

62<sup>te</sup> Internationale  
Festspiele  
des  
Panorama  
OPENING FILM

A FILM BY **UMUT DAĞ**

# KUMA

ONE FAMILY. TWO WOMEN. MANY SECRETS.



**VEIT HEIDUSCHKA AND MICHAEL KATZ PRESENT  
A WEGA FILM PRODUCTION**

[WWW.KUMA-FILM.COM](http://WWW.KUMA-FILM.COM)



WEGA FILM PRESENTS

# KUMA

ONE FAMILY. TWO WOMEN. MANY SECRETS.

A FILM BY **UMUT DAĞ**

[WWW.KUMA-FILM.COM](http://WWW.KUMA-FILM.COM)

2012 — Austria — Color — 1:2,35 — SRD — 1h 33  
ARRI Alexa Pro Res 444 HD (1080p/24)  
Screening Format: 35mm and D-Cinema (DCP)

PRODUCTION

**WEGA FILMPRODUKTIONSGMBH**

Hägelgasse 13 · 1140 Vienna/Austria  
phone: +43.1.9825742 · fax: +43.1.9825833  
office@wega-film.at · www.wega-film.at

INTERNATIONAL SALES

**FILMS BOUTIQUE**

Skalitzer Straße 54A · 10997 Berlin/Germany  
phone: +49.30.6953 7850  
info@filmsboutique.com · www.filmsboutique.com

FESTIVALS COORDINATION

**AUSTRIAN FILM COMMISSION**

Anne Laurent  
Stiftgasse 6 · 1070 Vienna/Austria  
phone: +43.1.526 33 23  
festivals@afc.at · www.austrianfilm.com



## SYNOPSIS

Fatma lives with her husband and six children in Vienna, trying to preserve the traditional values and the social prestige of her family. When Ayse, a 19-year-old girl from the Turkish countryside, is chosen to be married to Fatma's son, a special friendship evolves between the two women.

But soon this relationship is put to the test as the family has to face a difficult stroke of fate.



## INTERVIEW WITH UMUT DAĞ

***Kuma* is a story where different generations and cultures intersect. Is it based on your own background?**

Umut Dağ: No. Absolutely not. I was born in Vienna, and my parents are Kurdish. They emigrated from Turkey. My father was a manual worker, and my mother was a housewife. I grew up in the 20th District, a working-class area with a lot of immigrant families, and my background is not artistic at all. Which means it's a small miracle that I've made a film to be shown at the Berlin Film Festival. But that wasn't the decisive factor in making the film. I started off with the character of the mother, some-

one who has outdated values and clings on to them. These values are her only support, because she believes they're right and feels she can protect her family by adhering to them. This was the thought I began with. I knew the phenomenon of the second wife from Turkey, even though it's not very common. In exceptional situations, like in the story of the film where the mother is sick, it could happen in some regions that the husband would take a second wife. I started to think that there must be situations where the wife herself would arrange for a second wife, to look after the family. And that struck me as a very interesting

idea, because Turkish society places more emphasis than others on outward appearances. The question of what a family has achieved is very important. Is the family proud of the children? How does the family present itself to the outside world? In a structure like that, of course, you're always under pressure – not only in the sense that you have to keep on functioning, but also because you have to be more than you really are. You're pushed into a straitjacket, and it doesn't make life exactly easy. You don't feel you can ever open up to other people, because anything you say could be interpreted as a weakness, and this tends

to make people more isolated and lonely. I started to wonder how it would be for an older mother if she felt she had to arrange for her family to be looked after when she was dead. Then it would be quite feasible for her to bring in somebody from outside – somebody who could be isolated in exactly the same way.

**The film focuses not only on the character of the mother but also on several other female characters, and all of them appear to be performing a balancing act in everyday life between the two cultures, in their own way.**



Umut Dağ: The film does depict various aspects of that situation, but it's not essentially intended as a social critique. It's much more a matter of observing a family and how the different individuals react emotionally to a young woman who is brought into the family at a later stage – how the people grow together or drift apart in that process.

**Did you have the feeling that the story could be narrated more powerfully by means of the female characters?**

Umut Dağ: Of course. In my view women generally have more fascinating stories to tell. I don't mean that from any simplistic attitude towards gender, but because there are simply far fewer films about women in the history of movies. 95% of films are about men, with women playing decorative roles, and they don't deserve that. There are so many interesting stories – and this was one of them. It was important for me that in *Kuma* men should be given the same space that is normally granted to women in other films.

**In *Kuma* there is a clear preponderance of interior sequences. The rooms where the story is set seem to represent, to a considerable extent, the confinements of this woman's life. Were you attempting to portray the limitations of this existence by means of these spaces?**

Umut Dağ: We thought long and hard about how to depict this woman's life. What do women from the older generation actually experience here? The playground, the school their children attend, the supermarket and perhaps the roads that take them to their closest relatives. And in summer, barbecues on the Danube Island. Unfortunately that is the sad truth. This fact, combined with the focus of our story, just didn't leave many more options in terms

of spaces. You can portray an enormous amount like this, although there was always the risk of alienating viewers with this reduced spatiality, and leaving them feeling bored.

**Language is one subject of the film and also an aspect of the story: some characters speak German to exclude Ayse, but when she starts learning the language it seems to be a step towards emancipation.**

Umut Dağ: I was really determined that nobody could accuse me of making a film about integration. I don't like the word, and I don't want to deal with the subject, because I don't think it really exists. People can live together, live with each other and live alongside each other, all for good reasons. The film isn't a statement; it's just an observation of what can happen in reality, and what does happen. And it isn't based on any calculation but on a need, which meant finding an authentic narrative tone.

**You didn't want to make a film about integration – and in fact, on the contrary, *Kuma* is a film that portrays a closed society within Austrian society.**

Umut Dağ: It would be naive of me to think I can avoid this issue. Of course I have to confront it. We are in Vienna, and this is a contemporary subject that will be debated for another generation or two. Unfortunately. But I do think this story could also be set in a mountain village in Tyrol. Perhaps not with a second wife, but with a younger woman who marries into the family. *Kuma* is a family story, where different values come into conflict. A Chinese family who moved to Vienna 30 years ago would be familiar with similar problems between the generations. It's a fundamental issue associated with immigration, but it's not a culturally specific phenomenon.





**What prompted you to choose a Turkish title for the film, and what does “Kuma” mean?**

Umut Dağ: That’s a good question. It’s something we discussed for a long time. Actually, we did find a German title, and for quite a while we intended to use it. But then, during the shooting and editing of the film, it shifted emotionally to a slightly different area. The second wife takes on the role of a catalyst in the family. The very presence of her alien being triggers a snowball effect which wouldn’t otherwise have come about. So we decided it was more appropriate to use a title that people need to look at twice, that people don’t initially associate with anything but at the same time establishes that this film is about a family with a different language and culture. “Kuma” is a Turkish word that

means literally “second wife”, so it describes exactly the women who are drawn into a family at a later stage, by marriage.

**Not so long ago your medium-length film *Papa* won the First Steps Award (Best Young Filmmaker Award in German-speaking countries). Is the family an area that provides you with inspiration, that you regard as the closest source of dramatic material?**

Umut Dağ: Yes. When you try to tell a story you have to think closely about what you yourself can empathise with – where you have a connection to the story. By performing a lot of research you can find a point of reference, but soon you begin to look at things within yourself, and to mine your inner world of feelings. And of course your own family is the closest

source of all this. After all, we all have our own emotions, neuroses, joys, fears, grief and trauma in our families. However, I don’t regard my own experiences as the determining factor in creating a story. I don’t sit down and start thinking about how I can rework my emotions as a film narrative. There is also a lot of chance involved. With *Papa* my personal contact with the leading actor was very important. I’d made music videos and a documentary with him, and in that way I got to know something about his own life – which in turn inspired me. The character of the mother was the next impetus, and I was familiar with that from my own mother and her friends and relatives. There are a lot of powerful mother figures from that generation, people who carry with them so much grief and hope, because they sacrifice themselves for their

children and their family – but as soon as the children have grown up, they find they are left with nothing. I find that very moving, and it interests me a lot, although this film doesn’t really deal with that aspect enough. It’s a subject that I would like to approach more explicitly at some point with my co-author, Petra Ladinigg.

**The story of *Kuma* develops in a grey area where different cultures merge together, where it is impossible to draw clear lines between them. Your narrative method conveys this confusion and to a certain extent uses it as a strategy, by deliberately leading the audience astray, so it takes some time for them to find their bearings.**

Umut Dağ: At the beginning the narrative pace is hectic, and the audience is misled in a way. Then at some point the



audience has to confront the question of what is actually happening. But this wasn't a strategy; Petra Ladinigg and I saw it as a narrative necessity in order to bring various aspects closer to the viewer. At the beginning of the film we are attempting to establish the family, which is made difficult in the hectic atmosphere of the wedding and the subsequent farewell. When you see the film a second time or think about it more closely afterwards, you realise that the first impression might have caused you to jump to the wrong conclusion, and I think that's a really good thing. We wanted the audience to grow into the story over time, although it's a difficult balancing act to pull off, because you can very easily lose the audience in the process. If you don't give the audience enough space for identification, they'll walk away. It's a difficult balancing act, but I hope it's been successful, at least partially.

**Emotion is also a factor that plays an important role in *Kuma*. Austrian cinema has the reputation of being cold and rather dismal. Do you, as a young filmmaker, aim to bring a stronger emotional narrative to the cinema?**

Umut Dağ: I don't spend my time wondering what kind of cinema I want to encourage, as a Kurdish Austrian. It's not the main impetus that motivates me to tell a story. But I'm also not the sort of person who puts a camera in a corner, set up for a wide shot, and places his characters in the space, hoping this will somehow convey emotions and involve the audience in the suspense. It works very well with a large number of outstanding films from very good directors. But I wouldn't have the courage to work like that. I want to be with the actors, with the emotions in their faces and their eyes. I want to be in their hearts,

in their breathing, in their gaze, I want to follow their glances and share their feelings and tremble along with the actors playing these characters. I don't have the courage to watch an actor in a static long shot with complete confidence that the result will be powerful enough to convey the emotion. I'd rather cut to a close-up and show it.

**But you do feel influenced by the Austrian auteur cinema?**

Umut Dağ: Of course. But I'd have to define that. I don't think there is such a thing as the Austrian film, although naturally there's a tendency to create a trademark. If you look closely at the most successful Austrian films, what I find fascinating is the absolute need to be absolutely dedicated emotionally to authentic, true-to-life narrative. The aim is to depict plausible individuals, the way they really live, and make that part of the story. That's what has inspired me, and that's the basis of my aim: that the audience should watch the actors and forget they're watching a film, because they are so involved in it. It's difficult to pull off, but it helps me to push actors to their limits, because I know what is possible. Austria is a very positive environment in that sense.

**How did you find your actors?**

Umut Dağ: We had casting sessions in Cologne, Berlin, Istanbul and Vienna. According to my producer, Michael Katz, it was most extensive casting procedure since *The White Ribbon*. I decided we would shoot the film in Turkish, even though Kurdish is my mother tongue, because I knew it would be even harder to find suitable Kurdish actors. But I was able to draw upon a large pool of Turkish acting talent. We went to Turkey for the casting because it was obvious the two leading



female roles would have to be played by Turkish actresses. It quickly became clear that Begüm Akkaya would take the part of Ayse. It was almost as though we had written it for her. We were so keen to have Nihal Koldaş for the part of the mother because she manages to convey inner strength and at the same time fragility. We mainly used people from Vienna to play the members of the family who live in Vienna, and most of them are not professional actors. Incidentally, the actor who plays Hassan is the leading actor from *Papa*.

**You say your way of filming is to come in close to the actors. What kind of visual concept did you work out with the cameraman, Carsten Thiele?**

Umut Dağ: We didn't plan the shooting in a traditional way, shot by shot. Instead we talked a lot about emotions, what we wanted to convey to the audience and how close we wanted to be to the characters emotionally. We didn't decide how to proceed in each scene until the day we shot it. I tried to give the actors as much space as possible, and then we would react to that with the camera. It was a huge challenge in terms of lighting and camerawork, and I'm very grateful to everybody for going along with it. There's quite a risk involved, if you know which scene is going to be filmed but not how many shots will contain or where the camera will be positioned. But it worked out just fine.

**There also seems to have been a lot of careful work at the editing desk, because your narrative style is frequently fragmentary and elliptic, leaving the audience to do a great deal as well.**

Umut Dağ: But this narrative style was already set out in the script. We filmed very few scenes which are not now in the

film itself. A few things were moved around during editing, but we didn't change the narrative style while we were editing. Right from the start Petra Ladinigg and I intended to tell the story as naturally as possible, to stay very close to the characters and to play round a lot with nuances and glances. A lot of this was also stipulated in the script. Of course, the rhythm only developed while we were filming and during the editing process. Claudia Linzer, who edited *Inside America*, did a fine job there. I was very happy to have her on board, because she is so good at reading the nuances, and also because she was so patient with me.

**What is the attraction of directing, for you personally?**

Umut Dağ: I very often have the feeling it's the only thing I can do. I've wasted a great deal of time in my life looking around for what I really want. Nothing else has enthralled me so much. It's always been my aim not just to do a job because I have to earn a living but to have a profession that doesn't feel as though it is a job at all. With directing it suddenly clicked for me, and when I started to film my first practice pieces it was the first time in my life that I could devote myself to something for weeks on end, day and night. If I have to sleep here in the sound studio because something isn't finished, it doesn't occur to me to complain. It's all part of the job. I feel very strongly that there are things I want to say, and I hope I have an instinct that will guide me in the right direction.

Interview: Karin Schiefer  
January 2012



UMUT DAĞ





## CAST

Fatma	NIHAL KOLDAŞ
Ayşe	BEGÜM AKKAYA
Mustafa	VEDAT ERINCİN
Hasan	MURATHAN MUSLU
Kezban	ALEV IRMAK
Nurcan	DILARA KARABAYIR
Elmaz	MERVE CEVİK
Mehmet	ABDULKADIR GÜMÜS
Soner	ALI YILDIRIM
Serife	ILKAY KAYKU ATALAY
Gülşen	ALIYE ESRA SALEBCI
Tante Vildan	ELIF DAĞ
Oktay	AZAD SEN
Emine	GÜLTEN SEN
Meryem	ASLI KISLAL
Ibrahim	ETHEM SAYGIEDER
Osman	BERK KRISTAL
Baran	AYDEMİR GÜNDÜZ
Davut	ERDEM TURKOGLU
Herr Abdullah	NAZMI DAĞ
Nuriye	SALIHA ÜZÜLMEZ
Özden	DILEK TOPKAN

## CREW

Director	UMUT DAĞ
Written by	PETRA LADINIGG
Based on an Idea by	UMUT DAĞ
DoP	CARSTEN THIELE BVK
Sound Engineer	SERGEY MARTYNYUK
Sound Mixer	BERNHARD MAISCH
Music	IVA ZABKAR
Editor	CLAUDIA LINZER
Production Designer	KATRIN HUBER
Costume Designer	CINZIA CIOFFI
Make-Up	MARTHA RUESS
	ISABELLA LECHNER
Casting	MARTINA POEL
Casting Turkey	HARIKA H. UYGUR ULKU
Casting Germany	FINALCAST/EMRAH ERTEM
Line Producer Turkey	MGA YAPIM
Production Manager Tr	YUSUF KARATAŞ
Production Accountant	CHRISTA PREISINGER
Production Manager	ULRIKE LÄSSER
Supervising Producer	MICHAEL KATZ
Producers	VEIT HEIDUSCHKA
	MICHAEL KATZ
Austrian Distributor	FILMLADEN
International Sales	FILMS BOUTIQUE

## UMUT DAĞ

DIRECTOR AND AUTHOR (\*1982)

Umut grew up as the oldest child of a Kurdish immigrant family in Vienna's district Brigittenau. After finishing the Vienna Business School, he began to study international development, theology and pedagogy.

After some time he more and more concentrated on his short films but also worked at the same time in the Austrian Film Industry for several Feature Films for example *Die Fälscher*, *Ein Augenblick Freiheit*, *Der schwarze Löwe*, *Freundschaft* etc. and for about 50 Advertising films.

Since 2006 he studies directing at the Vienna Film Academy under Peter Patzak and Michael Haneke.

2011 his film *Papa* won the First Steps Award for the best medium-length film.

## FILMOGRAPHY

(SELECTION)

*Kuma*, Feature Film, Completion 2012 together with Co-Author Petra Ladinigg  
*World Premiere Berlinale 2012*,  
*Opening Film Panorama*

*Papa*, A 2011, 40min, DVCPHD, Color, Short Feature Film, (Concept, Director)  
*Best Austrian Short Film 2011 DIAGONALE 2011*, *In competition Max-Ophüls Preis 2011*,  
*First Steps Award 2011*

*101010 – Ich bin Wien*, for SPÖ-Wien, A 2010, 4 min, HD, Music Video (Director)

*R*, for AQIL, A 2010, 5 min, DVC-Pro HD, Color, Music Video (Author, Director, Production)

*Wer!*, for SUA KAAAN, A 2010, 3:30 min, HD, Music Video, (Author, Director)

*Aus eigener Kraft*, A 2009, 45 min, Digital Betacam, Color, Documentary (Author & Director)  
Audience Award at the 14th International Filmfestival Filmacademy Vienna

*Radioaktiv*, for SUA KAAAN, A 2009, 4 min, DVC-Pro HD, Music Video (Author & Director)

*Selam*, for Mevlut Khan, A 2008, 4 min, DVC-Pro HD, Color, Music Video (Author, Director, Production.)  
*Golden UTV Award 2009 and UTV Audience Award 2009 for the best MusicVideo.*

Participation at *Babylon Feature Film Development Workshop* Rotterdam Film Festival 2008

*Todesnachrichten*, A 2008, 23 min, HDCAM, Color, Short Film (Director & Co-Production)  
*Vienna Independent Shortfilm Festival – A 2008 (Audience Award Austria Panorama)*, *Diagonale, Graz – A 2008 (National Premiere)*



