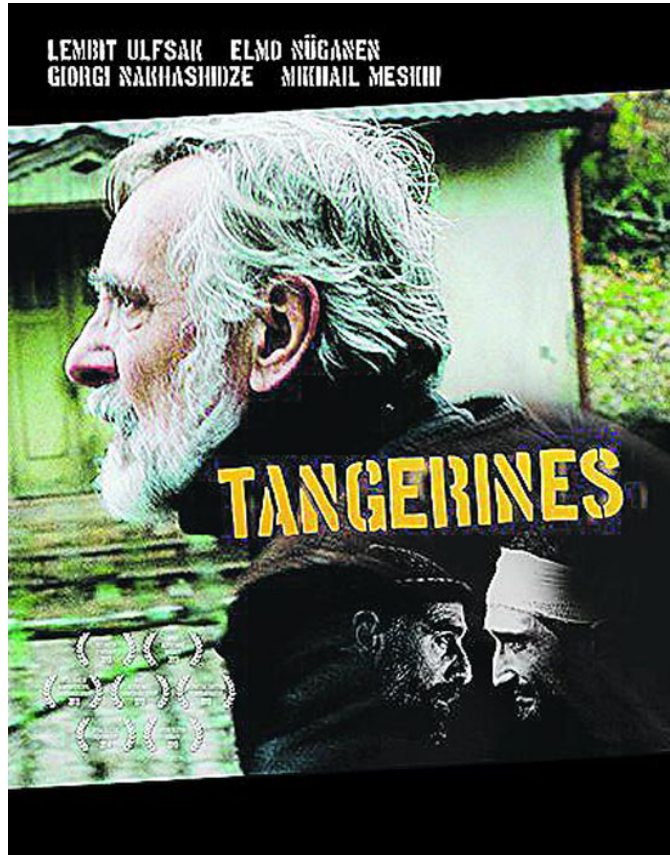


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One of the Best International Movies of the Year

By Sophie Braccini



One of the best films featured by the monthly International Film Showcase opens Oct. 31 at the Orinda Theatre. "Tangerines," an Estonian/Georgian movie by Georgian director Zaza Urushadze, depicts in a very simple but sophisticated way, the absurdity of war. A must see, the movie is appreciably short at 90 minutes, wonderfully acted and very powerful.

Set in Abkhazia, a part of Georgia that sought independence in the early 1990s, "Tangerines" speaks directly to any person coming from Eastern Europe and particularly Ukraine. The movie, however, is not only about a specific country at a specific time; it depicts how conflicts deprive people of their humanity and can blind them into senseless rage. In an interview with Eastern European media Eastbook.eu, director Urushadze said, "This film, above all, is a story about people who find themselves in a situation that is beyond their control, and forces them to renounce their human nature."

At the center of the movie is Ivo (Lembit Ulfsak), who is Estonian. Although Estonia is thousands of miles away, Ivo has deep roots in Abkhazia, like the many Estonians whose families settled on the lands abandoned by Abkhazians after the Russian victory of the Russo-Turkish War in

1877-78. When war breaks out between the Georgians and the Abkhazians - and the Chechen mercenaries who supported them - his fellow villagers leave to go back to Estonia. But he and his neighbor Markus (Elmo Nuganen), who planted a beautiful tangerine orchard, stay behind, with Markus struggling to harvest the crop. The two Estonians are not part of the conflict, yet both sides look at them suspiciously.

Ivo, played magnificently by Ulfsak, is the only one left who shows any humanity in the insanity of the war. He rescues two wounded soldiers - one Chechen, one Georgian - and tries to make his home a sanctuary of sanity and tolerance as the world turns increasingly chaotic outside. The film is dense, with beautiful cinematography. There is not one feminine presence in this movie, but certain scenes contain tenderness and humor, and the very last scene is an important, poignant one.

This is not a happy movie, but it is not depressing either - far from it. There are very few films that reach the universal experience through a simple four-person tale. "Tangerines" has the strength of a Greek tragedy and can spark endless reflection and discussion. The film is timely, given the recent conflict in Ukraine. Young people interested in the humanities, or teachers interested in spurring discussions about what it means to be human or about bias, racism, and government manipulation - all topics touched upon in this rare movie - should see this film.

"Tangerines" will be shown for one week beginning Oct. 31. For information, visit www.lamorindatheatres.com.

History of 1992-93 War in Abkhazia

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, in August of 1992, a fratricidal war broke out

in Abkhazia, a small territory located on the Black Sea coast of the newly independent Republic of Georgia. A 16-month conflict ensued between, on the one hand, Abkhaz forces aided by local civilians as well as fighters from other countries, such as Chechen mercenaries, and, on the other hand, the central government of Georgia, in the form of National Guard, paramilitaries and volunteers. Combatants both deliberately targeted and indiscriminately attacked civilians and civilian structures, killing hundreds. Troops on the ground terrorized the local population through house-to-house searches, and engaged in widespread looting and pillage, stripping civilians of property and food. Moscow was offering military support to both sides in the conflict, thus creating a so-called "controlled conflict."

(Source: Human Rights Watch Report on the 1992-93 war)

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