LES FILMS D’ANTOINE – COIN FILM – TOPRAK FILM

present

**MR GAY SYRIA**

**A documentary by Ayse Toprak**

**Protagonists**

Husein

Mahmoud Hassino

Omar

Nader

Wissam

Samer

Ayman Menem

Bradley Secker

Suma

Issam

William

Salam

Muhammed

Hussam

The Tea and Talk Group

Jad

Ahmed

**Director of Photography**

Hajo Schomerus

Anne Misselwitz

**Sound recordist**

Vincent Rozenberg

**Editor**

Nadia Ben Rachid

**Sound Editor**

Gabriel Mathé

**Re-recording Mixer**

Henning Hein

**Music**

Zeid Hamdan

**A co-production by**

Les Films d’Antoine, COIN FILM, Toprak Film

**With the support of**

Film- und Medienstiftung NRW

Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program

Open Society Foundation

Ford Foundation | JustFilms

Antalya Film Forum

The New Film Fund

Meetings on the Bridge / Başka Sinema

Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

**Associate Producer**

Ali Betil

**Produced by**

Antoine Simkine

Ekin Calisir

Christine Kiauk

Herbert Schwering

**German Distribution**

Salzgeber & Co. Medien / Björn Koll

**World Sales**

Taskovski Films Ltd. / Irena Taskovski

http://www.taskovskifilms.com/

France – Germany– Turkey 2017 – 87 min

Format 1:1,77 – Sound 5.1 – DCP

[www.facebook.com/mrgaysyriafilm](http://www.facebook.com/mrgaysyriafilm)

[www.twitter.com/mrgaysyria\_film](http://www.twitter.com/mrgaysyria_film)

**Festivals**

**Sheffield Doc/Fest**, UK on 13 June 2017 (World Premiere)

**Lovers Film Festival, Torino**, Italy on 16 June 2017 (Italy Premiere)

**Awards**

**Special Jury Mention, 32nd Lovers Film Festival, Torino**

*"For the courage and strength with which the director drew attention to a refugee story among refugees with the hope that the film should not be hidden or remain in the shadows, as its protagonist". (Jury motivation)*

**Logline**

Two gay Syrian refugees try to rebuild their lives after having been forced to leave their country. Husein is a gay barber in Istanbul. Mahmoud champions LGBTI rights in Berlin. What brings them together is a crazy dream: to join the international beauty contest, Mr. Gay World, as an escape from their trapped lives and an answer to their invisibility.

**Short Synopsis (100 words)**

Mr. Gay Syria follows two gay Syrian refugees who are trying to rebuild their lives. Husein is a barber in Istanbul living a double life between his conservative family and his gay identity. Mahmoud is the founder of Syria’s LGBTI movement and is a refugee in Berlin. What brings them together is a dream: to participate in an international beauty contest as an escape from their trapped lives and as an answer to their invisibility. Will the dream come true or will the refugee crisis and the harsh consequences of being gay in the Muslim world shatter it to pieces?

**Synopsis (200 words)**

Set in Istanbul and Berlin, *Mr. Gay Syria* follows two gay refugees as they try to rebuild their lives after fleeing the war in Syria. Husein is a 24-year-old barber who escaped to Istanbul with his parents and pregnant wife. Mahmoud is the founder of Syria’s LGBTI movement and a refugee in Germany. He works part time at a NGO helping gay asylum seekers.

What brings them together is a crazy dream: joining the international beauty contest called Mr. Gay World, hosted in Malta. If they manage, it will be the first time an Arab man from the Middle East attends such a public event. For Husein, this is a potential escape to Europe. He yearns to live in a society that accepts him. For Mahmoud, as a gay rights defender, this is *the* place to generate visibility and launch a campaign for Syrian gay refugees.

While *Mr. Gay Syria* follows the journey of the two characters and their friends, the beauty contest becomes a thread that weaves together the difficulties of being gay in homophobic societies, the challenges of coming out, the joy of falling in love and the devastating migration crisis.

**Director’s notes**

I first met Mahmoud when I was looking for a fixer for a documentary on Syrian refugee children. At first I thought he was shy. As we got talking, I started to see his vivacious personality shine through his initial reserve. Eventually, he became my closest ally for this project.

In 2014, I received an email from Mahmoud saying: “I’m in Berlin, I’ve applied for asylum. Hopefully it’ll soon be sorted and I can return to Istanbul.” A few months later I received another one: “I’ve lost my citizenship, I won’t be able to return to Syria, I’m stuck here forever. I feel like I’m lost and floating in between two worlds.”

Mahmoud’s message haunted me for quite some time. He had the common destiny with millions of Syrian refugees, uprooted by a conflict beyond their control, with the dream of finding new homes in unfamiliar lands, to belong somewhere, demanding the right to live any way they want.

Through Mahmoud, I got to meet my main character Husein and his friend Omar. I came to admire their willpower and resolve to overcome the adverse conditions that they face and improve their life chances. That they did this with a light heart and laughter taught me the meaning of holding on to life, no matter the circumstances.

This film is keeping in line with my fight for a better world. I feel that building truly democratic societies depends on not only defending our own rights, but also fighting for others’ rights. I’m well aware that this film talks about a very specific problem within the context of a much bigger human tragedy. However, human rights cannot be compartmentalized. For me, this is exactly what makes this story interesting and powerful.

*Ayse Toprak*

**Director’s bio**

Ayse Toprak is a filmmaker based in Istanbul. She received a BFA in Film &TV from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, and an MA from the New School. Her work experience includes Channel Thirteen/PBS in New York, and producing for Al Jazeera in London, Doha and Istanbul .

Ayse is interested in how documentaries, their subjects and colorful characters have far-reaching impacts on society. With that, films that manage to trigger a national dialogue on neglected issues, brake prejudices or breach hitherto taboo subjects became her favorite medium, as well as personal and professional ambition. She is fascinated by people who are pushed to the peripheries of society who have personal, vivid, compelling stories. Her conviction in filmmaking comes from her wish to tell the stories of such people who she feels have different ways of looking at the world, each very unique in their own ways.

**Les Films d’Antoine** is an independent production company based in Paris France. We are producing and coproducing feature films aimed at the French and international markets and helmed by acclaimed or upcoming directors. We are especially interested in Art house cinema that can reach an audience beyond the festivals and critics recognition. Les Films d’Antoine is a member of ACE, EAVE, INSIDE PICTURES, SPI, EFA, EPC.

**COIN FILM** has been developing and producing feature films and high-end documentaries for cinema and television since 1993. All of its films are characterized by the filmmaker’s individualist approach and artistic profile with the main goal being the combination of artistic films with ambitious entertainment. Of the more than 40 films produced to date by the two producers Herbert Schwering and Christine Kiauk, many have been international co-productions, screened and awarded on many international festivals. COIN FILM is a member of ACE, EFA.

**TOPRAK FILM**, based in Istanbul, was founded in 2015 by two documentary filmmakers Ayşe Toprak and Ekin Calisir. The company develops and produces films that carry stories from the region to the international audience with an artistic vision and creative storytelling. We are interested in films that create impact by focusing on local and personal stories that resonate across borders and territories.