is only there to tell the story of these young, spirited hearts. Li, Qe and Jeta, the protagonists, are the ones who embody this youth. First in their respective families, from which they escape by spending time together. We take the time to discover them, each one at home, and their worries, their concerns. And even though they are childish and immature, they are fighters. They steal to feel alive, and by necessity, but they are fuelled by desire to fill what they feel like is an injustice. An injustice that is confirmed when they see their dream of going to university shatter. Once again, the institution failed them. Neglected, the girls decide to take matters into their own hands and see only one way out: delinquency. From there everything accelerates- they free themselves from their family's shackles, but see new responsibilities appear that shake them. After a new disappointment, they decide to go on a trip. Liberation. With them we breathe again.



The situation in which the girls find themselves is meant to be extreme in order to challenge the viewer on what is often forgotten by adults, namely this rage that grows within us when we become aware of our condition. In each of us is a rage that has manifested itself, or it will. It will only take on different forms depending on the environment in which we are built. It is this awareness, this rage, that marks what is commonly known as the transition from childhood to adulthood.

The characters of Lena and Zem embody it perfectly. Both of them have been confronted with the same questions but reacted to them differently. The confrontation and interaction between the girls and these two characters is very interesting as it brings to light many aspects that are difficult to explore. Lena, who lives in France, comes to her grandmother's house on vacation. She represents this cultural contrast, as for the girls trapped in Kosovo, she embodies a form of ideal in that she seems to have "the dream life". But it turns out that she does not. So, Lena also embodies a form of disillusionment.

In terms of directing?

I wanted this film to be raw. I tried to capture this feeling. Nevertheless, I wanted to leave space for the girls to evolve. I wanted the frames to be very wide at first, very composed, before we gradually gain access to the girls' intimacy, to their lair. Something precise, dryly cut, in order to impose a visual frame on them that amplified their agitation. Thus, it was a way to lock them up, the girls were prisoners of this frame, as they are of the country: lionesses in a cage. I reserved the dynamics that shoulder shots can confer for the family scenes that I wanted to be very violent. A few very composed, almost choreographed still shots that I called "tableaux" punctuate the story.

What about the atmosphere?

The timelessness, although difficult to impose, finally gave me a great freedom, whether it was the costumes, the atmosphere, or the style. I said I was looking for something raw. That is, I wanted something lively, fresh, young. Some risk-taking too. I wanted to work mainly in natural light, the September sun in Kosovo is magnificent, it envelops the bodies in a warm colour. At night too, there lay the challenge, my goal was to allow to see and not to show. It is as if we were with the girls, that we lived with them, that we accompanied them. Together with the Director of Photography, we looked for the darkness, the shadow, the backlight more than the light.

Once we found the trio, the girls became one. Putting faces on Qe, Li and Jeta marked a turning point in the project. They all have the same strength in their eyes, this intensity that unites them. I worked with them beforehand to compose strong characters and to create this group cohesion. It was important to feel this union, that it shows through the screen.

The film mainly takes place in my childhood village: Pleshina and its surroundings. These are very personal and intimate landscapes for me. A lot of nature, a lot of red bricks, places that themselves have a history. There are many elements that visually enrich the plot and make it more complex.

For the music we used some existing titles but the soundtrack, in part, is composed. It is typically Kosovar, a mix of traditional music and more popular music. The daily life of the trio is strewn with titles of a famous local rock band of the eighties, "Gjurmët". These are titles that marked my childhood, we listened to them on loop with my father. Moreover, the Kosovar sound landscape is very rich, the identity of the country is also translated by its sounds, many insects, crickets, and cicadas. Streams of water, the rustle of leaves agitated by the wind, the call to prayer that echoes throughout the whole village. All in all, I wanted to create a strong unity, which would provide a solid framework for the unfolding of this plot.

What about the place of the Hill?

The Hill is a character in her own right. She has an almost maternal role towards the girls. She soothes and consoles them. She is the cradle of the most important moments of their lives and of their great discussions that led to important decisions. The hill sees and hears everything, she knows. She knows the destiny of the girls because she is omniscient to the three of them. Her importance is key as the different stages of the unfolding "tragedy" is held there.

The figure of the lioness incarnates a force, a courage, a capacity of organization within the group. The girls take the image of the lioness as a spirit animal. They have something wild in their being, in their rebellious spirit. Often a link between the three girls and a wild form is created; paradoxically, they refuse this comparison, feeling like they are being hunted.

What about the relationship between the lionesses and the hill?

It is a hill, a hill conquered by three lionesses, wild and majestic. Up there, they roar. They roar with anger, with despair, with powerlessness in the face of their condition. Their only strength lies in the fact that they roar together. The echo is strong, it resounds for a long time. Then hope is born, which makes hearts beat. Until the echo returns, louder, more overwhelming. It would be harmless if there were no one to listen to it. But the lionesses are always there, attentive.

LUÀNA BAJRAMI

DIRECTOR

Her keen interest in video led her to discover the stage at the age of ten. Love at first sight. Self-taught, she acquired experience through her collaborations with different filmmakers, while practicing writing, editing, and directing through numerous amateur short film projects. After graduating from high school, she stopped her studies and devoted herself fully to her passion. In 2019, she directed her first short film EN ÉTÉ MURISSENT LES BAIES, and her first feature film: THE HILL WHERE LIONESSES ROAR. With a dual Franco-Kosovan culture, she varies the formats, from short to long, while also testing documentary filmmaking. She mainly deals with the condition of youth through a rather universal prism. Her next feature film is currently in development.



FILMOGRAPHY

Actress

- 2021** THE HILL WHERE LIONESSE ROAR
IBRAHIM by Samir GUESMI
LES 2 ALFRED by Bruno PODALYDÈS
Z (comme Z) by Michael HAZANAVICIUS
L'ÉVÉNEMENT by Audrey DIWAN
- 2019** HAPPY BIRTHDAY by Cédric KAHN
PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE by Céline SCIAMMA
SCHOOL'S OUT by Sébastien MARNIER
- 2018** APRÈS LA NUIT by Valentin PLISSON and Maxime ROUX
- 2017** MARION, 13ANS POUR TOUJOURS by Bourlem GUERDJOU
DEUX ÉGARÉS SONT MORS by Tommaso USBERTI
- 2011** LE CHOIX D'ADÈLE by Olivier GUIGNARD

Director

- 2021** THE HILL WHERE LIONESSE ROAR

ERA BALAJ

Era Baraj started acting after taking drama classes at an early age. For her first role, she played Hermia in "Midsummer's Night's Dream" at the National Theatre of Kosovo. She gained fame in the Kosovan film industry through her leading role in ISTAR, one of the most watched series in the country. In 2019, she joined the art department of the University of Pristina in Kosovo. While continuing her studies, she has starred in several projects as an actress including THE LAND WITHIN ME by Fisnik Maxville and THE HILL WHERE LIONESSES ROAR by Luàna Bajrami.

FLAKA LATIFI

Flaka Latifi was born in Gjilan, Kosovo where she studied drama at the University of Pristina. Since 2018, she has performed various leading roles in short films. At the same time, she took roles in theatre productions including the latest staging of Kushtrim Koliqi's, "La Rrem" at the National Theater of Kosovo. After graduating, she completed her training as an actress, taking an interest not only in acting, but also in dancing and singing. She got her first film role in the film THE HILL WHERE LIONESSES ROAR.

URATË SHABANI

Uratë Shabani studied acting at the University of Pristina. Having discovered her passion for theatre and film at an early age, Uratë is now a graduate with a Master's degree in this field. She is currently acting at the Adriana Theatre in Ferizaj, allowing her to perform in a wide variety of plays with many different directors. At the same time, she has not stopped working on several film projects and TV series. Uratë also finds time to support young film students by participating in their short films. THE HILL WHERE LIONESSES ROAR is her first feature film.

CAST

Qe	Flaka Latifi
Jeta	Uratë Shabani
Li	Era Balaj
Zem	Andi Bajgora
Lena	Luàna Bajrami

CREDITS

Director	Luàna Bajrami
Screenwriter	Luàna Bajrami
Producers	Valbone Rahmani and Pascal Judelewicz
Music Composer	Aldo Shllaku
Director of Photography	Hugo Paturel
Editing	Michel Klochendler
Sound Engineer	Pëllumb Ballata
Mixing	Jean-Guy Veran
Color Grading	Reda Berbar
Gaffer	Benjamin Carrion
Script	Judith Dozières
Staging Assistants	Alexia Lobut Aulona Selmani
Production	Orëzanë Films and Acajou Productions
Co-Production	Vents Contraires
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With the help of	Kosovo Cinematography Center
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International Sales	Loco Films