



CHESTER FILM SOCIETY PRESENTS:

HEAD ON

2004 Germany-Turkey 122 MINUTES (Planned Ending 09.55pm)

DIRECTED BY FATIH AKIN

STARRING BIROL ÜNEL, SIBEL KIKELLI

Written and directed by the 32-year-old Fatih Akin, who was born in Germany to Turkish parents, *Head On* belongs to the burgeoning cinema of exile, stories of economic migrants clinging to old ways in new countries and raising rootless, rebellious children.

Harshly lit, set in parts of Hamburg that cultural visitors ignore, it's a tale of love and desperation that begins with a handsome, bedraggled man in his forties, Cahit (Birol Ünel), and a good-looking girl in her twenties, Sibel (Sibel Kekilli), meeting in a hospital.

Both are of Turkish origin and have attempted to kill themselves. A violent alcoholic at the end of his tether, he drove his car into a wall while drunk. Her nose has been broken by her brother after he saw her holding hands with a boy, and she's determined to avoid a marriage arranged by her rigidly conventional father.

Sibel pressures Cahit into marrying her, because her parents will assent to a union with a Turk, however dubious. There's a comic scene in which a chum of Cahit's accompanies him to Sibel's home, pretending to be his uncle and lending an aura of respectability to the proceedings.

A traditional alcohol-free wedding is followed by the bride and groom snorting coke and getting drunk together. Thereafter they go their own ways, indulging in promiscuous sex, drugs and booze. The marriage remains unconsummated because for the couple to become truly man and wife would end Sibel's new-found sense of freedom. However, they fall in love, they become jealous of each other's sexual partners, and there is an inexorable drift towards a violent break-up, severed family relationships, jail for Cahit, a search for degradation in Istanbul for Sibel.

The film's strength resides in the way the director, helped by his leading actors, avoids both melodrama and a schematic documentary approach to the plight of exiles.

While the tone is for the most part strongly realistic, Akin employs the Brechtian device of dividing the film into acts or chapters, each introduced by a band (six men in dinner jackets and a singer in a long red dress) standing on the Asian side of the Bosphorus with the dome of St Sophia behind them, performing sad traditional love songs directly to the audience.

Philip French, *The Observer*

A heartfelt shout of rage from Turkish-German film-maker Fatih Akin, positioning Head On as the German answer to La Haine. After ending up in the same Hamburg psychiatric hospital, two damaged individuals come together, both Turkish immigrants. Cahit (Birol Ünel) has left the mother country a long way behind, living on his own in a squalid bedsit and living the punk-rock life. Sibel (Sibel Kekilli) is much younger, a girl-next-door chafing at the restrictions of the traditional Turkish upbringing, and who persuades Cahit into a marriage of convenience to get herself out of the family home.

And so commences a long orgy of hedonism, which inevitably founders on the rock of self-hatred which the ethnic push-pull engenders. Both Ünel and Kekilli inhabit their characters with frightening intensity - an intensity matched by the seriousness with which Akin presents his material. The frequency with which Cahit and Sibel resort to self-harm makes for uncomfortable viewing, but in this dislocated cinematic universe it almost seems natural.

Unfortunately, however, Akin's film dips into occasional absurdity - with his Michael Hutchence looks, Ünel makes a pretty unconvincing punk - which tends to undermine the onscreen traumas. Nevertheless, there's a sense of urgency here that can't be ignored.

Andrew Pulver, *The Guardian*

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PLEASE LEAVE ANY COMMENTS ABOUT THIS FILM ON THE REVERSE OF THIS FORM. MANY THANKS.

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TERRIBLE FANTASTIC