

HIVE

Albania (2021) 84 minutes

Director: Written and directed by Blerta Basholli

Cast: Yllka Gashi (Fahrije)
Cun Lajci (Haxhi)
Aurita Agushi as Zamira



Screening 1st November 2023 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

The film is based on the true story of a woman, Fahrije, who goes against misogynistic societal expectations to become an entrepreneur after her husband went missing during the 1998-1999 Kosovo War. She starts selling her own ajvar and honey, recruiting other women in the process. She struggles to feed her family and also against a hostile community who is rooting for her to fail.

Reviews



Hive is a straightforward film, presented in Alex Bloom's handheld, unromanced images, tuned to mid-toned brown and gray hues; here, even the sunshine seems unfriendly. Julien Painot's fine score is sparingly used, and a single brief dream sequence is about all there is in terms of more individual flourish.

That such an understated, formally cautious film picked up major prizes in a vibrant Sundance World Dramatic competition is perhaps greatly a factor of the admiration it engenders for the real Fahrije (whose homemade pickle business continues to thrive), and the seeming ease with which her story can be mapped to the beats of a familiar triumph-over-adversity narrative.

Jessica Kiang, Variety

Stories of defiance in the face of repression and wartime barbarism are always timely, but this true-life Kosovan drama resonates with particular ferocity in the present moment. It depicts one woman's attempts to pick up the pieces years after the Serbian army has slaughtered dozens of the men, women and children in her small community – including, potentially, her husband. Only 'potentially', because years later no bodies have been found and the trail of evidence has run cold.

Shrugging aside sexism that even tips into violence, as well as the reservations of her fellow widows and the disquiet of her father-in-law and teenage daughter, Fahrije takes the latter course to set up a small business making ajvar, a Balkan pepper dip, for a local supermarket.

The film is never quite a feelgood film – the deep trauma that underpins it militates against any jaunty *Calendar Girls* vibes – but there is a tangible sense of joy as Fahrije begins to lead her fellow, long-suffering widows to a place of healing and the promise of better times ahead. And the come-uppance one or two of the menfolk get is definitely mood-enhancing.

Phil de Semlyen, TimeOut

Film Facts

- The film was selected as the Kosovan entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 94th Academy Awards in 2022.
- The film premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival and became the first film in Sundance history to win all three main awards – the Grand Jury Prize, the Audience Award and the Directing Award – in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition.

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