

# arts

INDY Week's arts blog

Archives | RSS | Follow on [t](#)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2016

## Movie review: Academy Award-nominated drama *Mustang* is like a Turkish *The Virgin Suicides*

Posted by **Glenn McDonald** on Fri, Jan 22, 2016 at 4:32 PM

### *Mustang*

★★★★

Now playing

*Mustang* has been compared to Sofia Coppola's debut, *The Virgin Suicides*, with good reason. Like that 1999 film, this Turkish drama tells the story of five teenage sisters coming of age in a repressive home with a tone of aching melancholy.

*The Virgin Suicides* takes place in suburban Detroit in the 1970s, while *Mustang* is set in contemporary rural Turkey. A different perspective comes with the different milieu. Coppola told her story from the outside looking in, with the sisters remembered through the eyes of others. *Mustang*'s director, Deniz Gamze Ergüven, keeps her camera among the sisters at all times, looking out with yearning and hope.

The story begins on the last day of school. Walking home along the shoreline, the five sisters play in the surf, splashing and chicken-fighting with their male classmates. When their strict grandmother and conservative uncle—who are raising the orphaned children—get wind of their antics, the lockdown commences. The girls are pulled out of school, the home is turned into a fortress and "everything turns to shit," as youngest sister Lale (Günes Sensoy) phrases it in a voice-over.

The family begins the process of marrying the girls off, one by one. The sisters are dressed in colorless smocks and instructed in the arts of sewing and cooking and catering to men. Anything that could potentially corrupt the young women—phones, computers, magazines—is confiscated. The sisters each respond differently, acquiescing or rebelling to various degrees. Lale is the one we watch most closely. As her sisters are serially plucked out of her life, she gradually plans her escape.

Ergüven based the story on her own experiences growing up in Turkey, and naturally the film is a critique of an archaic, patriarchal culture. But this is never overt. The feminist message is implicit, and *Mustang* stands on its own as a marvelously well-crafted story. The performances from the young actors, all nonprofessional, are so easy and natural that the narrative engine humming underneath it all is undetectable. We feel like an invisible sixth sister among the pranks and puppy piles.

*Mustang* is the perfect title for this story, evoking imagery of young wild horses and wide-open plains. Bucking against cultural restraints, the sisters display a collective fierceness of spirit. When their unity is shattered, it's heartbreaking. Several dark threads are introduced in the second half of the film. A powerful sense of urgency surfaces, and the movie becomes a kind of lyrical jailbreak story. These young women need to get out now, before it's too late.

*Mustang* is among the five nominees for best foreign language film in this year's Academy Awards. In the Triangle, it's playing exclusively at **Silverspot Cinema in Chapel Hill**.



[click to enlarge](#)

The five sisters at the heart of Academy Award-nominated Turkish drama *Mustang*. photo courtesy of the Cohen Media Group

Tags: Film review, Mustang, Deniz Gamze Ergüven, Academy Awards, Sofia Coppola, The Virgin Suicides, Image

« [Carolina Theatre CEO Bob Nocek resi...](#)