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beyond the hills

written and directed by **Cristian Mungiu**

inspired by the non-fiction novels of **Tatiana Niculescu Bran**

Cosmina Stratan **Cristina Flutur** **Valeriu Andriuță** **Dana Tapalagă**

synopsis

Alina gets back from Germany to bring Voichița - the only person she loves and was loved by in this world – back to her. But Voichița found God – and God is the most difficult lover one can be jealous of.

director's note

Beyond the Hills is for me primarily a film about love and free will: mostly about how love can turn the concepts of good and evil into very relative ones. Most of the greatest mistakes of this world have been made in the name of faith, and with the absolute conviction they were done for a good cause.

Beyond the Hills also speaks about a certain way of experiencing religion. It has always concerned me how much attention believers place on respecting religious habits and rules and how little on applying the essence and wisdom of Christianity to their day-to-day life, for example.

Preparing for the film I read carefully the list of sins compiled by the Orthodox Church. There are quite a lot (464) and reading them, you cannot but ask yourself all kind of questions. Still, there is a sin that is not listed and which is amongst the most important things about which the film wishes to speak: the sin of indifference. Or maybe it is not a sin, since it's not listed. But then what is it? Is it dangerous or not? The film also speaks about the various ways in which Evil can manipulate people, and the subtle ways in which it can manifest itself. I wonder whether indifference is not one of them.

Deep down, I hope, *Beyond the Hills* speaks about options and choices in life deriving from education or from the lack of education, and about how many things in life derive from things that you cannot influence, or of which you are not guilty: where you were brought into the world, by whom, and in the middle of which community.

The film also speaks about a region of the world - like many others - where longtime exposure to an endless succession of misfortunes and atrocities of all kinds has led to a breed of inert people who have lost their normal reactions in front of normal stimuli. This is not necessarily their fault - it is just a natural survival mechanism, but one which is experienced as an extra burden for those still alive amongst them.

– Cristian Mungiu, 2012

biographies

Cosmina Stratan – Voichița

Born Iași, Romania, 1984. She studied journalism and advertising before graduating in acting from UNATC Bucharest. She acted in several short films during her studies, and worked as a journalist at Opinia Studențească where Cristian Mungiu made his print debut some 15 years ago. Cosmina later received awards for her work as a TV reporter. Her role in *Beyond the Hills* marks her feature film debut.

Cristina Flutur – Alina

Born Iași, Romania, 1978. She studied languages at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași, graduating in 2000, before studying acting in Cluj. Right after graduation, in 2004 she became an actress of the National Theater "Radu Stanca" in Sibiu where she currently works. As a theater actress she has played a wide variety of parts from Shakespeare and Chekhov to Steinbeck and Ionesco. *Beyond the Hills* is her first feature film.

Valeriu Andriuță – The Priest

Born Lazovsk, USSR, 1967. Valeriu studied engineering in Chișinău before graduating as an actor in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1993. He moved to Bucharest and studied theater directing, graduating in 1998. During his studies, starting in 1994, he acted in all Cristian Mungiu's fiction shorts, and in 2002 appeared in the director's feature debut, *Occident* (Directors' Fortnight, Cannes 2002). Andriuță staged and directed several theater plays while continuing to work as a theater and film actor before directing a couple of short films himself. He currently lives in Ireland. Andriuță's role in *Beyond the Hills* is his tenth appearance in a film directed by Cristian Mungiu.

Dana Tapalagă – Mother Superior

Born Botoșani, Romania, 1968. She started working at the local theater in Botoșani even before studying professional acting, as a colleague of Vlad Ivanov (*4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*). She later moved to Bucharest, graduating in acting at the Academy of Theater and Film, and appeared in several plays. She currently works as a freelance actress, with her voice as her principal professional instrument - in commercials, television or dubbing. Her part in *Beyond the Hills* is her second encounter with cinema, after her debut in 1995.

Tatiana Niculescu Bran – Writer

In 2006, while editor-in-chief of the BBC World Service Bureau in Bucharest, Tatiana Niculescu Bran published *Spovedanie la Tanacu (Deadly Confession)*, a non-fiction novel documenting the events at the Tanacu monastery in Romania, where a young woman visiting a novice was supposedly subjected to an exorcism, and died within weeks after her arrival. The incident took place in 2005, and made the headlines in the Romanian and international press at the time. Tatiana Niculescu Bran followed the case and published a second non-fiction novel, *Cartea Judecătorilor (The Book of the Judges)*, which focused on the trial of the defrocked priest who conducted the exorcism, in 2007.

Deadly Confession was adapted by the author herself for the stage – a play directed by Andrei Șerban premiered in New York in 2007 at La MaMa Theatre.

Tatiana Niculescu Bran graduated from the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest and the European Institute of Journalism in Brussels. Between 1995 and 2004, she worked as a radio producer and presenter for the Romanian Section of the BBC World Service in London. She was editor-in-chief of the BBC World Service Bucharest office between 2004 and 2008.

In 2011, she published the novel *Nopțile Patriarhului (The Nights of the Patriarch)* and in 2012 the novel *În țara lui Dumnezeu (In God's Country)*, an African story.

Oleg Mutu – Director of Photography

Born Chișinău, USSR, 1972. Mutu graduated from the Academy of Theater and Film in Bucharest in 1998. Cinematographer on, among others, *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* (Cristi Puiu, 2005) and *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* (Cristian Mungiu, 2007), he is the Director of photography on two films in Official Competition in Cannes this year: *Beyond the Hills* and *In the Fog* by Serghei Loznitsa.

Cristian Mungiu – Director

Born in Iași, Romania, 1968.
His first feature, *Occident*, was premiered in Director's Fortnight in Cannes in 2002.

In 2007, his second feature, *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*, was awarded the Golden Palm.

După Dealuri / Beyond the Hills is his third film as writer – director.

Interview with Cristian Mungiu

What was the starting point for your new film?
In 2005 I read this piece of news about a girl visiting a friend of hers in a small remote Moldavian monastery and ending up by dying there a few weeks later after what the press called "an exorcism". Soon this event made the headlines in every Romanian newspaper, and it wasn't too long before the international press picked up the story. The local bishop rushed to excommunicate the priest and the nuns associated with the event as soon as the incident became public - disobeying the regulations stipulating that an inquiry ought to take place. The Orthodox Church condemned the event and distanced itself from it. Later, in 2012, they decided to entirely prohibit the practice of reading the prayers of St Basil - considered the main liturgical instrument in fighting 'the Devil'. Nevertheless, the Internet is full of films shot on mobile phones attesting to the fact that this practice still continues.

The film credits state that you were inspired by 'non-fiction novels'.
Tatiana Niculescu Bran was a journalist at that time, working for the BBC in London. She became interested in uncovering what really happened in that monastery and investigated the events over the next few years, finally publishing two books about the incident relating what happened in 2005 and at the trial that followed. The books were labelled 'non-fiction novels' probably among the first Romanian attempts at this genre.

Did you think about making a film starting from that incident?
The subject interested me, but more from my perspective as a former journalist and an addicted reader of the press. However, from a filmic point of view, the story seemed too sensational, too melodramatic and too mainstream, considering the thousands of pages that had already been written about it on the Internet. But I continued to follow what happened to the people involved in the *story* during their trial and after they were convicted.

Did you know Tatiana Niculescu Bran?
I met her in 2007. I was in New York to promote *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days,* and the Romanian theatre director Andrei Șerban invited me to watch a stage dramatization of the event at La MaMa Theater. It was then that she gave me a copy of her book and we talked about the incident together.

When did you decide to make the film?
I ran across Tatiana again on Magheru Boulevard in Bucharest in early 2011 at a time when I was writing. She gave me a novel she had just finished, considering it could be turned into a film. This novel too had something of a religious theme. I ended up going over the story from the monastery once again. I started reading opinions about what happened on the Internet and discovered that the story still generated

thousands of comments and had dramatically polarized people. I first came up with a screenplay which was very disappointing - it was too close to the real events and revealed the lack of deep meaning of the real incidents - a tragic tale of incompetence, bad timing and a lack of responsibility.

And what kind of story did you want it to be?
I liked something in particular about the books: they weren't judgemental, they didn't establish responsibility, they didn't seek out the guilty parties - they just related what happened in what I felt was a very balanced, BBC style. I started seeing the possibility of telling a story from that starting point as soon as I was ready to leave the original story behind. My final screenplay is not about what happened in that monastery; it's not about that priest and about those nuns. It's fictional and I made a point of moving as far from the original story as I could. I preserved the spirit of the books, in that I wasn't judgemental and didn't try to identify the guilty parties - but I applied this principle to a fictional story in which I felt free to add layers of meaning that the real story didn't have for me. It still speaks about guilt but is more concerned with love and choices, with the things people do in the name of their beliefs, the difficulty of telling good from bad, understanding religion literally, indifference as an even greater sin than intolerance and freedom of will.

Was the writing difficult? How close is the final version of the film to the screenplay?
I wrote many successive versions of the screenplay but the one I used when I started to prepare for filming was 245 pages long. I cut it down to some 220 pages first and then to 180 prior to the first day of shooting. Nevertheless, I had to rewrite during shooting - at the beginning this happened from time to time, and at the end it took place on a daily basis. It was not a major re-writing, rather a fine-tuning of the way the story was taking shape - because when you start working on such a complicated, long and intricate story, you can't control all the aspects from the beginning and you have to keep your eyes open to understand the free will of your own film. *Beyond the Hills* finally stands at 2 hours and 30 minutes.

Have you included all the scenes you shot?
No. Some 30 to 40 minutes were cut - including some scenes that I liked a lot. This film exhibits a novelistic rather than a cinematic logic, in the sense that details and minor events are as important as the main conflict - the aim being to understand the world in which these people live, were raised and educated, their profound beliefs – background information without which you can't place the events in context and understand how could it happen. I'm not sure that such stories are suitable subjects for films, but I couldn't find out without trying.

Was it difficult to shoot such a long screenplay in such a short time?
Everything was complicated about this film, mainly due to its length and the deadlines we took on. I decided in August 2011 to try to have the film shot during winter and ready for May

2012. The decision to start quickly was mainly connected to my indecision regarding whether or not the texture of this story could constitute material for a film: I felt that if I postponed it and thought more about it, I might not make it at all.

Did you think about giving up before even starting?

I started to make decisions step by step. At first I said: let's have a screenplay first and then decide; then I said let's see some actors, let's shoot some scenes and so on. Now we have a finished film but I haven't found my answer yet.

How was the shoot?

It was difficult because we had to build the monastery and all the houses surrounding it, and because we had to shoot during winter in extremely cold conditions - at minus 15 degrees it's a bit more difficult to relax and think about your character and the reality of the moment.

It was also difficult because to shoot a very physical film in long shots in which the actors have to run, fight at the same time as delivering fast-paced and precisely written dialogue is not easy matter.

The sets were created on a hill above a small, quiet town some 100 kilometres from Bucharest, and living away from home for weeks and months in a row took its toll on the crew.

But most of all, shooting the film was difficult because the situations themselves are extremely fraught and because the film brought together people with extremely different religious beliefs who had to work together on the same project, sometimes having a personal approach to a given situation that was different to that of the character they were playing.

We started rehearsals without having clear answers regarding the financing of the project - due to the very short amount of time we had to finalise all the details - and this added extra pressure, especially on me.

Another factor was the weather: when you shoot in winter, you never know what the next day will bring and you have to adapt all the time. What's more, you only have light from 9 till 3, yet the shooting day lasts twice as long. Another issue was the snow: we knew it might take us by surprise, but we were shocked by just how much we got - it was one of the hardest winters in Romania in recent years.

You had to choose your cast rather quickly. How did you decide upon these actors?

The film is set in a part of Romania where they have a strong accent, so from the beginning my choices were limited to this region: Romanian Moldova. The dialogue was written phonetically from the start and needed to be re-written correctly in Romanian for application purposes.

I had just one actor in mind while writing: an old friend of mine who acted in all my films during film school: Valeriu Andriuță. I knew he had moved to Ireland and that he'd given up acting years ago, but somehow I felt it didn't matter. I called him long before I decided to make the film and asked him if he could let his beard grow. The more months that passed and the more his beard grew, the more I knew

I would have to work with him. When I started the casting, he came and we read a few lines, and I didn't even bother checking out any other actors for his part.

What about the female roles?
I knew I'd have to search for the female actors, and I knew it would be difficult. I needed actors who could give the impression that they're simple people, not well educated, from the countryside and, in the main, very religious. During casting I met all the actresses within the right age range and with the right accent and we read different dialogues. I asked Cristina Flutur to come and read for Alina after seeing a picture we found on the Internet. I decided to see Cosmina Stratan after a casting test that was shot in my absence, in which she started to cry - the scene didn't necessarily need such an approach but the emotion she could generate and transmit was impressive. I later discovered that they are both from Iasi, my hometown, like most of the actors we finally selected. I suspect it has something to do with a way of speaking I view as 'natural'.

Were you shooting a lot of takes?
Since we had little time for rehearsal and since I kept rewriting the dialogue, we shot quite a lot - more than I ever shot before: thousands and thousands of meters of film, always more and more takes as we advanced with the film. We started with 10 to 15 takes and we ended up shooting more than 20, 30 and at times 40 takes. Very often, the early takes are up to 50% longer than the later ones. Shooting long takes is difficult and exhausting for everybody.

There was very little time between the shoot and Cannes. When did you find time for post-production?
Actually, we didn't and we knew from the beginning we wouldn't have. So we ended up bringing the editor along to the shoot, transformed one of the hotel rooms into an editing suite, and edited during filming. I was spending every night, after shooting, and every Sunday, in the editing room, choosing the right takes and inserting them into

the edit. So we pretty much finished shooting and editing at the same time.

What are your expectations with this film?
I expect people to compare this film with my previous one, which they shouldn't - they should just watch. They are both films involving a couple of girls and a strong decisive male character, but they are very different.

I hope people will express an opinion after watching the film: it doesn't matter which side they take as long as they don't remain passive like the world we live in. I hope they will understand that the film says something about the environment we live in and about the colossal effects of small things we don't usually notice - things we accept in our daily habits as inoffensive in ourselves or in others.

I expect the film to be seen, judged and understood very differently abroad than at home.

What do you expect the position of the Orthodox Church to be?
I am not sure the Orthodox Church will have an official position - I rather assume it won't. I do nevertheless hope that many regular churchgoers will watch the film and form an opinion after watching it with their own eyes and thinking about it with their own minds - in a way, this is what the film is about: this need.

full cast

voichița	**cosmina stratan**
alina	**cristina flutur**
the priest	**valeriu andriuță**
mother superior	**dana tapalagă**
nun antonia	**cătălina harabagiu**
nun iustina	**gina țandură**
sister elisabeta	**vica agache**
nun pahomia	**nora covali**
mr valerică	**dionisie vitcu**
ionuț	**ionuț ghinea**
mother elena	**liliana mocanu**
father nușu	**doru ana**
doctor solovăstru	**costache babii**
schoolteacher	**luminița gheorghiu**
doctor radu	**alina berzunțeanu**
police inspector	**teodor corban**
policeman	**călin chirilă**
camelia	**cristina cristian**
female parishoner	**tania popa**
doctor neagu	**petronela grigorescu**
lieutenant	**radu zetu**
captain	**ion sapdaru**
secretary	**diana chirilă ignat**
sister arcadia	**liana petrescu**
sister eudoxia	**alexandra agavriloaiei**
sister tatiana	**alexandra apetrei**
sister lavrenția	**noemi gunea**
nun sevastiana	**katia pascariu**
sister anastasia	**mara căruțașu**
doctor d.l.	**cerasela iosifescu**
nurse gina	**ada bârleanu**
nurse sandra	**mariana liurcă**
ambulance	
assistant	**gheorghe ifrim**
watchman	**mircea florin jr.**
gabi	**marian adochiței**
head nurse	**ecaterina țugulea**
patient	**nicoleta lefter**
man in the car	**adrian ancuța**
georgiana	**andreea boșneag**

main crew

written and directed by **cristian mungiu**
inspired by the non-fiction novels of **tatiana niculescu bran**
cinematography **oleg mutu**
production design **călin papură, mihaela poenaru**
sound **cristian tarnovețchi**
editing **mircea olteanu**

producers

Romanian title: După dealuri
English title: Beyond the Hills
French title: Au-delà des collines
Year of production: 2012
Running time: 150 min, at 24 fps
Format: 1:2:35
Number of reels: 9
Sound: Dolby Digital

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BEYOND THE HILLS
DUPĂ DEALURI

Written and Directed by **Cristian Mungiu**
Inspired by the non-fiction novels of **Tatiana Niculescu Bran**

2012/Romania/France/Belgium/150 min

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