

REVIEW

Crash. Bang. Boom.

Karel Šindelář's *Why So Sirius?* (2018)

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A tragicomedy nestles among the short film selection at the 2019 goEast film festival, waiting to boggle its audiences in just 15 minutes. It is a story of two women catapulted onto each other by a careless car accident. Klára and Daniela are worlds apart in character and style, yet they manage to get caught up in the same sticky web created by the dark-humored director and writer Karel Šindelář. Spun with finesse and dosed with wacky tragedy, *Why so Sirius?* pulls two people off their own beaten tracks and throws a spanner in the works, leaving them and the viewer with a multitude of questions.

In the forest-covered hills of the Czech countryside, a fashionable couple – woman and man – drive their expensive black car until the engine begins to smoke and they roll to a halt. Their material appearance suggests that they like things to be clean and efficient, perhaps even sleek. But as the old saying goes, there is no fire without smoke, and tension is clearly burning up under the bonnet of this couple. Any call for help is pointless as there is no hope finding signal in the wide, open sky. Surrounded by trees, it looks as if the husband (Tomáš Turek) were all alone; he is certainly not minded by his headphone-wearing wife Daniela (Marie Turková), who seems to be oblivious to her surroundings. *Why so Sirius?* thus slowly constructs notions of a tired-out couple, repelled by tension and on the verge of exploding, which corrupt the sense of calm with threats of a coming storm. In just a few minutes, the use of imagery and body language creates a vague but complex opening that sets up the context for Daniela's impending loss and interaction with Klára.

Klára (Martina Šindelářová) is rather different from Daniela. She speeds down the country road in a painted van that jingles with all of the various trinkets that dangle around the young woman. With her foot on the gas, Klára decides that it is a good moment to apply lipstick in her rear-view mirror, not noticing Daniela's partner shuffling around the broken-down vehicle. Inevitably, she runs him over and gets out to reveal the lipstick smeared guiltily across her cheek. The size of the van is grotesque next to the dead body and the slinky black car. The van is clumsy and colorful like Klára's wardrobe. She is in fact dressed up as a LARP (live action role-play) character

and appears like some kind of mystical glitch of chaos in Daniela's highly regulated life. Running in opposite directions at first, the women eventually turn back to face the horror. Their incompatibility is prickling to watch and sparks questions about the dangerous paths which certain habits and behaviors can take you. In some lives, there is a slow realization of boredom and stress that Daniela seems to suffer from. For those who are more relaxed but less in control, perhaps the unbearable lightness of being will strike after one small mistake changes everything.

It is impressive how stories can be built out of visual stimulation and structured dialog. Doubtless other viewers will read the characters completely differently. It is nevertheless curious to watch the two lionesses circle and prowls around each other, unsure of what to do but at any rate ready to defend themselves. Some writers may have been tempted by the drama of physical conflict after the sudden murder of a loved one, but Šindelář chooses to keep the action at bay. There is admittedly a slight stray into a bizarre LARP scene, but the fantasy game quickly shocks Daniela back to reality as she proceeds to express her anger at the ridiculous turn of events. Yet, she does not attack. While Klára seems mostly shocked and is quickly catapulted into some kind of stupor, Daniela remains surprisingly calm. Her passivity is frustratingly engaging for the audience who are obliged to question what is going through both characters' minds because surely they would do this or that. By not making explicit his characters' thoughts, the director entices interaction with the shocking, life-changing situation. The grim plot twists with a sprinkle of surrealism incite morbid curiosity and invite the viewer to explore dark themes.

For many film lovers, genre films like tragicomedy, gore, horror or sci-fi, help to deconstruct issues close to the heart. Fantasy and wild imagination are keys that can unlock scrambled thoughts and emotions. It is exciting to see a young filmmaker show creativity and humor that is delivered with fresh and clean cinematography. The characters are vague in detail but powerful in spirit and their strange standoff is worthy of a good chuckle. Karel Šindelář has shown promise and skill that could make for an intriguing storyteller. In his upcoming films it would be fun to see the plot thicken a little bit more. More intricate character development could also benefit his approach. With all the real-life tragedy that is currently inspiring films, it is good to have fresh talent taking an approach that is light, dark and not so serious.