

The Yusuf Trilogy

bal honey

A film by Semih Kaplanoğlu



60th Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Competition





The life of sensitive young Yusuf in his first year of school:
the secluded forest where he lives, a place of mysterious beauty and
adventure, and the strong bond with his beekeeper father Yakup ...
From the writer-director of *Süt* (Milk) and *Yumurta* (Egg).

Synopsis

Yusuf is an only child who lives with his parents in an isolated mountain area. For the young boy, the surrounding forest becomes a place of mystery and adventure when accompanying his father on the job.

Yusuf watches in admiration as his father works sometimes higher than the eye can clearly see.

Yakup is a beekeeper who hangs his specially-made hives at the top of the tallest trees. With the skill of a tightrope acrobat, he must often suspend dangerously from the uppermost branches to gather honey.

Yusuf and his father have a very strong bond. Yusuf is excited to share a dream with his father. Instructed by his father, the young boy whispers it and no one else can ever know the secret that father and son now share.

Yusuf's stutter shames him in front of his classmates during an oral reading assignment. Being an outsider makes this year of elementary school even more difficult. Yusuf desperately longs for the teacher's congratulatory badge awarded for successfully reading out loud. He frets that he'll be the only pupil left empty-handed.

Yusuf's anxieties escalate when his father must travel to a faraway forest on a risky mission. With his family's livelihood endangered by more and more disappearing bees, Yakup has no choice but to hang his hives in another more treacherous mountainous area.

His father gone, Yusuf slips into silence to the distress of his pretty young mother Zehra. She decides to send Yusuf to his grandmother's to spend the Holy Night of Miraj. Hearing the story of the Ascension of the Prophet inspires Yusuf to believe that his father will be returning soon. But not even a day at the colorful fog festival on Sis Mountain can fully cheer up worried young Yusuf.

Days pass and Yakup still does not return. Yusuf sees his mother becoming sadder everyday. Yusuf summons all of his courage and runs deep into the forest to search for his father. A journey into the unknown...







Semih Kaplanoğlu

Semih Kaplanoğlu is one of the most acclaimed writer-director-producers of contemporary filmmaking in Turkey.

With his third feature film “Yumurta” (Egg), he received Best Director awards in Fajr IFF, Valdivia IFF and Bangkok World FF. The film received 30 awards in total including important national awards such as the Golden Orange (Antalya IFF) and the Golden Tulip award (Istanbul IFF). His feature film “Süt” (Milk) premiered at the 2008 Venice IFF, and was also screened at festivals around the world, earning him international awards, such as FIPRESCI prize at the Istanbul IFF.

“Bal” (Honey) is the third part of the Yusuf Trilogy, which traces the origins of a soul. Like in his previous films, Semih Kaplanoğlu decides to work without music .

Semih Kaplanoğlu, born in 1963, has also written many articles based on plastic arts and cinema which have been translated into foreign languages and published in such magazines and journals as Gergedan, Gösteri, Cumhuriyet, and Sanat Dünyamız between 1987 and 2003.

Filmography

Bal - Honey (2010)

- World Premiere in the 60th Berlinale
Official Competition

Süt - Milk (2008)

- World Premiere in the 65th Venice Film Festival
Official Competition
- Istanbul International Film Festival
2009 – Fipresci Award

Yumurta - Egg (2007)

- World Premiere in the 60th Cannes Film Festival
Quinzaine des Réalisateurs
- Istanbul International Film Festival
2008 – Best Film Award
- Nürnberg Filmfestival Türkei-Deutschland
2008 – Best Film Award
- Ravenna Mosaico d'Europa Film Festival
2008 – Best Film Award
- Seoul International Film Festival
2008 – Best Film Award

- Bangkok World Film Festival

2007 – Best Director Award

- Valdivia International Film Festival

2007 – Best Director Award

- Fajr International Film Festival

2007 – Best Director Award

Meleğin Düşüşü- Angel's Fall (2004)

- World Premiere in the 55th Berlin Film Festival
Forum Section
- Nantes 3 Continents Film Festival
2005 – Best Film Award
- Barcelona Independent Film Festival
2005 – Best Film Award
- 11th International Film Festival of Kerala
2006 – Best Film Award

Herkes Kendi Evinde - Away From Home (2000)

- International Singapore Asia Film Festival
2001 – Best Director Award



Comments from writer-director Semih Kaplanoğlu

The Yusuf Trilogy

BAL is the third film in my "Yusuf Trilogy". The idea of the "Yusuf Trilogy" took form while I was revising a script which I had written long ago and which was more or less the story of university aged Yusuf in SÜT/MILK. While I was elaborating on the character of Yusuf, I started to think about this young man's future as an adult (YUMURTA/EGG) and his past as a young boy (BAL/HONEY). Those ideas helped shape the trilogy. I started with YUMURTA/EGG, maybe because I wanted to peel down the character slowly and reach his core. The trilogy could be considered an extensive flashback. However, they are not period films. All take place in the present day amidst various places, relations and economic standards in Turkey. I have been asked if all three Yusuf characters are indeed the same man.

I choose not to answer so as not to disclose the secrets of the character, the direct and indirect relationship between the films, the mysteries to the films.

My Own Past Experiences

I drew on my own past experiences while shaping the character of Yusuf. So we can say that Yusuf has parts from me. I referred to my own youth and childhood while writing the three scripts and I believe I was able to handle the issues about Yusuf's life, troubles and quests realistically. My own childhood served as a point of reference for the script of BAL/HONEY as well. My troubles at school while trying to learn how to read and write, my questions which grownups left unanswered, the intense cruelty and richness of nature... In a way, a child forms his personality while discovering the world with curiosity. An occasional misunderstanding leading to naïve mistakes, dreams, joys and sorrows allows him to reach the truth. I hope BAL/HONEY allows us to reach the truth of Yusuf.

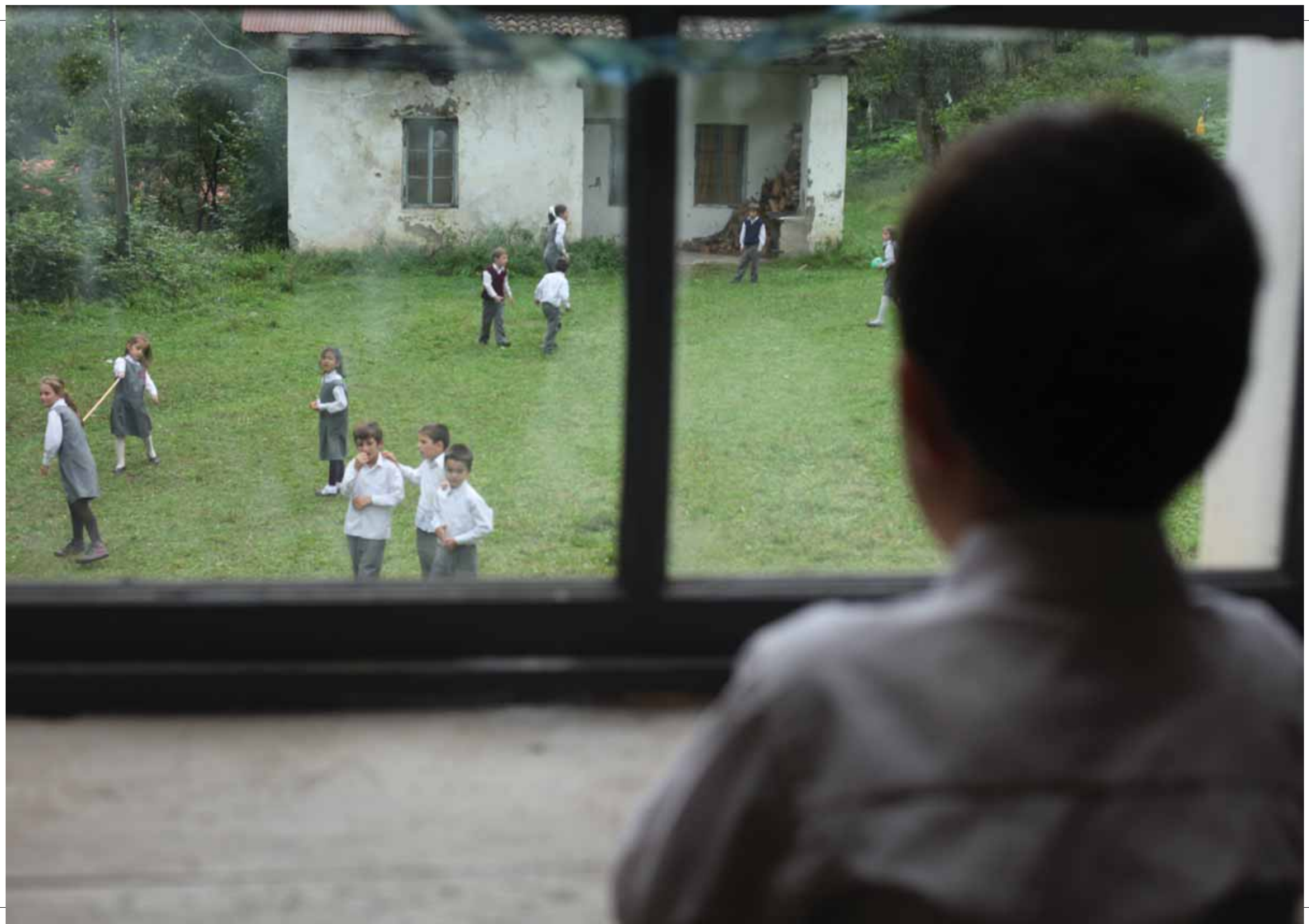
No Ordinary Place

For Yusuf and his father Yakup, the forest represents a fairytale place containing many mysteries at its heart. The forest is a magical realm into which they vanish and appear back again. It is no ordinary place where they walk to and from for a means of livelihood. It constitutes another world with big old trees, various mysterious creatures, like the mule and the hawk which accompanies them into the forest. It was quite difficult to find a place where there were broad and tall trees with big trunks. I tried my best to find a location both suitable for placing the hives and the visual world that I wanted to create in BAL/HONEY. We worked in various forests, particularly in those where beehives have been placed for centuries. They were located 30-40 km from each other and at different heights way above sea level, and they all feature many different kinds of trees.

Yakup the Beekeeper

Yusuf's father Yakup is a beekeeper who gathers black hive honey, considered some of the world's finest honey and specific to the region. This therapeutic honey is the essence of an older world, untouched nature and holiest knowledge for the inhabitants of the region. It is produced by a dwindling number of beekeepers. Yakup's occupation will soon die out. This tough labor includes placing specially-made hives on tall treetops in mountainous areas. This profession is as dangerous as it is grueling.

Yusuf's admiration of his father certainly owes something to his unconventional job. In my point of view, it has something in common with Yusuf's future vocation - poetry.



The Absence of Father

We cannot say there is no father figure for Yusuf in the Yusuf Trilogy, since we clearly see in BAL/HONEY that he lives with and has a strong relationship with his father. The point is how Yusuf experiences the later absence of his father, how he makes up for the absence in a way. From a psychoanalytical point of view, the early loss of his father might have led Yusuf to develop his relationship with authority through his mother i.e. SÜT/MILK. Maybe this is the underlying reason into his fragility, introversion and undecidedness and eventual rediscovery i.e. YUMURTA/EGG. But all these are matters of psychology which I don't take heed of in my stories. I'm trying to portray and reflect on the situation on a more spiritual level. Rather than dissecting our existence in the laboratory of psychology and confine life into cause and effect relationships, I'm trying to refer to some greater power. I'd like for and hope that the Yusuf Trilogy analyzed from the perspective of the Prophet Yakup and the Prophet Yusuf with the guidance of dreams also from the perspective of hope-fear. The whole picture will then be complete.

Shooting near the Black Sea Coast

BAL/HONEY was shot in and around the small town of Çamlıhemşin. It is in the Rize Province along the Black Sea coast of northeast Turkey. The reason behind my choice of this region is its nature. This was the only region featuring the kind of forests I was looking for. However, the geographical conditions of the region gave us hard times during the shoot, especially during the forest shoots. We could only go up to a certain point by car, and then we had to get off and hike with the equipment to reach the shooting location which was quite far away. Filming was done in a steep place where one could hardly stand. The Black Sea coast also has very unpredictable weather. Rain, sun and fog can often be experienced within the same hour. So we had a difficult time with continuity of the scenes. When I look through my journal, I see that it rained 39 out of 48 days.

The Childhood of Humanity

If we were to define modern times as the adulthood of humanity, then I can say that the locations where BAL/HONEY was shot are still experiencing the childhood of humanity. We worked in mountain villages which will soon be deserted by people who are still trying to live by ancient tradition and under conditions and rules set down by nature. In such places, we are witnessing the destruction of natural water resources for the sake of building thermal power plants. This is a problem that must be addressed as soon as possible.

Yusuf's Stutter

Having just started school, Yusuf is learning to read and write. When he is alone with his dad he is able to read, slowly pronouncing everything. But in the classroom, he gets overexcited and stutters. When his friends tease him, he retreats into silence and loneliness. Just as recent high school graduate Yusuf isn't admitted to military service in SÜT/MILK, the moment he cannot read out loud in front of his classmates in BAL/HONEY is a breaking point for Yusuf as a boy. Receiving a badge for successfully reading out loud is of great importance for a first grader. Failing and being the laughing stock of his classmates leads Yusuf to retreat into himself and he will develop a strong relationship with words and poetry.



The Search for Young Yusuf

We searched for the right Yusuf in various cities, towns and villages in the region for months. We went to all of the elementary schools and interviewed first graders. I was looking for the young version of Yusuf in YUMURTA/EGG and SÜT/MILK. I wasn't convinced by any of the hundreds of boys that we met. After two months of searching, I decided to change the location. It was a risky decision. All the work done by my assistants and casting people would go out of the window, like the many other children cast in secondary roles. We moved to a new place 100 km away from our previous location and started working there. There were few residents left, and mostly old people, due to unemployment and migration. Few kids remaining were not promising either. One day, on my way back from a location scout, I saw Bora Altaş riding his bicycle. I got out of the car and introduced myself. I immediately felt that he was the Yusuf that I had been looking for. He was a sensitive, smart child with a world of his own.

Transforming Bora into Yusuf

During the filming of BAL/HONEY, Bora Altaş was seven. Bora has a very different character than the Yusuf which I had written. He is very sociable. I couldn't afford to leave him the way he is. Bora would have to act. It was hard to get Yusuf out of him. We worked hard and were patient. I explained Yusuf to him scene by scene as much as I could. We developed a bond based on trust. I can say that I worked with him the way I work with adult actors. Bora was courageous enough to submit himself to me and I never abused the trust and admiration I held for him. I have learned a lot trying to make such a young child concentrate on his role. As I don't have child, I have no experience with children. I can never forget Bora and the other children's enthusiasm and commitment. I'd like to acknowledge the help of actress Tülin Özen and child acting coach Kutay Sandıkçı in assisting me to get the best performances out of these children.

Spiritual Realism

I have experienced and learned many things over the past four years during pre-production, production and editing of the three films in the Yusuf Trilogy. It has also served as a process where I tried to shape my filmmaking style, which I tentatively call "Spiritual Realism".

During this period, I questioned not only the cinematographic elements such as visual imagery, actors, sound, location and time, but also the technical crew, financial resources and the way I find and spend them, and I certainly learned some lessons. Making a film is like discovering, even defining one's self through the mirror of that film. Not just for the director, but for everybody in the crew. For instance, when my mother - who played small roles in YUMURTA/EGG and SÜT/MILK - saw the house in YUMURTA/EGG, she told me it looked very much like our old house where I spent my childhood. This inspired her to tell me many details that we had never talked about before, family stories that I never knew. I later used some of them in SÜT/MILK and BAL/HONEY.



Crew

Director

Semih Kaplanoğlu

Screenplay

Semih Kaplanoğlu - Orçun Köksal

Director of Photography

Barış Özbiçer

Art Director

Naz Erayda

Sound

Matthias Haeb

Unit Production Manager

Aksel Kamber

Editing

Ayhan Ergürsel, Semih Kaplanoğlu, S. Hande Güneri

Co-producer

Johannes Rexin, Bettina Brokemper - Heimatfilm

Producer

Semih Kaplanoğlu - Kaplan Film Production

Cast

Bora Altaş / Yusuf

Erdal Beşikçioğlu / Yakup (Father)

Tülin Özen / Zehra (Mother)

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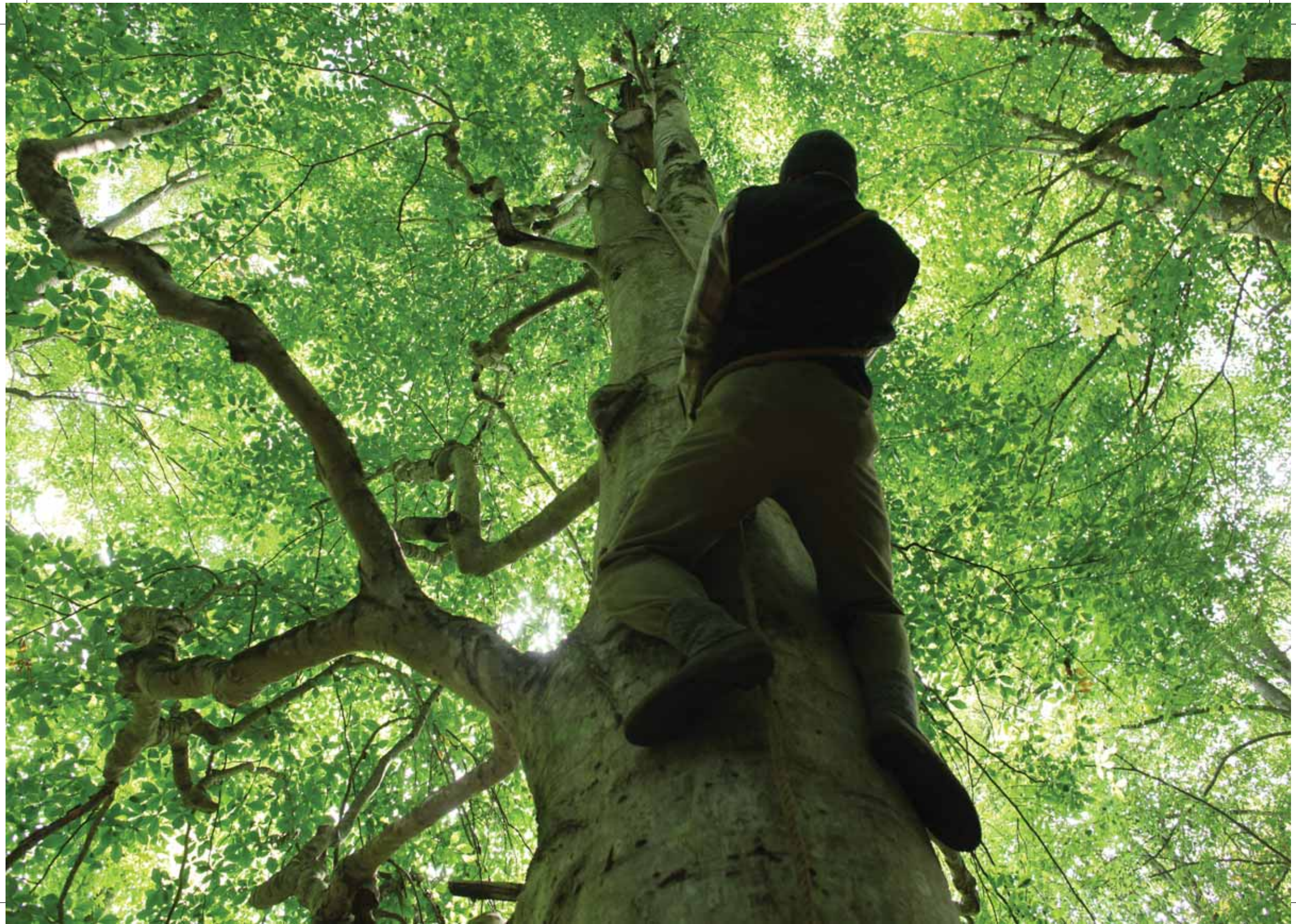
T.C.
Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı

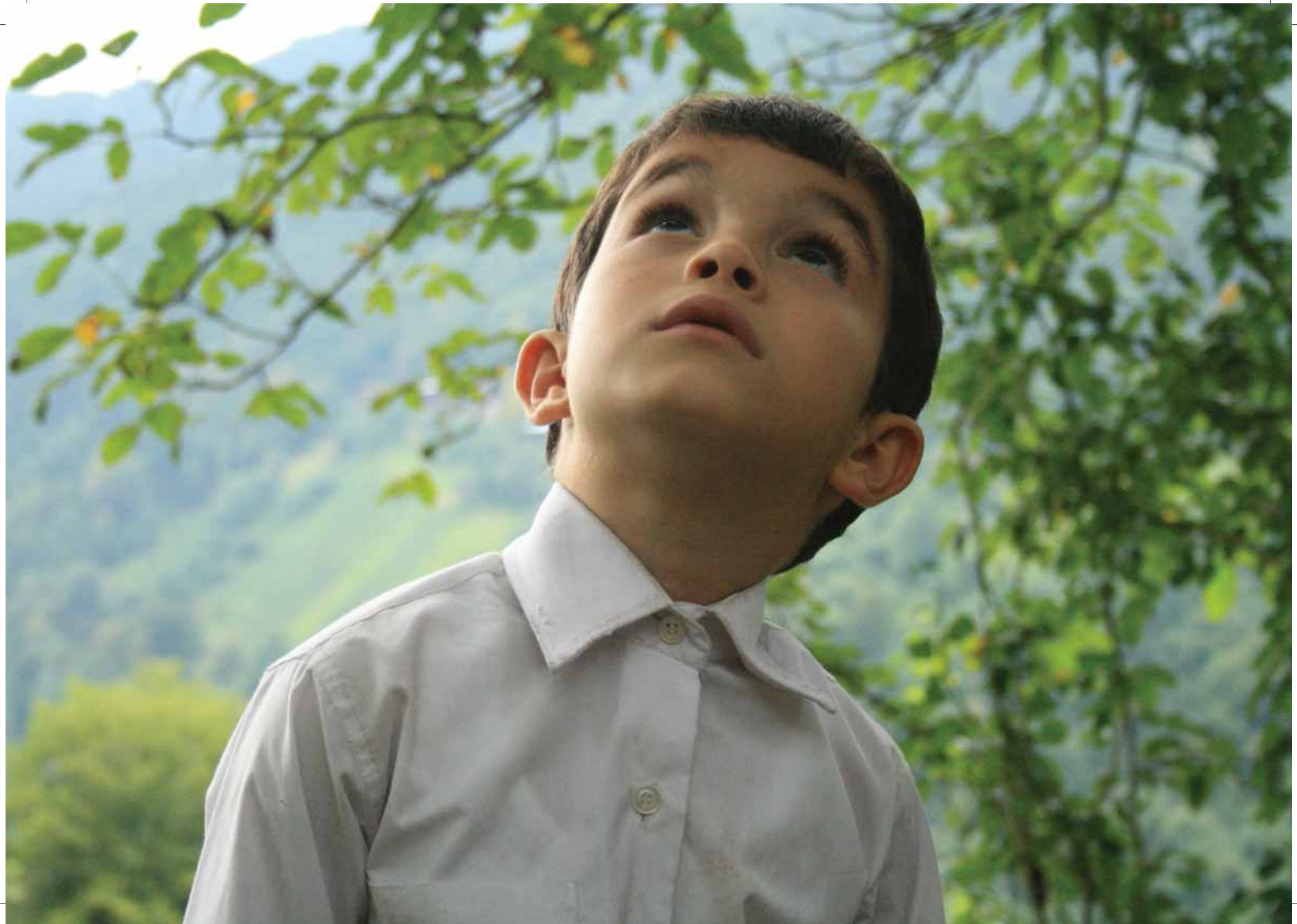
Pusan Promotion Plan

CineLink
Sarajevo Film Festival

THE MATCH FACTORY







Technical Info

Film Title : Bal

Type of Film : Feature

Format : 35 mm.

Running Time : 103 min.

Length : 2825 m.

Number of Reels : 6

Color

Original Film Language : Turkish

Subtitles : German / English

Screening ratio : 1:1.85

FPS : 24

Sound : Dolby Digital Surround

Countries of Production : Turkey - Germany

Year of production : 2010

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