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Screen, Screen Features

Director Spotlight: Yorgos Lanthimos

5 mins read

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I will never forget the first time I watched *Dogtooth*. This feature – earning Lanthimos deserved recognition at both Cannes and the Academy Awards – is hardly casual watching, arguably elevating itself into the realm of taboo. Yet, the onslaught of provocative imagery, bone-dry dialogue and a viciously satirical attitude seared it upon my conscience instantaneously. There was no going back – I had fallen into the abyss of Yorgos Lanthimos’ bizarre mind.

Dogtooth tackles a captivating domestic nightmare, revolving around a suburban family entirely isolated from the outside world; whilst living under the autocratic rule of their father. Lanthimos deftly explores identity (or the lack of one), ideology and patriarchal authority throughout a blisteringly unsettling hour and a half. However, as one quickly learns upon absorbing a Lanthimos film, it’s acceptable – even necessary – to laugh. *Dogtooth* is undeniably peppered with brilliantly absurd scenes. Such highlights include: a cat being mistaken for a deadly monster, the mother allegedly giving ‘birth’ to a dog and an infamous dance scene. When delving into his filmography, Lanthimos’ sheer pleasure in offsetting horrific tragedy with unorthodox black comedy firmly engrains itself as a unique trait.

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Lanthimos is often associated with his dialogue – the syntax of his films is peculiar, resembling human conversation yet lacking any sort of empathy or emotion. Miraculously, the director has managed to execute his unorthodox style in both Greek and English. Take his most recent work *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* as an example – an early dialogue exchange involves an unusually detailed breakdown of metal and leather watch straps. The hospital setting intertwines with the clinical conversational styling brilliantly, only adding to the uncanny effect. These quirks rarely dampen the sense of engagement or immersion within the diegesis either. If anything, the stripped-back approach heightens the power of Lanthimos' emotional cruxes, whilst enhancing those absurdist black comedy setpieces.

These films undeniably benefit from Lanthimos' frequent collaborations with fellow Greek cinematographer Thimios Bakatakis. The cold colour palette and minimalist framing work in symbiosis with Lanthimos' intent to create distant, unsettling worlds. His filmmaking prowess has only grown over time – *The Lobster* experimented with dystopian science-fiction settings whilst *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* introduced lengthy Kubrick-esque tracking shots. Lanthimos isn't afraid to collaborate across all fields, most recently with actor Colin Farrell. Whilst his collaborations with Martin McDonagh revealed a wonderful comedic edge, Farrell's work on both *The Lobster* and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* have cemented his multifaceted talents. The aforementioned transition from Greek to English is no small feat, yet as with Bakatakis, one can truly sense that Farrell and Lanthimos' minds truly think alike. The lack of any weak cast members in any Lanthimos work speaks to the power of his inhuman worlds. In a promotional Q&A, Nicole Kidman admitted that her performance for *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* was entirely guided by the distinctive script, without any further advice from Lanthimos.

Ultimately, it is those inhuman worlds that entrench Yorgos Lanthimos as a thrillingly original voice in the contemporary film scene, speaking to our very human concerns. *Dogtooth* and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* both visualise the terrifying destruction of fragile domesticity – the former from an internal threat, the latter external. *Alps* expands on *Dogtooth's* scope yet remains focused on human intimacies, notably death and grief. *The Lobster* touches on the most powerful human intimacy of them all –

love. There
are critics
who argue

*Yorgos Lanthimos (centre) and the cast of Killing of a
Sacred Deer*

Lanthimos' films simply lack empathetic qualities – the cold dialogue, provocative comedy and absurd narratives are too far removed from reality.

However, I would nonetheless implore you to try at least one of these brilliantly peculiar films. It is those inhuman distortions that make Lanthimos' works strangely human indeed. One thing I can guarantee – just like my first viewing of *Dogtooth*, you will never forget watching these films. Welcome to the mind of Yorgos Lanthimos

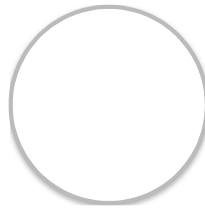
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