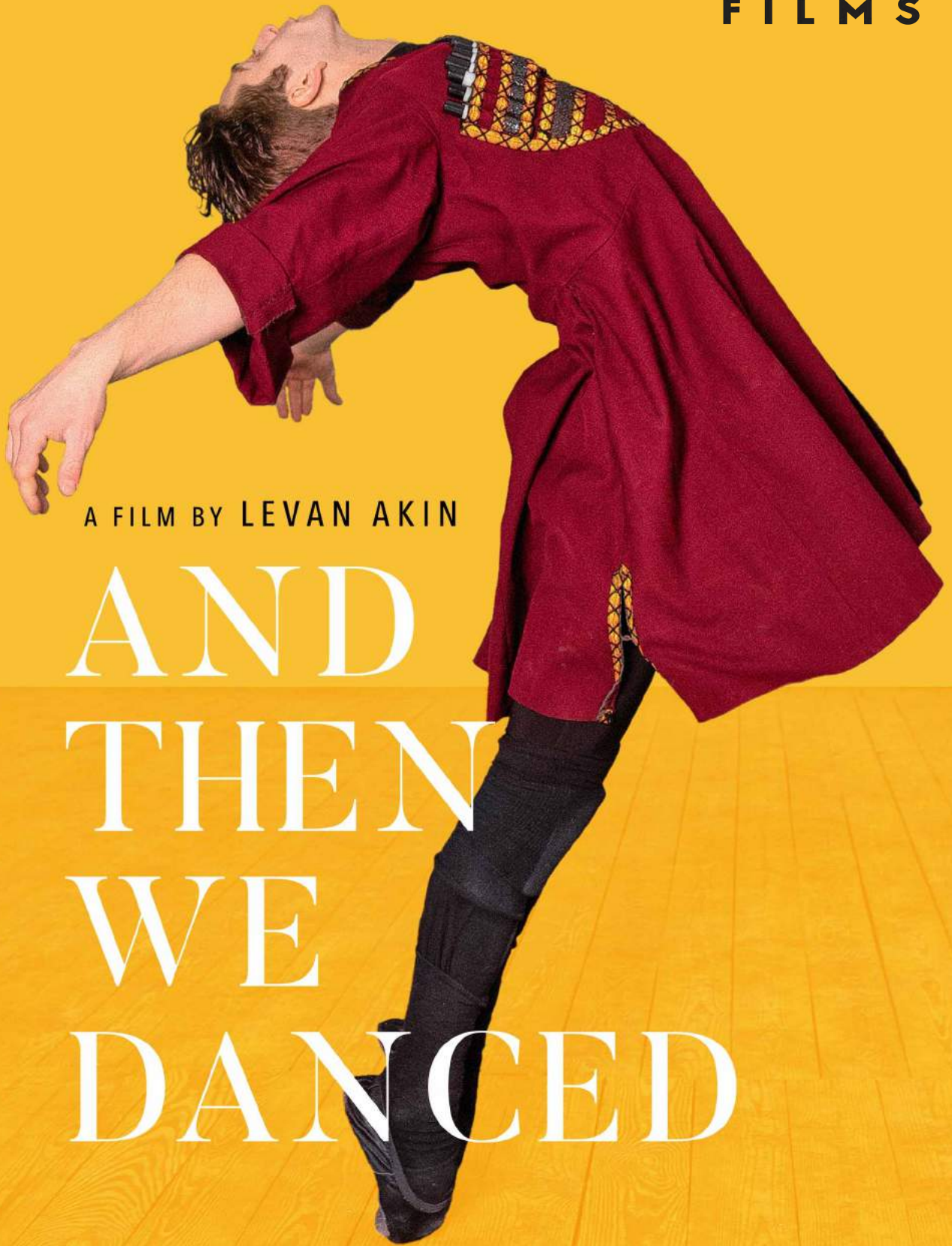


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A FILM BY LEVAN AKIN

AND THEN WE DANCED



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LOGLINE & SYNOPSIS

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Logline:

A passionate coming-of-age tale set amidst the conservative confines of modern Tbilisi, *AND THEN WE DANCED* follows Merab, a competitive dancer who is thrown off balance by the arrival of Irakli, a fellow male dancer with a rebellious streak.

Synopsis:

A passionate tale of love and liberation set amidst the ultraconservative confines of modern Georgian society, *AND THEN WE DANCED* follows Merab, a devoted dancer who has been training for years with his partner Mary for a spot in the National Georgian Ensemble. The arrival of another male dancer, Irakli—gifted with perfect form and equipped with a rebellious streak—throws Merab off balance, sparking both an intense rivalry and romantic desire that may cause him to risk his future in dance as well as his relationships with Mary and his family.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

In Georgia there are three things that are upheld as the paragon of Georgian Tradition and National Identity: the Church, the traditional polyphonic singing, and the traditional national dance.

The lead person I follow in the film actually shares the same name as me, his name is Levan and he is a dancer, I too used to dance when I was younger and I imagined being him in an alternate reality. I interviewed a lot of dancers and they all told me stories of how gender conservative and strict the Georgian Dance scene was. So I decided to set the story in this setting. The Georgian Dance would represent the “old” and the burgeoning love between two of the dancers would represent the new.

With this film I find myself really going back to my roots as a filmmaker, working in an organic way, where the real lives of the people in the film and what’s going on in Georgia now affects the story. It is ever evolving. Telling the story of young LGBT+ people and their struggles on a smaller scale but also showing the history and situation of Georgia today on a larger scale. This film will not only be a very interesting look into a part of the world not so many people are familiar with but also a heartfelt movie about the importance of being free.

INTERVIEW WITH LEVAN AKIN

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You are of Georgian descent but living in Sweden. How did this project materialize?

When I witnessed some brave kids trying to have a pride parade in Tbilisi, Georgia in 2013 be attacked by a mob of thousands organized by the Orthodox church I felt I needed to address this issue in some way.

The fluidity and sensuality of the direction is quite impressive, could you talk a little bit about the shoot, were there any challenges?

It was my first time directing in Georgian and I am not fluent and I worked with a lot of non-actors in existing locations. Everything is based on real stories I'd gathered and things were constantly evolving. So the research phase was very extensive, I lived and filmed the main characters a lot with my own camera. I think that is why I got so close to them, so intimate. There were no barriers, it was not forced, it became completely natural.

How did you go about casting? Can you go through the actors and tell us why you chose them?

I did a lot of interviews during my research phase and met some of the people who are in the film then. Levan





Gelbakhiani, who plays Merab, I saw on Instagram first. He is a dancer and I had him write about himself to which he'd then read to me every time we met. Slowly we built a trusting relationship and I was inspired by his surroundings and his life. I met Bachi Valishvili, who plays Irakli, at the regular casting where we tried him against Merab. There was instant chemistry, plus we found out that he had danced Georgian dance for 7 years!

Do you go back to Georgia often? What is your feeling about the young generation growing up there?

With this project I've been back many times. My parents are actually part of the Georgian diaspora from Turkey and I was born in Sweden so we used to go back to Tbilisi a lot during the USSR era growing up. I've seen Georgia in many shapes since then. The young generation now is like any kid anywhere in the world, everything is globalized and they grow up with the same pop culture. However, in Georgia there is a great divide between this generation and the older generation who lived during the USSR.

Do you have the feeling people are getting more tolerant towards the questions of gender and sexualities worldwide?

Both yes and no. In many ways it seems as if we are going backwards in many European countries. This is just my analysis but it seem the polar opposite sides are becoming more severe regarding these types of questions everywhere in the world.

Can you tell us a little more about the traditional Georgian dance culture portrayed in the film? How big a part does this dance have in Georgian culture?

It has a very large role. All children in Georgia go to dance classes from a very young age, just like perhaps Karate plays a large part in Japanese culture. The inclusion of Georgian dance in the film came from one of the interviews I did with a Georgian dancer. Also, I know from my own family that dance plays a great part in Georgian history and culture. To juxtapose the traditional with the "new" Georgian dance was an obvious

choice for the film. Initially we were naive and asked the prestigious Sukhisvilebi Ensemble if they would support us and help the film with dancers etc. We were promptly told that homosexuality did not exist in Georgian dance and asked to leave. The head of the ensemble then called all the other ensembles in Georgia and “warned” them of us. This initial meeting sabotaged a lot for us and made our work even harder. We had to work under a lot of secrecy and pressure. Even having bodyguards on set.

What was it like being in production in Georgia with your ties to the country while your main professional experience is from Swedish productions?

It was interesting for sure. I realized how Swedish I am after all. But one time filming late night my Scandinavian cool cracked and the team was so delighted that my Georgian side came out! In Sweden there is a culture of consensus but in Georgia difference of opinions and flaring tempers is the norm.

The story is a universal love story, can you talk a little bit about the balance between the universal theme and what makes this story at the same time very different from what we’ve seen before?

To me the circumstance that Georgia and other former USSR countries are in at the moment is very fragile. All of these countries are unique, of course, and in Georgia’s case the strong ancient traditional values play a large part in the current situation. Western values are considered a threat to the old Georgian ways. And for a country that has been conquered over and over again throughout the centuries, keeping their cultural identity becomes a matter of survival. The Georgian language, their ancient alphabet, wine culture and food culture etc. are extremely important for them. With this film I am trying to show that even though you open up and move into a different direction you can still own and keep your traditions.



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

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Levan Akin is a Swedish born filmmaker and his work often plays on class and gender. He most recently directed THE CIRCLE, based on the bestselling YA book. He has also directed the feature film CERTAIN PEOPLE which received its international premiere at the 2012 Tribeca Film Festival to rave reviews. He has also directed several TV-series for SVT Drama most notably REAL HUMANS. Currently Levan Akin is writing and directing a new TV-series for SVT titled DOUGH set to premiere in the spring of 2021.



CAST & CREW CREDITS

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MERAB - Levan Gelbakhiani

IRAKLI - Bachi Valishvili

MARY - Ana Javakishvili

DIRECTION & SCREENPLAY - Levan
Akin

PRODUCERS - Mathilde Dedye, Keti
Danelia

DIRECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY - Lisabi
Fridell

EDITOR - Levan Akin, Simon Carlgren

MUSIC- Zviad Mgebry & Ben Wheeler

SET DESIGNER - Teo Baramidze

SOUND EDITING - Beso Kacharava

COSTUME DESIGNER - Nini
Jincharadze



ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Music Box Films is a North American distributor of acclaimed international, independent, and documentary features. Recent releases include Christian Petzold's critically acclaimed *TRANSIT*, Kirill Mikhanovsky's *GIVE ME LIBERTY*, and Francois Ozon's *BY THE GRACE OF GOD*. Upcoming releases include Levan Akin's *AND THEN WE DANCED* (Sweden's official submission to the 2020 Academy Awards), Werner Herzog's documentary *NOMAD: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BRUCE CHATWIN*, and Justine Triet's sultry psychodrama *SIBYL*. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates the Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premiere venue for independent and foreign films. For more information, please visit www.musicboxfilms.com

ABOUT TOTEM FILMS

TOTEM FILMS is a new Paris based sales agent company created by Agathe Valentin, Bérénice Vincent and Laure Parleani in October 2018. In Cannes, they represented *AND THEN WE DANCED* by Levan Akin and *CENIZA NEGRA* by Sofia Quiros Ubeda which premiered at Critics Week.

