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## Kelin -- Film Review

By Natasha Senjanovic, June 24, 2009 03:06 ET



## "Kelin"

Bottom Line: Lyrical tale needs no words to convey an epic yet understated melodrama. Betrayal, lust, murder and revenge unfold wordlessly and compellingly among the snows of the Kazakh Steppe in the directorial debut of journalist-screenwriter Erkek Tursunov. "Kelin" has the feel of an epic tale passed down the generations through oral tradition yet the director brilliantly turns this notion on its head by eliminating all dialogue and using very little music. He intelligently trusts audiences to grasp the universality of the story even when watching rituals and customs foreign to them.

The film's provenance and the fact that it is virtually silent (save the occasional grunts and the sounds of nature) almost certainly relegates it to just festivals. Yet it heralds the arrival of a new director from a virtually unknown part of the world, who is capable of marrying high production values with innovative storytelling and a surprisingly modern feel.

The film opens with the young, listless and beautiful Kelin (which actually means daughter-in-law) being prepared for her arranged wedding. Her true love has lost out to a richer suitor (who offered more silver coins and a bigger fur coat for her), but not before binding himself to her through a blood oath.

Adorned in sumptuous headgear and dress, Kelin is taken far away, on an ox, to her husband's house, to live with, presumably, his elderly mother and younger brother. Despite being forced into the marriage, she discovers that he is not such a bad catch after all, along with the joys of sex. Domestic bliss does not last long, however, as her first love comes looking for revenge, triggering a series of dramatic events.

Like with any epic tale of romance, audiences must give themselves over to it, which is easy to do in "Kelin." In Tursunov's capable hands this human melodrama is a visual and lyrical feast whose emotions are stripped to the very essence and are never overly sentimental.

Tursunov goes even further, giving the protagonist an active sexuality that after a while makes her no victim of her circumstances. Young and curious, she is simply caught in a remote,

ancient community still very much governed by external forces and rites.

While the community is one few Westerners have ever heard of, Tursunov is sure that we will nevertheless recognize ourselves in it. And we do, in the impeccable cast whose silence speaks volumes and whose desires and actions are more than comprehensible. Even those rituals we do not immediately understand soon become clear in the story's context.

Cinematographer Murat Aliyev never treats the stunning snow-covered landscapes as folkloric postcards of a little-known region or people. On the contrary, he even extracts warmth from them, showing the characters' surroundings as bristling with life and color.

*Venue: Taormina Film Fest in Sicily*

*Production company: Kazakhfilm JSC*

*Cast: Gulsharat Zhubyeva, Turakhan Sadykova, Erzhan Nurymbet, Kuandyk Kystykbayev, Nurzhan Turganbayev*

*Director/Screenwriter: Ermek Tursunov*

*Producer: Gulnara Abikeyeva*

*Director of photography: Murat Aliyev*

*Production designer: Alexander Rorokin*

*Music: Edil Kussainov*

*Costume designer: Kuat Tleubayev*

*Editor: Svetlana Niyazova*

*No rating, 84 minutes*

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