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Başka Sinema: Cinema is not dead

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Let's say you're a very busy person and can barely find the time to engage in social and cultural activities, although you would like to very much.

In fact, let's say you're an avid fan of cinema and you like all kinds of movies, including mainstream, art house, avant-garde and documentaries. Let's say you run into a friend on the street, and she says, "You just have to see the film that got the Cannes Palme d'Or this year!" You really trust this friend's opinion, and you tell yourself that you're going to make time for that film.

Two weeks pass, and you look into the Turkish daily newspapers or cinema websites only to realize that the word-of-mouth promotion your friend gave was completely useless, because the film that you were aching to see on the big screen has already been taken out of cinemas because of low attendance. But what did you expect, really? While around 500,000 viewers are lining up to see the latest "Iron Man," your festival film only took 2,000 viewers in a week, so it was deemed unprofitable by the distributors and cinema owners.

You get frustrated, but you had already foreseen that this art house gem would be taken out of cinemas in one week in İstanbul, because although you personally know a lot of people who might have wanted to see the film, the audience would never be enough to fill all six daily matinees in one theater. What a shame, you think to yourself, you might as well wait for the DVD to come out, if it ever does, or even worse, download it from the torrent websites. You had already missed this film at the last film festival, and it seems likely that it will be lost in oblivion.

Well, life might be getting a little better for you cinema lovers, as Başka Sinema has come to save the day! Sponsored by the Kariyo Ababay Foundation and produced by the M3 distribution company, this new cinema distribution establishment has already booked three cinemas in İstanbul (Rexx, Capitol and Beyoğlu) and one in Ankara (Büyülü Fener) in which non-mainstream, art house films, documentaries, short films and festival favorites will be shown for a minimum of four weeks through a rotating matinee system. For example, in one day, up to four films will be shown in one theater, thereby maximizing the number of viewers for these particular films. This isn't new for those who are used to the rotating matinee system in North America and Europe, but this is truly a big step for the Turkish cinema industry, which was about to collapse into the monopoly of mainstream movies and the mentality of shopping-mall consumption.

Independent producers have been crying out for years that their films have no audience in Turkey, but this system has proven otherwise. It has pinpointed the behavior and satisfied the needs of the audience segment that is ready to watch many films during a film festival but is prone to miss the same movies during normal distribution. In a way, Başka Sinema is a film festival that lasts an entire year.

Başka Sinema started this November, and already the four theaters mentioned above are playing to full houses every matinee. I tried to find a ticket to "Frances Ha" two times at Rexx for the 7:45 p.m. matinee, and on both occasions I was disappointed to find that there were no tickets left. I really can't remember the last time I couldn't find a ticket in İstanbul for an edgy independent film such as "Frances Ha," but it must have been during the İstanbul Film Festival two years ago. However, I know the movie will play for another two weeks at least, so I'm going to get my ticket beforehand! And the beauty of this system is that there are no breaks during the screenings, so your viewing experience is uninterrupted.

Besides showing international independent films, Başka Sinema will also be showing Turkish art house films that are festival favorites every three weeks in its program. And lucky for you, dear expat, most of them will have English subtitles. The figures are so optimistic that it is likely there will be more cinema chains joining the system by providing at least one of their theaters.

Currently the November program includes Onur Ünlü's "Thou Gild'st The Even," Noah Baumbach's "Frances Ha," Abdellatif Kechiche's Palme d'Or winner "Blue Is the Warmest Color," Aslı Özge's "Lifelong" and Neil Jordan's "Byzantium." The brochures are everywhere, but please check the website at www.baskasinema.com for matinee information and for films to be shown in upcoming months. The website is a bit complicated, but you'll get used to it.

Cinema is not dead; it's alive and kicking with all its might. You don't have to be chained to your TV or computer screen to watch the film you missed, as thanks to Başka Sinema you won't miss it. Once again you can enjoy that long-lost "movie-going" experience. An experience in which you can collectively fall in love with a movie because you know that the camaraderie in that cinema, created in front of the big screen, is priceless.



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