

Film Review: Mesmerizing Power of Turkish Crime Drama ‘Once Upon a Time in Anatolia’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 8, 2012 - 3:25pm

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CHICAGO – Nuri Bilge Ceylan is one of the most interesting and admired filmmakers on the international scene and his latest, “Once Upon a Time in Anatolia” is another mannered, deliberate film (some might say SLOW) that somehow gains accumulated power through its director’s incredible eye for composition and appreciation for the beauty of cinema. The film was the co-winner of the Grand Prix at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival (with the Dardenne Brothers’ “The Kid with a Bike,” which is also opening this month in town) and has finally made its way to Chicago cinemas this weekend (after a brief appearance at CIFF), opening at the Music Box Theatre.



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

If you haven’t seen Ceylan’s incredible “Distant” and “Three Monkeys,” you may not know what to expect from “Anatolia.” It is that rarest of genres — the philosophical procedural (the great “Memories of Murder” from Bong Joon-ho probably falls into that sub-sub-genre and arguably David Fincher’s “Zodiac” as well). It is about people going through routine and a filmmaker who finds depth in the mundane. Not that there’s anything mundane about the plot of “Once Upon a Time in Anatolia,” but it is the kind of story that would be told during the first commercial break of “Law & Order” and it is given gravity and beauty by a filmmaker willing to take his time with it.



[Read Brian Tallerico’s full review of “Once Upon a Time in Anatolia” in our reviews section.](#) [12]

A group of rotund police officers drive around a haggard prisoner trying to find something undefined that he clearly told them about during questioning. They talk about yogurt. They talk about smoking. They get calls from loved ones. As the film goes on, they get as sleepy as audience members are likely to — yawning and nodding off. They barely talk about their case. The prisoner looks more and more like walking death as he’s either purposefully screwing with them or, as he says, really can’t remember where it is due to how drunk he was at the time. Either way, “Once Upon a Time in Anatolia” has an unmistakable tone. It’s a deliberate, studied piece that will clearly be as much about the people driving around trying to find what we soon learn is a dead body as it is about how the body got there in the first place.

“Anatolia” feels a little different than “Distant” and “Three Monkeys” right from the very beginning. It’s more narratively conventional and straightforward, even approaching genre tenets at times, something Ceylan’s previously films, which were more mood pieces, didn’t do. It’s not too far a stretch from his previous works but it’s more of a cousin than a sibling. And it’s interesting to see this filmmaker taking his relatively opaque style and applying it to a genre that’s typically heavy on exposition and stated motivations. He also seems more honestly interested in these characters — to the point where one could even say he likes them. The film is reportedly based on a true story and Ceylan has said that he feels like he knows these people wandering the night to find a body. His love for them shows in the way he so practically and unromantically tells us so much about their lives in the action of just one night.



[Continue reading for Brian Tallerico’s full “Once Upon a Time in Anatolia” review.](#) [12]

“Once Upon a Time in Anatolia” was directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan and opens in Chicago at the Music Box Theatre on March 9th, 2012.



Once Upon a Time in Anatolia
Photo credit: Cinema Guild Pictures

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