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'Olive Trees' a Wry, Subtle Look at Unrequited Love

MOVIE REVIEW

By KEVIN THOMAS
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Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami's *"Through the Olive Trees"* couldn't be more understated or modest, yet in its indirect way it exerts a cumulative emotional tug. As funny as it is poignant, it was inspired by two young people involved in the making of an earlier Kiarostami film, *"And Life Goes On,"* an account of a father and son traveling through earthquake-ravaged portions of Iran.

On the last day of shooting, Kiarostami realized that the young man playing a small role as a bridegroom was in real life in love with the young woman whom he had cast as the bride but who had spurned him repeatedly. This film envisions how a persistent suitor goes about trying to make real the role he is playing in the movie.

Kiarostami rounded up a cast of non-professionals, who in turn helped improvise their dialogue, with amazingly persuasive results. The setting is an earthquake-devastated village, where the newlyweds take over a damaged adobe house that the husband, a bricklayer, promises to restore to perfection.

Much of the humor—and sadness—occurs between takes of the film-within-the-film. For example,

when its director (Mohamad Ali Keshavarz, the one professional actor in the cast and well-known in Iran) tells the bricklayer, Hossein (Hossein Rezai), to ask his bride, Farkhonde (Tahereh Ladania), to look for his socks, he later reassures her that in real life he would never ask her to do such a thing.

Thankfully, *"Through the Olive Trees"* is not yet another solemn comment on art and reality, but rather a wry, compassionate observation on how events, whether they be a devastating earthquake or the making of a movie, affect people's dreams and destinies. In his sheer determination and innate decency Hossein recalls the little boy in Kiarostami's wonderful *"Homework,"* in which a doughty 8-year-old, living in an ancient mountain village, embarks on a long trek by foot to return a notebook to a classmate who will be expelled if he doesn't have it with him at the beginning of school the following day.

■ **MPAA rating: G. Times guidelines:** *There is no violence or sex, but the subject matter is too complex for small children.*

'Through the Olive Trees'

Hossein Rezai.....	Hossein
Tahereh Ladania.....	Farkhonde
Mohamad Ali Keshavarz.....	Director
Zarifeh Shiva.....	Director's Assistant

A Miramax presentation. Writer-director-editor Abbas Kiarostami. Cinematographers Hossein Djafarian and Farhad Saba. In Farsi, with English subtitles. Running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes.

■ *In limited release at the Westside Pavilion, 10800 W. Pico Blvd., West Los Angeles, (310) 475-0202.*