

# Homecoming

As Greek movies continue to take the international box-office by storm, can *The Flight of the Swan* elegantly swoop in amongst the crowd? Ranti Bambgala reviews the film



Award winning, Nikos Tzimas has a very impressive CV. Along with his company, Athens Film Productions, he has produced a staggering 45 films and 8 television series. Prior to this Tzimas had directed 5 feature length films as well as 2 short films. Equally as impressive is his first English language film, *The Flight of the Swan*.

The movie centres on the protagonist Alexis Pappas, a young idealist, who, along with his three friends, had helped overthrow the Junta at the now infamous Polytechnic riots of 1973. The three take different paths in life; Alexis' path leading him to Columbia University, marriage to a Greek-American called Maria and a successful job at a multinational company on his return.

Time and time again, we see the misery that results from the lure of wealth and trapping that career success brings on TV, and this film navigates and illustrates the pitfalls just as well as we have seen played out in Greek reality. Though what makes the film stand out is not just the beautiful Greek scenery, or the gripping action shots, but the fact that we are shown the tail effect of what happens as a result of the personal loss of integrity on a bigger scale.

Somewhat autobiographically, with *The Flight of the Swan* Nikos Tzimas had returned to his native Epiros. A poor place that could use a lot of development, but development that works in harmony, not just with people's needs, but also with the environment.

Joan Borsten Vidov produced the movie and Conrad Gonzales is the editor. A few extracts from their exclusive interview to Athens Insider.

**How would you describe *The Flight of the Swans* in a few words?**

JBV: From an American perspective, it's a very timely story. It's a story about corporate greed and corruption and the impact it has on the environment, which we have seen in spades for quite a while. In this particular case, the people involved in the film are faced with the dilemma of a village hillside in Athens crumbling because they've pulled out all of the trees and everything else it takes to hold the foundation together. Just as we were arriving here, a whole piece of road in the Peloponnese that had been inaugurated about a month ago fell off. And then in the US you see what BP did to the environment. From country to country there have to be many examples.

That's the bigger story within the smaller story of the screen about very idealistic young men who helped to overthrow the Junta here. And then they went on to different paths of their lives and ended up in confrontation with each other because one lost his ideals and the other didn't.

**One thing that struck me most about the production is its high quality and the genre. Why the interest in the action genre? Did both influence each other?**

JBV: Its not largely action, but it's a lot of action. But not like an American action movie. Nikos Tzimas has made several movies before and has produced a lot of movies. He has a vision larger than what's



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been done locally. That's why he reached out to an American producer and editor, British actors, American actors, as well as Greek actors and wonderful cinematographers. By American standards, its sort of a plus genre, because you have strong drama and also some very warm and friendly asides. Its sort of a family movie, but at the same time its got all of these other issues and things.

**Why the interest in filming in Greece?**

JBV: The three young men from who the story begins, were at the Polytechnic. It's basically about Greece. Is there a scene outside the country? Yes in theory. But the story could happen anywhere. You could take it to Nigeria and it would be relatable; or in Japan, or in the States.

**Was there any significance in your choice to film in English? (and subtitle in Greek), as opposed to the other way around?**

JBV: That was Mr Tzimas' idea. He wanted to create a film that went beyond the Greek borders and not just the art houses. He wanted to make a movie that transcended borders, in a language he does not speak, in order to make it accessible.

**This relates to the earlier question, is the film targeted to any particular audience?**

JBV: We did some test screening in the US and women really respond. They are issues in the film that has to do with relationship and women were just glued to their seats. The main character goes to America to study. He meets a Greek-American girl and they come back to Greece. As he becomes wealthy and successful their lives begin to

disintegrate. And not because of a lack of love. He became a big shot in huge multinational corporations, and lives his life from project to project. He doesn't have the time to be a husband. He misses the birth of his daughter

**Does this movie draw from real life events?**

JBV: It begins 'This is based on real life' and some of the scenes were re-enacted from Mr Tzimas' own life.

**Greek cinema has made a huge impact on the international circuit? What's changed?**

CG: I've been visiting the Greek Film festival in LA. They take all the best Greek films and present them to Greek-Americans and a wider audience. For the last 2 years I was at the jury and what's interesting is that I had the opportunity to see some fantastic films that I haven't seen released in the States. It is a combination of the right local support and the use of a more international crew to garner more of an international interest.

The interest in *The Flight of the Swan* lies in the fact Mr Tzimas reached out. He wanted to avoid the pace and feel of a typical European movie. He wanted to give it an American sensibility which is why he brought Joan onboard, and she in turn me for my experiences with *The Sopranos*.

**And lastly do you have advice for future Greek film-makers?**

CG: In Greece, there are boundless opportunities for fabulous stories to be told in fabulous locations. We have four great projects and are looking to make a new film this year.

Mr Tzimas is giving a glimpse of Greece not seen since *Zorba* and *Never On a Sunday*. My advice: Make use of different styles of editing. Be more open to modern & avant-garde stories. Combine local and international stars, so that the film will reach a wider audience.

*The Flight of the Swan* features Larry Hagman and Linda Grey of *Dallas* fame, who were very well received in Greece and plays in cinemas throughout Greece since January 20. 

