

ely
 film
 society
 dec
 2018

the
 notes

coming up
@ kings lynn

- **FILM** Thursday 10th Jan 7.30pm
WONDERSTRUCK
- **CLOSE-UPS** Thursday 17th Jan
7.30pm
*Lumière – A Celebration of
French Cinema*
- **FILM** Sunday 27th Jan, times tbc
**THE GUERNSEY LITERARY AND
POTATO PEEL PIE SOCIETY**
+ *post-film meal*

further details klcc.uk

A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night

Ana Lily
Amirpour,
US 2014

Written by Ana Lily Amirpour

Sheila Vand The Girl
Arash Marandi Arash
Marshall Manesh

...Hossein 'The Junkie'

Mozhan Marnò ... Atti 'The Prostitute'
Dominic Rains Saeed 'The Pimp'

Rome Shadanloo

...Shaydah 'The Princess'

Milad Eghbali The Street Urchin

Reza Sixo Safai Rockabilly

Ray Haratian The Boss 'Commercial'

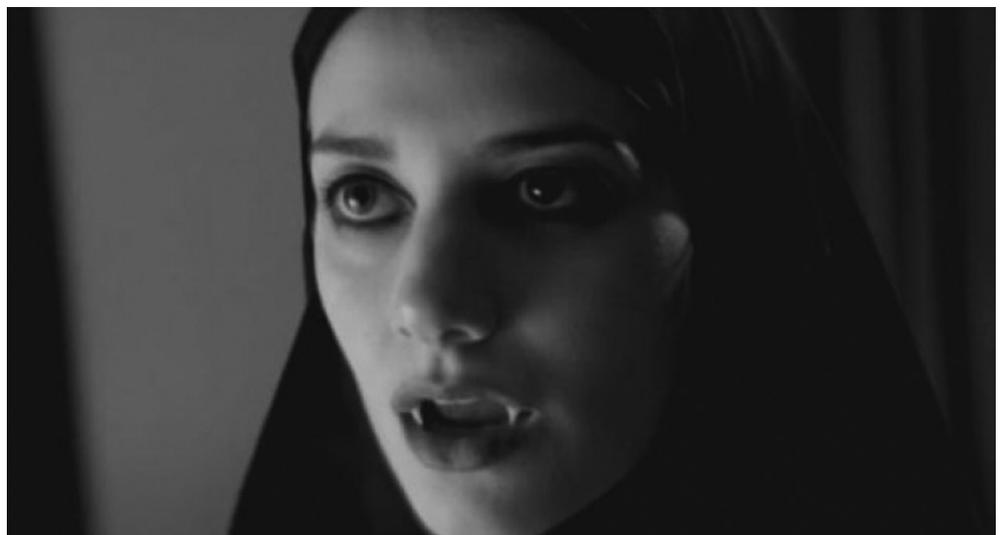
Ana Lily Amirpour

... Skeleton Partygirl

Pej Vahdat DJ Porno

Masuka the cat himself

“ Iranian-American writer-director Ana Lily Amirpour describes her weirdly exhilarating feature debut, which premiered at Sundance last year [2014], as the Iranian love-child of Sergio Leone and David Lynch, with Nosferatu as a babysitter. It is set in the fictional Iranian ghost town of



Bad City (the name nods toward Frank Miller's Sin City) and plays out like the missing link between Kathryn Bigelow's first two features; the ultra-cool biker pastiche *The Loveless* and the latterday vampire flick *Near Dark*. It is steeped in the pop iconography of the past, yet its crystalline anamorphic black-and-white photography has an unmistakably contemporary edge. Cinematically, it exists in a twilight zone between nations (American locations, Iranian culture), between centuries (late 19th and early 21st), between languages (Persian dialogue, silent cinema gestures) and, most importantly, between genres.

Arash Marandi is “the Persian James Dean”, a handsomely coiffed young buck who has worked hard to earn his '57 convertible, but whose father is beset by debts and heroin addiction. When Dominic Rains's tattooed pimp takes Arash's car as collateral, a bloody dance of death ensues that places our hero at the scene of the crime – surely the set-up for a tale of mistaken identity and false prosecution?

Yet what follows is closer to the innocently vengeful romance of Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In*, the authorities notable by their absence as dead bodies lie unnoticed in open pits. This is a lawless place – a no-man's-

land with a touch of the old west, a frontier town awaiting a High Plains Drifter stranger. What catches everyone off guard is that this avenging angel should take the form of Sheila Vand.

Throughout the film, actress and performance artist Vand (who had a supporting role in the Best Picture winner *Argo*) is a talismanic shapeshifting presence. In one scene, she's an alienated youth, at home with her vinyl, altered images of 1980s pop icons plastered on the walls; in another, she's an eerie relative of *Persepolis*'s "Punk Is Not Dead" heroine, cutting a swath in a chador on a skateboard; elsewhere, she's a timeless wraith, a sepulchral creature lurking in the shadows.

As she transforms, so the movie mutates around her, gleefully crossing boundaries as it mixes and matches its tropes. Early scenes evoke the monochrome retro-cool of Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise*, where Marandi is less James Dean than John Lurie. Then we awaken in the world of *Eraserhead*, the concrete walls and belching industrial backdrops of Taft, California, echoing the geometric framings of David Lynch's stateless nightmare. And all the while we move toward the gothic terrain of FW Murnau and Tod Browning (Marandi

is fancy-dressed as Dracula when he first meets "the Girl") refracted through the noirish lens of Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction*.

It's no surprise to learn that the Patti Smith-esque Amirpour once plied her trade as singer and bassist in a rock band. Her soundtrack mixes the spaghetti twang of Federale with the eastern groove of Bei Ru and the indie melodies of Radio Tehran, while a groaning wind blows the ghost of sound designer Alan Splet across the screen like so much aural tumbleweed.

In one superb sequence, lovers embrace for the first time to the sounds of White Lies' ironically named *Death*, the track left to play out at length as our antiheroes turn to face each other in the slowest of motion; eyes meeting, necks beckoning, hearts pumping, lips not quite touching – a symphony of exposition in movement and music.

There's a subversive intelligence at work in this scattershot cultural literacy (Amirpour also developed a graphic novel alongside the film), placing together oxymoronic elements that knowingly bridge the gap between east and west, ancient and the modern. Just as Jennifer Kent looked back to the stop-frame stutters of early cinema for her superb chiller *The Babadook*, so Amirpour adjusts her shutter speeds to

inject an almost imperceptible eeriness into the Girl's killer moves, her bat-like wings fluttering like a moth dancing close to the light of an old movie projector.

It all adds up to a deliriously disorienting experience that can be read as either political parable or pulpy potboiler – preferably both. As an American offshoot of the Iranian new wave (this is billed, somewhat cheekily as "the first Iranian vampire western"), it's a defiant statement of girl power, a modern twist on the Reclaim the Night battle cries of international feminism set against the backdrop of oppressively dysfunctional patriarchy. Yet Amirpour never lets a message get in the way of a good tune, taking palpable delight in spinning the reels like a cinematic DJ, keeping the crowd on their toes, wrong-footing their dance moves.

Her next feature, *The Bad Batch*, is billed as a dystopian tale of love and cannibalism with a star-studded cast including Keanu Reeves, Jim Carrey and Diego Luna. They've clearly been spellbound by Amirpour's thrilling debut and are expecting great things of her. See this and you'll understand why.

Mark Kermode, *Observer*



Why did you choose to shoot in America but in the Farsi language?

I don't think a film is the real world, a film is a world of the mind of a person. David Lynch's Mulholland Drive is supposedly in LA, but it's the LA of his mind. So I think this is a dark fairy tale and it's a place of my mind. I'm part Iranian and part American and born in England, and it's like a soup of so many things. What's so awesome about the film is that it doesn't have any loyalty to the real world and it doesn't have to. It's like a dream, it's just consistent to itself. You grew up in California.

I had my period there, yeah [laughs]. So where did you spend most of your childhood and adolescence?

I think where you have your puberty and period is a big part of it. I was in Miami before that, but I was just a kid. When I hit puberty I was in Bakersfield, in California – there's this redneck desert, farming, malls, I was going to a mall, I wore short cowboy boots, and there's also all the Mexican gangs, and all the Mexican



girls that I was mixed up with because I was brown, the cholas, the gang girls with lipstick, they'd push me and all that [laughs].

It's interesting that you grew up in America and that the Iranian part of your identity is a place of the mind for you.

It's a weird thing about Iranian culture. We're one of those cultures like Italian or Jewish, we have very strong families, aggressively imposing families, in an awesome way. So I always had my Iranian-ness in that way, my grand-mother and my aunt and everybody, and the dinners and the noises and everything. But I never had the place

itself. There was a weird thing that happened when I made this film. It became this imaginary limbo. I felt like I was making my own country in a way. Here's the rules, and here's the citizens, and now is the place and everyone can come and visit, and if you like it, stay... Other people in the film were similar. Arash [Marandi] was in Germany, his family lived there, and Dominic [Rains] went to Texas and Sheila [Vand] was born in California, very similar to me. I think everybody liked how it was like getting to have a place that was Iranian. Because even when I went to Iran I didn't feel like it was my country... It's something else. But I am Iranian. What am I? [laughs]

Electric Sheep magazine

NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS
ALPHAVILLE

(Jean-Luc Godard, France
1965)

Monday 21 January 2019

www.elyfilmsociety.com

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