

# Sugartown: The Bridegrooms

Greece 2006, 82 min.

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*Sugartown* is both a terribly beautiful and frightfully empty town located on the Western Peloponnese coast. The romantic sunsets at sea are lost on the population of Zaharo (the town's Greek name) at this film's start, because it is a town without women.

"There are no women for the boys," everyone agrees, and an early title reveals that the town's 12,000 inhabitants are so short on brides that mayor Pandazis Chronopoulos is elected for promising to bring in women from abroad. While it's framed at the beginning and end by comic newsbytes, the documentary focuses on the bitersweet stories of three potential bridegrooms and Greco-Russian marriage diplomacy.

The story features Nondas, a 48-year-old rural café owner (he's also a Peter Falk look-alike and nicknamed "Kadafi"), Efthimis, a shy 38-year-old electrician, and Kostas, a 28-year-old rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed shepherd. As the rural town organizes its trip, eventu-

ally settling on an exchange with the Russian city of Kiln, eight kilometres from Moscow, each of the men confesses he is looking for no more than a woman who is "a good person". "I have everything I need in life," Kostas wistfully explains, "a house, a car, a tractor, fields, animals. I have my fortune. But I need a partner." Efthimis confesses he's been burned in the past (with old home video footage of the dancing perpetrator for evidence) and makes a joke about kidnapping the right woman.

The straightforward, fixed camerawork captures rural Greece's both stark and often kitschy texture. A shot of the bare light bulb burning outside Nondas' café at night speaks volumes about loneliness. When the Greek men travel to Russia and start meeting women, the camera does a good job of capturing the unfolding romantic developments and cultural awkwardness. There is always a strain of hope as well as sadness. It records the negotiations between the two countries' officials, and unveils one Russian priest's financial greed.

The chronological journey back and forth between Greece and Russia, with abundant titles to guide the audience, is set to optimistic rhythm-and-blues shuffles (by Sergios Voudris) as well as sadder, Greek instrumentals and one grandpa's impromptu folk songs.

Despite the mayor's promises, organized luncheons, dark nightclub outings and TV hype, love is harder than anyone assumes. Marital bliss turns out to be more elusive than the Greek bridegrooms thought it would.

Angelike Contis