KINO LORBER

presents

THE KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

A FILM BY NADAV LAPID



2014 Cannes Film Festival
2015 New Directors/New Films

Israel/France | 119 minutes | 2014 | In Hebrew with English subtitles

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Synopsis

Nadav Lapid's *The Kindergarten Teacher* is the story of a teacher who becomes at first enchanted, and then ultimately consumed by the poetic genius of her five-year-old student. As the titular protagonist, Nira, discovers that her young student, Yoav, has an otherworldly talent for language and poetry, she slowly and progressively becomes interested in cultivating the boy's gift. But when fascination morphs into obsession, Nira pushes the boundaries of her relationship with the boy and his family in an attempt to protect his talent before he passes from boyhood to adolescence, and his purity is lost.

Following his critically acclaimed debut *Policemen*, Lapid demonstrates the aesthetic vision of a true auteur, combining a verite approach with thrilling a cinematic narrative that brings into sharp focus the dangers of both mediocrity and passion.

Director's Statement

Between the ages of four and a half and seven, I wrote over 100 poems, most of which I dictated to my nanny. The first was a love poem to Hagar, the older sister of my friend from kindergarten. It was presumably my heyday in terms of creativity. At seven years old I stopped, not wanting to write anymore or have anything to do with those poems. I resumed writing prose only after I was released from the army, but never a poem. My parents put my poems in a drawer and no one took them out for over 25 years. I avoided reading them altogether, until the idea formed in my mind to make this film.

Casting the right boy for the lead was a key element, when we started to work on the film. In the rather familiar decision whether to cast an older boy that looks younger than he really is, who will provide a sense of relative security and also a mature understanding of the situation, as is customary in films where children are the focus, or a boy the same age as the protagonist, we went with the second option. The actor was five years old when filming began. We found the gap that exists at that age between a crudeness of speech and motion, something not yet perfected, and an impetus of imagination, thought and desire crucial to the portrayal of Yoav. Also, the child's degree of awareness as to the situation is elusive at this age and often the situation is gauged in a manner other than that of an adult. Yoav, the boy in the film, reads reality in his own way, and I wanted the audience not to be sure how he perceives his poems and the act of writing them.

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I felt it was important to choose a boy who is not a sluggish, eccentric child who suddenly spews poetry, but a boy who is both ordinary and different, so that the words emerge from within him while their appearance remains a mystery, this also lead me in the manner in which I directed him. While writing, and later, while casting the role, I found it vital to the essence of the film that a slightly random, unexplained element be present as the boy wrote his poems; meaning the writing is possible but not obvious. He withstands the kindergarten teacher's attempts to decipher that which cannot be fully deciphered. The question can obviously be asked as to where the words come from, just as the kindergarten teacher does. She can even insist on finding an answer, knowing that a distinct answer will not be provided. In this sense the child must present the option of asking and the ability to refuse to answer.

The kindergarten teacher is in fact the focus of the film. With her constant discontent with the mundane and reasonable reality, a hunger that forms into a mixture of extreme sensitivity and cluelessness, a fierce passion whereby she cannot define exactly what she is passionate about – Is it the words? The words of the child? The child himself? Her own words? Another love? Sarit Larry who plays the teacher was born into a religious family. At 16 she decided to devote her life to acting, something that no one in her family had any affinity for. She abandoned religion, determined to become an actress. At 26, a young, accomplished actress, she virtually abandoned acting overnight and decided to dedicate herself to philosophy. When we reached her, by some strange coincidence, she was (and still is) a doctor of philosophy at Boston University who hadn't acted in 16 years. Something about her totality and unyielding devotion, her unwavering search that combines zeal and naiveté, and above all her acting skills, were just what she needed, so I felt, to play the role with authenticity; she slipped into the role so effortlessly.

The kindergarten scenes with the large number of children were challenging at first in terms of the well thought out and meticulous filming. But in the end they provided a key to understanding the film's visual perception. The film combines extremely well planned movement of the camera in a sequence of shots that is precise and well-timed and the spontaneity of children that cannot be fully planned or controlled. A combination achieved not by compromising but by incorporating these contradicting elements. Not to subjugate the camera to the children, not to try and tame the children, but to create a tension, virtually a collision, between the organized motion of the camera and the unruliness of the camera's subjects, who violate and even attack the structure that the camera is trying to achieve. A conflict between the boundaries of the frame and what is inside it.

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Credits

Crew

Written and Directed by……..……Nadav Lapid
Produced by……..Talia Kleinhendler, Osnat Handelsman-Keren, Carole Scotta
Associate Producers……..….Simon Arnal, Caroline Benjo
Director of Photography……;;;;……Shai Goldman
Editor…….……...…Era Lapid
Casting Director……..Orit Azulay
Child Casting…….…….Ilan Gazit, Yehuda Bello, Limor Shmila
Production Designer……..…Miguel Merkin
Costume Designer…….…..Doron Ashkenazi
Makeup…….….Melanie Hadad
Sound Designer……..……Aviv Aldema
Sound Recorder……..…Marina Kertez
Mixer…….Jean-Christophe Jul'e
1st Assistant Directors…….....Avi Satat, Michal Ben Gad
Line Producer……...Zehava Shekel
Line Producer France……Julie Billy
Script Consultant……..…Clare Downs, Haim Lapid

Cast

Nira, The Kindergarten Teacher……Sarit Larry
Yoav……...Avi Shnaidman
Nira's Husband……....Lior Raz
The Poetry Teacher……Hamuchtar
Miri, the babysitter……..Ester Rada
Assi……..Guy Oren
Yoav's Uncle……..……....Yehezkel Lazarov
Yoav's Uncle……..…..Dan Toren
Kindergarten Assistant……Avishag Kahalani