FATIH AKIN'S CINEMA OF INTERSECTIONS

NOAH ISENBERG SURVEYS THE CONTEMPORARY GERMAN DIRECTOR'S INTENSE, MADCAP FILMS

"We wanted workers," Swiss playwright Max Frisch once remarked of the so-called *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers, that began pouring into Germany in the early 1960s, "and we got people." These same people, mostly from Turkey, Greece, the former Yugoslavia, and Italy, eventually had families. And the children of these families grew up in a country that, while perhaps not entirely their own, has become, at least on a cultural and social level, as much theirs as is the country of their parents. German director Fatih Akin, whose parents migrated to Germany from Turkey in the mid-1960s, was born in Hamburg in 1973 and has made this very subject—the tricky balancing act that shapes the existence of people like himself who juggle more than one language, tradition, and set of codes—a leitmotif in his films. Over the course of the past decade and a half, he has produced a rich body of work in which he positions himself as director, and positions his subjects, in that same dialectical universe that a stray road sign from his delirious road movie *In July* (*Im Juli*, 2000) so pithily suggests, its arrows pointing in opposite directions: Hamburg–Istanbul. Akin consistently casts his probing gaze on the competing forces of these two distinct, but intersecting worlds, revealing their resistances and collisions as well as their affinities.

Beginning with his first dramatic shorts, *Sensin: You're the One!* (*Sensin: Du bist es!* 1995) and *Weed* (*Getürkt*, 1996), made while he was still a student at Hamburg's Academy of Fine Arts, Akin has examined, often playfully and provocatively, the recurrent dilemma of reconciling dual identities. The first film, a comedy, chronicles the madcap search by Kubilei (Akin), a young Turk from Hamburg, for an ideal mate: she has to smoke Marlboros, listen to punk, and be into Robert De Niro. And as no mere afterthought, she also has to be Turkish. Akin wrote, directed, and starred in the film, as he did in his next film, *Getürkt*—literally "turked," but also slang for "gypped" or ripped off. This second foray into the comedic short offers a variation on the same theme, revolving around a tedious summer holiday on the Black Sea at the bungalow of a female guest worker (Nadire Ilter) and her mischievous twentysomething son Musa (Akin), who does all he can to pawn off the weeds he digs up in his mother's garden as dope from Amsterdam. This, he believes, is his ticket to acceptance among the German-born Turkish thugs who otherwise block him from entering the town disco, his only chance for distraction and entertainment. The film, which reaches its literal high point in a zany scene shot from inside a smoke-filled car and laced with snappy dialogue in broad German slang, contains more than just a nod to the stoner humor of Cheech & Chong, but its central gag cuts a bit closer to home: you can take the Turk away from Germany, but you can't take the German—the habits, the speech, the sensibility, the dope—away from the Turk.

IN THE HOOD, ON THE ROAD

Akin grew up in Hamburg's Altona district and the eclectic, colorful world of that neighborhood serves as the setting for his first feature-length film, *Short Sharp Shock* (*Kurz und Schmerzlos*, 1998), which he also completed while in film school and which earned the Bronze Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival. It tells the story of three toughs in their twenties, Costa "The Greek" (Adam Bousdoukos), Bobby "The Serb" (Aleksandar Jovanović), and Gabriel "The Turk" (Mehmet Kurtulus), who are thick as thieves. Begging comparison to Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973), but also to John Singleton's *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) and Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995), the film offers a highly self-conscious, studied take on the American gangster film. The three chums profess, in their semi-improvised banter, a deep love for *Scarface* (1983), speaking worshipfully of Al Pacino, teasing each other with such names as Bobby Capone, and mugging for the camera—when a snapshot of them is taken at a family wedding—flashing the faux hand gestures of L.A. gang members.

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Fatih Akin
Courtesy of Strand Releasing.

Short Sharp Shock starts with a bang, really the crash of a car window, and the sound of an alarm as Costa lowers his body into a BMW and snatches the stereo. But even before that, in the credit sequence, a series of tightly framed, quick-cutting shots, photographed at close range against a muted sky, shows a group of street fighters doing martial-arts moves to the rhythms of the undulating score. It's relatively clear from this point on what to expect. These are the type of guys who sit around on the couch watching Hong Kong action movies, sharing a joint and fantasizing about making it big; the type of guys who, despite their hamstrung efforts, can't ever get a break. As writer and director, Akin shows a certain spiritual kinship with his characters, giving a cameo as a soul-searching dope dealer named Nejo, an odd dude with glazed eyes and nervous speech, who tells a shaggy story of unwittingly breaking into a car he thinks is his own and storing the gun he finds in its glove compartment in his fridge. Stylistically, too, *Short Sharp Shock* replicates the atmosphere, in terms of lighting (natural and low-key) and sets (bordellos, gambling parlors, nightclubs), of a gangster picture or, perhaps, even more so of a neo-noir. The cinematography by Frank Barbian, who also shot *Weed*, luxuriates in the shadow play of Hamburg at night, his swift-moving camera capturing the half-lit alleyways and parking garages, along with the flickering skyline, the storefronts, graffiti-tagged walls, and rain-soaked streets. Such flourishes of noir, however, are not limited to cinematography alone. In one of the film's final scenes, when Costa, suffering from stab wounds inflicted by an Albanian mobster, lies dying in Gabriel's arms, drenched in shadows and singing a Greek ballad, he strikes the pose of a mortally wounded Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) in the final sequence of *Double Indemnity* (1944); in both cases, a deep tenderness buried beneath the tough-guy exterior is laid bare.

Despite its wider scope, and its generic trappings, the personal-identity issues that percolate throughout his two shorts are not altogether absent here. The three leads frequently rib each other about their immigrant backgrounds, about the stereotypes associated with each of them, and about the lack of understanding of their families. Haggling over a deal on a stolen laptop, Bobby and Costa resort, for comedic effect, to the heavily accented, broken German of their parents. Akin frequently deals with such matters lightheartedly, as he does in the shorts, and with acute self-awareness. When Bobby announces, for example, that he, a Serb, is going to work for an Albanian, he defends his position saying, "today they call it *multikulti*." Their relaxed, liberal attitudes aside, the characters still have trouble shaking free of their residual ties to family tradition: Costa looks for salvation—or to elude what he fears is a curse on him—in a Greek Orthodox church; and Gabriel, who in an earlier scene sneaks out of a mosque, kneels in atonement in the film's poignant final shot to pray with his father, the lamentations of a Turkish folk song resonating in the background.

As if taking Bobby's proclamation on multiculturalism to heart, *In July* travels freely across boundaries—fittingly enough, Akin plays the part, another sly cameo, of a Romanian border guard—and continues with the cultural import-export business that encompasses so much of his artistry as a director. Casting Moritz Bleibtreu, who had already earned international recognition for his performance in Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (1998), in the lead role of Daniel Bannier, an aspiring physics teacher from Hamburg, Akin confects a love story as hallucinatory road trip. Opening with an unusually long take of a desolate highway, somewhere on a sad stretch of road that leads to Istanbul, a black Mercedes inches its way closer into the frame before it stops on the shoulder. The driver, a gold-toothed Turkish Berliner in alligator boots named Isa (Mehmet Kurtulus), who is transporting the body of his dead uncle back to Turkey in his trunk, steps out of the car and looks up at the sun during what appears to be a total lunar eclipse. Suddenly, when Isa takes a peek into the trunk giving a spritz of air freshener to mask the stench, Daniel—who, we later learn, has lost his ride to Istanbul—sneaks up on him from behind only to have Isa turn his flame-enhanced aerosol can on him and nearly commit a roadside murder. After this prologue, Akin introduces flashback narration allowing him to bring several disparate but interlocking strands of the story together, something he pursues to even greater dramatic effect in his later work.

We go back several days in time, to the moment when the shy, slightly clumsy Daniel, whose initial gestures vaguely resemble those of Cary Grant in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938),

stumbles upon a neighborhood flea market on his way home from school and ends up buying an old Mayan ring thought to be a lucky charm. Or at least that's what its seller, the dreadlocked Juli (Christiane Paul), who has an unspoken crush on Daniel, tells him. She also tells him, against his stiff Nordic disposition, to follow the sun, a ploy that she hopes will bring him closer to her. But the farcical thrust of the film makes sure that the planned meeting between Juli and Daniel at an outdoor concert gets tripped up and replaced by his falling for a stunning Turkish woman named Melek (Idil Üner), who happens to arrive wearing a tank top with a sun emblazoned on it when we first see her (shot in slow motion, walking knowingly toward the camera). While eating with Daniel at a local Turkish restaurant, Melek, who is merely passing through Hamburg on her way back to Istanbul, tells of a planned rendezvous underneath the Bosporus Bridge. Although it's not Daniel she's planning to meet, he decides to heed Juli's words and follow the sun.

Far more significant than the film's convoluted plotlines, which include quite a few flights of fancy—a ganja-inspired rendition of "Blue Moon" suspended in midair while riding a freighter down the Danube, a fever dream in a Budapest night-

First features

Top two: *Short Sharp Shock*. Photo: Gordon Timpen. © Wüste. Others: *In July*. © 2000 Wüste Filmproduktion. DVD: Koch Lorber Films.

club, the hotwiring of a car on the Romanian border, among others—are the ways in which Akin uses the road movie, and the tale of Daniel's path from Hamburg to Istanbul, as an opportunity to reflect more generally on transit. To be sure, Akin's cinema is shot through with travel motifs (airports, taxicabs, automobiles, bus depots, hotel rooms), and his characters are perpetually on the move. In the case of *In July*, there is the frenetic border crossing of Daniel and Juli, and of the film's ancillary players, and the overriding sense that the old idea of nation, with rigidly defined boundaries based on language, culture, and ethnicity, no longer holds today. In an otherwise minor scene in the film, Daniel, after being thrown overboard from the freighter on which he and Juli were traveling, is picked up on an empty dirt road by a female bus driver named Luna (Branka Katić, best known on these shores as the ambiguously foreign coffeeshop girl in HBO's *Big Love*). As he climbs into the passenger seat and he and Luna drive off, Akin has Pierre Aïm's camera rest for a moment on the anachronistic YU sticker still affixed to the bus's rear panel, updated now with the thick red spray-painted letters "Ex" over it. This mildly utopian, fundamentally revised universe, as Akin paints it, presents a portrait of a newly configured Europe in which Turkey, on its periphery, and Germany, at its heart, are merely a road trip apart.

LOVE AND DEATH

What *In July* may lack in visual intensity and existential heft is amply made up for in the first two installments of what Akin has dubbed his "love, death and devil" trilogy (the third and final installment has, as of this writing, yet to enter production), *Head-On* (*Gegen die Wand*, 2004) and *The Edge of Heaven* (*Auf der anderen Seite*, 2007), his most ambitious and most widely celebrated feature-length work to date. While *Head-On* addresses the psychologically taxing and occasionally deadly predicament in which acculturated German-born Turks find themselves today—attempting to elude the forces of religion and kinship while not quite blending into the dominant social fabric of their new home either—*The Edge of Heaven* reveals how inextricably connected the larger story of German and Turkish life has become, how much the clashes on screen are not merely coincidental but fundamental to an evolving identity on both sides. Together these two films catapulted Akin to fame on an international scale, receiving the 2004 Golden Bear prize at the Berlin Film Festival for *Head-On* and Best Screenplay for *The Edge of Heaven* in 2007 at Cannes.

Pairing a downtrodden nightclub janitor called Cahit (Birol Ünel), a mercurial figure with a dark past, a mean

Between two worlds

Head-On. © 2003 Wüste Filmproduktion/Corazón International/ NDR in Zusammenarbeit mit arte. DVD: Strand Releasing.

drinking habit, and a short fuse (an intern on the production, who oversaw the making-of featurette included on the DVD release, aptly refers to him as "the Turkish Kinski"), with the charming, seductive, and habitually suicidal Sibel (Sibel Kekilli, whose own offscreen past in the adult entertainment industry generated endless headlines in the German tabloid press), Akin ensures that *Head-On* has enough emotional force and psychological energy for an entire mini-series. But what keeps the film from entering into the maudlin, pathos-laden world of such a series—the two leads meet at a psychiatric clinic, after all—is the combined force and energy of Akin's direction and the intense performances he manages to get out of his two leads and supporting cast. With his hunched posture, unruly salt-and-pepper mane, sad eyes, and weather-beaten handsome face, Cahit comes off as a post-punk antihero adrift in the world, the iconic poster of Siouxie and the Banshees hanging on his apartment door providing a glimpse of his cultural allegiances; he claims, in conversation with Sibel's overbearing, conservative brother (Cem Akin), that he's "thrown away" his Turkish. Early on in the film, we see him driving his car at full speed, feeling no pain while the dark chords and screeching sounds of Depeche Mode's "I Feel You" reverberate from his stereo, into a concrete wall. Likewise, Sibel's take-no-prisoners attitude, ferociously demonstrated by her willingness to slit her wrists with a broken beer bottle rather than face the oppression of her unwaveringly dogmatic Turkish family, proves a strangely suitable match for Cahit, ironically not a far cry from the one Kubilei searches for in *Sensin* (in a late scene, one of the film's few comic interludes, in which Cahit is driven from the airport in Istanbul by a Turkish taxi driver from Munich who speaks Bavarian dialect, we also see a flicker from *Weed*).

The show wedding that formally brings the scrappy couple together is just that: a replaying of the rituals we see near the start of *Short Sharp Shock*, but this time merely as a ruse to appease Cibel's family and grant her freedom. Even during the wedding itself, the coked-up couple does a delirious, latently erotic dance that anticipates their subsequent dance to Sisters of Mercy's high-octane "Temple of Love" in Cahit's apartment and their defiant shouting of "punk is not dead!" It also anticipates the tortured schizophrenia of their relationship—their insistence that they are not a married couple and their gradual, painful steps toward becoming one. Sibel's sexually liberated stance (she giddily announces to Cahit in a disco, "I'm going to get laid") and his charged on-again-off-again sexual relationship with a German hair stylist (Catrin Striebeck) ultimately recede allowing their unanticipated

Istanbul tragedy
Edge of Heaven. © 2007 Corazón International. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.).

mutual attraction, and *amour fou*, to take hold, if only to be tripped up by additional barriers.

Akin introduces each of the film's critical transitions by way of a Turkish chorus, with musicians lined along the Bosporus river and a lone female singer at the center, commenting obliquely, often ruefully, on the story that unfolds before our eyes and in several instances allowing the melancholy instruments to speak for themselves. As he does elsewhere, he employs music as a means of enhancing his visual storytelling, not merely as an adornment or an ambient flourish but as a narrative voice in conversation with the actors, the director and, ultimately, the audience. In a revealing instance, when it appears that Cahit and Sibel finally recognize their love for one another, Sibel is shown whirling around on an amusement park ride, a big smile on her face, with Wendy Reme's "After Laughter" serenading her. Aptly enough, the tears do follow, as the song's refrain tells us, and Cahit is shown beating a former lover of Sibel's to death in the next scene, sending Cahit to prison and Sibel to Turkey to escape the "honor killing" that her family would feel compelled, and in fact attempts, to perform on her.

Shuttling back and forth between Istanbul and Hamburg, *The Edge of Heaven* is structured around two deaths and the ensuing collisions of three separate pairs of characters, each of which is strained and eventually estranged or separated by death: a Turkish father and son, Ali and Nejat Aksu; a Turkish mother and daughter, Yeter and Ayten Öztürk; and a German mother and daughter, Susanne and Lotte Staub. Much like the narrative structure of *In July*, Akin opens *The Edge of Heaven* in the present, with a long panning shot that brings us to a filling station somewhere near the Black Sea, with Nejat (Baki Davrak) driving through the breathtaking Turkish landscape alone in a strangely serene state of melancholia suggestive of Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997). The flashbacks then come in the form of three separate, but overlapping parts, "Yeter's Death," "Lotte's Death," and "The Edge of Heaven," finally bringing us back to Nejat's drive and replaying the opening sequence before reaching the film's open ending with Nejat seated, almost like a figure in an oil painting, on the beach in unfulfilled anticipation.

The generational conflicts that Akin handles elsewhere in his opus—the pitched Oedipal battles and other forms of rebellion fought by the youthful, forward-looking characters of his films—come to violent expression in *The Edge of Heaven*. A professor of German literature in Bremen, Nejat is seemingly most at home in the world of German letters (later, after moving to Istanbul, he fittingly takes over as proprietor of a German bookstore), quoting from Goethe and often answering his father's Turkish questions in German; his father Ali (Tunçel Kurtiz), by contrast, holds fast to the ways of the old country, asserting his ownership of Yeter (Nursel Köse), whom he first meets working as a prostitute and brings into his home in the hope of establishing a semblance of normality. Ali's violent outburst, triggered by the suspicion Yeter has betrayed him, results in her death and an irreparable rift between him and Nejat. Though different in many respects to that between Nejat and his father, the fraught relationship of Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska) and her mother Susanne (Hanna Schygulla) also pivots on the generational conflict, with Susanne's bohemian past papered over by the bourgeois complacency of her middle-aged life in Hamburg ostensibly precluding the kind of social engagement her daughter demands. Susanne and Lotte spar over the latter's youthful idealism as well as her romantic and political devotion to Ayten (Yeşilçay Nurgül), a charismatic radical upstart and political refugee whom Lotte falls in love and takes under her wing, and for whom she doggedly insists on fighting to the bitter, lethal end. Ayten and her mother Yeter have long lost contact with one another, but are shown, in Akin's parallel stories, unknowingly to brush up against one another (as Nejat does with Ayten in Istanbul).

In his fearless treatment of cultural taboos and the dexterity with which he handles explosive social drama, Akin shows himself, specifically in his trilogy-in-progress, to be a legitimate heir to the Fassbinder estate. The affinities between *Head-On* and *Ali: Fears Eats the Soul* (1974), whether in their unflinching depiction of race and German identity or in their love of lush colors, dark eroticism, and the languid camera movements that convey their visual aesthetic, are plain. In essence, *Head-On* is the tale, allegorically speaking, of Ali's children. Similarly, Akin's choice in casting Hanna Schygulla as Susanne in *Edge of Heaven* is a conscious invocation of Schygulla's career as Fassbinder's muse, in particular her lead in *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979)—that icy, detached stand-in for postwar German political culture—which formed a cornerstone of Fassbinder's own trilogy. Her solo scene mourning the loss of Lotte in an Istanbul hotel room, shot from above and using stop motion to convey her bodily contortions of grief, is among the film's most powerful and unsettling. Akin compresses time, space, and emotion into this brief but essential sequence, cornering Susanne in her otherwise grand, sumptuous room, as she enacts without speech the full complexity of her loss.

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

In the final week of production on *The Edge of Heaven*, Akin's longtime collaborator, friend, and co-founder of their independent production company Corazón International,

Andreas Thiel, dropped dead of a stroke at the age of forty-eight. Akin and Thiel had long talked about doing something lighter, less fraught with politics, history, and memory, more pitched at the masses. During the final editing of *Head-On*, Akin dashed off a script that drew heavily from the life of his writing partner and stand-by actor Adam Bousdoukos, who owned Taverna, a popular restaurant in Hamburg that Akin frequented on a regular basis, and had recently endured a nasty split with his girlfriend. That script became *Soul Kitchen* (2009), which had its American debut at last year's Tribeca Film Festival, having picked up a Special Jury Prize at the 2009 Venice Film Festival, and was recently released on DVD by IFC Films. It marks a significant departure for Akin, a move away from the terrain of the two previous films and a return to the neighborhood.

Picking up where he left off in his role as Costa, the thief with a heart of gold in *Short Sharp Shock*, Bousdoukos plays restaurant owner and tough-luck magnet Zinos Kazantsakis. His restaurant, the eponymous Soul Kitchen, a greasy spoon in Hamburg's warehouse district famous for its fish sticks and free-flowing booze, faces a barrage of threats by health inspectors, tax collectors, and real-estate speculators. As if that weren't enough, Zinos's upper-crust girlfriend Nadine (Pheline Roggan), a journalist, leaves him behind to go on assignment in Shanghai and he promptly slips a disk in his back—allowing for plenty of gestural humor—when trying to lift the broken dishwasher in his kitchen. But with the help of his slick, dim-witted brother Ilias (Moritz Bleibtreu), out of prison on work furlough, along with a temperamental new chef named Shayn (Birol Ünel), whose culinary aspirations far exceed fish sticks, and a sharp-tongued waitress with bedroom eyes named Lucia (Anna Bederke), the place is transformed into a nightlife destination for all of Hamburg.

Seeking levity, Akin fills the script that he and Bousdoukos concocted with plenty of boisterous slapstick numbers. There's the tirade that Shayn throws at the tony restaurant at which Zinos first discovers him, when a customer asks to have his gazpacho heated up and Shayn plants his knife in the tablecloth (one American review ran under the witty title "Big Nacht"); the doomed Skype sex between Zinos and Nadine or her falling unconscious from sleeping pills mid-act during their last night together before she flies off to China;

Fatih Akin on the set of *Soul Kitchen*
Photo: Corazón International/Gordon Timpen. An IFC Films release.

Restaurant business

Soul Kitchen. © 2009 Corazón International. DVD: IFC Films.

Zinos's visits with a charming physical therapist named Anna (Dorka Gryllus) whose over-effective massage technique prompts a panicked request to flip over to his stomach; and their later visit to Kemal the Bone Cruncher (Ugur Yücel) to fix the uninsured Zinos's back once and for all. Much of the humor, even if a bit short on surprise, achieves the desired effect. It's hard not to chuckle, or even to belly laugh, when Zinos is on the dance floor at a disco doing his deep knee-bends and other therapeutic movements amid a sea of gyrating dancers. Part of what makes the film successful are the oddball characters—many of them created specifically for actors who collaborated with Akin in the past—including the crotchety Greek boat-builder Sokrates (Demir Gökgöl, who plays Sibel's strict father in *Head-On*) and the stooge-like poker pals of Ilias, Milli (Cem Akin, who has acted in nearly all of his little brother's films) and Ziege "The Goat" (Marc Hosemann, who has a memorable bit part as Sven in *Short Sharp Shock*). Rainer Klausmann, who photographed *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven*, puts his skills to good use here, as does Akin's faithful editor Andrew Bird, who has worked with the German director on every film since his first shorts.

More than anything else, *Soul Kitchen* focuses on the resilience of Zinos as he struggles to hold on to his restaurant, and to defend the home that it represents for its motley personnel and patrons, fending off the inhospitable forces conspiring against him, including the sleazy real-estate speculator in the figure of his old school buddy Thomas Neumann (Wotan Wilke Möhring). Yet the greatest threat of all comes from inside the family, when Ilias, mistaking himself for Dr. Mabuse, gambles the place away in a late-night card game with Neumann. At this point in the film, the overarching levity is stripped away, revealing something darker, even redolent of *The Edge of Heaven*. In what is perhaps the film's most poignant scene, Zinos, Ilias, and Sokrates are holed up in a dingy hotel room as visually confining as the one in which the grief-stricken Susanne finds herself in Istanbul, with Ilias doubled over in pain begging for forgiveness for what he's done to the restaurant, Sokrates pelting him with nasty epithets, and Zinos downing a bottle of wine in a near comatose state of disbelief. This scene, an obvious low point for the protagonists, is, however, quickly counterbalanced by their hair-brained scheme to break in and steal the deed from the municipal office before the transfer of ownership becomes final. The escapade fails almost from the moment that it's hatched, but it gives Ilias an unexpected chance to redeem himself, and, after a couple more plot twists, the restaurant is finally rescued for good.

A major ingredient of the film, never at the expense of the action but often sharing center stage, is the music. Akin already had experience directing a music documentary, *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2006), sandwiched in the middle of the two entries to his trilogy. In it, he has us follow Alexander Hacke, bassist of the German industrial thrash band Einstürzende Neubauten who helped score *Head-On*, to Istanbul where he meets with contemporary musicians, classical and popular, and almost like Alan Lomax in the Mississippi Delta, records their performances. Akin adeptly eludes the trap of ethnic essentialism by revealing the fertile cross-pollination of traditions: the Romani influence on Turkish folk music, the import of Seattle grunge by the rock band Duman and the speed rapping of Ceza, who spits his lyrics with similar verve and velocity to Busta Rhymes. In *Soul Kitchen*, he follows suit, moving outside of the Turkish German orbit to recognize his hometown's self-avowed predilection for American funk and soul, while also showcasing some of its local talents in rock and hip-hop.

Throughout the film, Akin, with the help of music supervisor Pia Hoffmann, draws on an infectious playlist that propels the narrative, amplifying the sensibility of his characters and their environment. Time and again we hear the synthesizer-heavy refrain to Zapp & Roger's "I Want to Be Your Man" as the signature ringtone of Zinos's cell phone. And Zinos himself offers as his emphatic retort to the tax collector Frau Schuster (Catrin Striebeck), as she and her colleague from the Finance Office do a repo job on his stereo for overdue payments: "Music is food for the soul." It's not long, as the story unfolds, before Milli and Ziege run off with the sound system of a local disco, relocating it to Soul Kitchen and giving Ilias the chance to woo Lucia with his prowess for spinning vinyl; Ivan "Boogaloo Joe" Jones's rapturous guitar playing on "Brown Bag" gets the place back on its feet. Along similar lines, in the film's orgiastic celebration—what amounts to an ill-fated sendoff for Zinos, hoping in vain to reunite with Nadine in China—Shayne's aphrodisiac-spiked dessert meets its match in Curtis Mayfield's "Get Down," with the tax collector Frau Schuster getting humped by Neumann on the dance floor. Akin periodically uses music to add a witty touch, as he does, for example, when Louis Armstrong's "The Creator Has a Master Plan" plays right after Zinos miraculously outbids his rival, speechless while choking on a button, in the public auction of the restaurant. Or the inclusion of old-time Hamburg movie star Hans Albers's crooner "Das Hemd," giving the film a dose of cozy *Heimat* flavor precisely at the moment that a frustrated Zinos is driving a forklift in the stockyards.

Musicology
Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul. © 2006 Corazón/ Intervista/NDR. DVD: Strand Releasing.

Sometime in the mid-1960s, around the same time that Fatih Akin's parents were settling in Germany and Dyke & The Blazers were releasing their rare-groove single "We Got More Soul," the American architect and architectural theorist Robert Venturi wrote a small manifesto in which he declared, "I am for messy vitality over obvious unity." These same words could be attributed to Akin, whose work favors a hybrid character that self-consciously incorporates the element of play, and that resists all notions of fixed identity. This is as true of his earliest shorts as it is of his latest pictures, the freighted works of his trilogy and the buoyant ode to Hamburg by one of its native sons alike.

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ABSTRACT A career survey of the work of Turkish German director Fatih Akin, whose films (notably *The Edge of Heaven* and *Soul Kitchen*) combine comedy with darker notes, emphasizing the theme of dual identity and paying particular attention to the use of music.

KEYWORDS *Short Sharp Shock, In July, Head-On, The Edge of Heaven, Soul Kitchen*