

Published July 10th, 2019

## 'Secret Ingredient' - Macedonian movie in Moraga

By *Sophie Braccini*

"Secret Ingredient" Photos provided

Macedonian movies are somewhat of a rarity in the U.S.; having one presented at the Rheem Theatre in Moraga is probably an all time first. "Secret Ingredient" is part of the International Film Showcase that opens on July 12 for a week and is a unique opportunity to discover the charming and a little old-fashioned humor of a nation where the middle class, like everywhere else, tries their best to make a better life for their loved ones.

North Macedonia is an independent state located north of Greece; it is a former piece of defunct Yugoslavia and has one of the lowest per capita GDPs in Europe. Macedonia has a filmmaking history that started over a century ago with the Manaki brothers, who were cinema pioneers of the Balkan Peninsula at the turn of the 20th century. "Secret Ingredient," directed by Gjorce Stavreski, follows a long tradition of creating movies that portray the life of ordinary people and their adventures.

Vele is a young mechanic who works on trains and lives with his father, a difficult old man suffering from advanced lung cancer. Vele loves the old man and will take extreme risks to get him a "secret ingredient" to alleviate his pain and seemingly get him to remission. The chances taken to get the ingredient, and the gangsters who try to get it back, create the first layer of the movie, which includes action and suspense with a bit of physical violence.

The extent of the secrecy the son has to go through to get his father to try the vilified substance, the gullibility of the people who see Vele as a powerful healer once the cat is out of the bag, create the second layer - the gentle and often sweet humor of the movie. Of course in a state that has legalized cannabis consumption, this entire imbroglio could appear to be a bit dated, but this is another country that seems to be a bit stuck in the 20th century.

But the real crux of the movie is not, in fact, the secret ingredient, or if there is a secret ingredient, it is not the illegal substance, but the difficult love between a father and a son who have been struck by drama and have such difficulty communicating. This layer is indeed the most endearing and touching aspect of the movie - how two very stubborn men can finally manage to tear away the cloak of silence that has frozen their relationship in a state of banal frustration without deep connection and love.

Also interesting is the documentary aspect of the movie. North Macedonia is said to be the poorest of the former states that formed Yugoslavia. In the movie, the characters live in rundown apartments, take care of old trains with mostly manual tools, and drive beat-up cars. The health care system seems to be understaffed, and there are constant remarks about the Macedonian way, which appear to imply selfishness and bureaucracy. Not that different from parts of the U.S., after all, it just gives the feeling of having been filmed in 1990 and not in 2017. Once the father and son leave for the countryside, the audience finally gets a glance at the natural beauty of this Balkan country.

The actors have interesting physical characteristics, like anyone you might cross in the street, and they play their roles with genuine talent. The ending, which is very refreshing, will certainly surprise the American audience.

The movie opens at the Rheem Theatre in Moraga on July 12 for at least one week. Info: [www.orindamovies.com/location/1629/Rheem-Theatre-Showtimes](http://www.orindamovies.com/location/1629/Rheem-Theatre-Showtimes)



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