

Interview with Stergios Dinopoulos and Krysianna B Papadakis, directors of *Bearcave*

„Romantic love should learn from friendship“

By Andromachi Arvaniti

Stergios Dinopoulos and **Krysianna B Papadakis** are two rising Greek filmmakers who, after living abroad, chose to return to their roots, which inspired them to make their first feature film. *Bearcave* is their debut feature, now screening at the Crossing Europe Film Festival in Linz. Set in the Greek mountains, its story is a rugged odyssey that, like many of the greatest tales, leads to love. It follows two protagonists: Argyro (**Chara Kyriazi**), a bold young farmer and her best friend, Anneta (**Pamela Oikonomaki**). The two share a strong bond that hints at something more than friendship. When Anneta tells Argyro that she is pregnant and plans to move to a bigger city to live with her boyfriend, the plot unfolds with heated twists and turns.

We spoke with the directors about the topics of their film: how the modern and the traditional coexist, the relationship between nature and humanity, social issues that still matter today, as well as the importance of friendship.

Beyond being a physical place, the bear cave seems to function as a form of escape. What does it symbolize for you?

SD: We like this interpretation. Many people look for a definitive symbolism behind the cave, but we ourselves haven't settled on something specific. What is clear, though, is that when Argyro is faced with a dead end, when she feels fear and realizes she's at a critical point, she decides to go to the bear cave, even though she had avoided it for years.

What does the film reveal about women's position in the village?

KBP: The moral framework of the village is very present in the film, along with its contradictions. When we were developing Anneta's character, we had many discussions about the ethical forces that shape and drive her decisions. In the first part, we see women carried along by external circumstances. We see two young women yielding to their parents' expectations and to what is considered best for their reputation and their social advancement. More broadly, not just in villages but in life in general, many women are not allowed, even by themselves, to pursue a life centred on their own desires. Even today.

Argyro refuses to leave her father and the family business behind in order to pursue her own path. Would you say that family still lies at the core of young people's value systems in Greece today?

SD: Even among younger generations, we would say yes. Whether you love your family or resent it, you are still expected to present a good image to others. You are expected to take care of your parents as they took care of you, to always be available, to never miss family gatherings and, of course, to regularly visit your grandmother. It also seems that many life choices, such as what to study or what career to pursue, are still heavily influenced by the family circle.

At the same time, in recent years many people have confronted the idea of a “chosen family”. When someone’s biological family does not accept them or fails to provide safety and warmth, they are forced to build a new family of their own choosing.

KBP: That said, Greece’s family-cantered culture should not be viewed purely as a flaw. Sometimes putting aside our own needs to care for others, when done in balance, shows that our culture is not entirely individualistic.

This coexistence of modernity and tradition is also reflected in the film’s soundtrack, which ranges from Marina Satti and Black Morris to traditional clarinet music. How did you make these choices?

KBP: We’ve definitely been influenced by the recent revival of traditional music in Greece. In general, it feels like younger generations are increasingly embracing traditional Greek music, something that used to be considered outdated or even embarrassing. For example, our parents mostly listened to foreign rock bands. Perhaps we reached a point of oversaturation. Maybe, amid today’s chaos, we feel the need to redefine our cultural identity.

The film also shows life in the Greek countryside, a slower, more nature-centred way of living compared to the fast pace of cities. How far have we drifted from that way of life?

SD: Very far... We often find ourselves returning to the idea of “slow living” and it’s something we’ve consciously woven into the film. *Bearcave* is a film that takes its time, and in a way, this acts as a response to the fragmentation of attention caused by social media. It invites the viewer into a slower rhythm, one aligned with nature. Also, the ideal way to experience the film is in the cinema, dedicating time to it. The scenes encourage you to focus on the present and experience them almost like memories in time. Symbolically, the film ends with a return to nature, with Argyro and Anneta sitting under a tree.

Beyond the romantic element, the film portrays a deep and powerful female friendship. What does female friendship mean to you personally?

KBP: It’s essential. It’s love and solidarity. Through female friendship, through deep communication and connection, you grow. We can’t imagine life without it.

SD: More broadly, friendship may be one of the most important forms of companionship. We’ve been sold the idea that romantic love is the only form of salvation. However, that comes from a heteronormative perspective. Through friendship, you learn boundaries, communication, sharing and mutual support. Sometimes romantic love doesn’t provide that. Romantic love should learn from friendship.

At the end of the day, *Bearcave* is an optimistic film. Why are you optimistic?

KBP: We are optimistic because we no longer have expectations. Given the economic struggles and environmental crises, we feel we’ve seen or perhaps lost everything. We’ve demystified the “American Dream”; we no longer believe in it. What we believe in now is people and solidarity.