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SPECIAL EDITION OF THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE ON SLOVAK CINEMA

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50 ROKOV  
50 YEARS  
SLOVENSKÉHO  
FILMOVÉHO ÚSTAVU  
THE SLOVAK FILM  
INSTITUTE  
1963 - 2013

# *film.sk*

## NEW FILMS

- **Miracle**
- **Normalization**
- **Velvet Terrorists**

## REVIEWS

- **My Dog Killer**
- **Fine, Thanks**

## INTERVIEW

- **Mira Fornay**

**WE INTRODUCE  
THE SLOVAK FILM INSTITUTE**

**2012 IN SLOVAK FILM**

Best  
1921  
1991  
Of  
Slovak  
Film



## An Introduction to 35 Slovak Films and 20 Slovak Filmmakers

Film entries written by  
**Peter Hames**

### EDITORIAL

You will find an optimistic remark about the direction of Slovak film at the start of the review of *My Dog Killer* and the special issue of the monthly *Film.sk* that you are holding in your hands also serves to testify that such a contention is appropriate. So what happened in Slovak cinema last year? In addition to a consistent account of distribution results, we also offer three evaluative studies by film theoreticians who, in separate texts, reflect on Slovak feature, documentary and animated production in 2012.

But we also move to the beginning of this year, as that is when the second film by director Mira Fornay *My Dog Killer* was released. It contributed to the aforesaid optimism, not solely by winning the Hivos Tiger Award at the Rotterdam Film Festival, where the noteworthy full-length feature début by director Mátýás Prikler *Fine, Thanks* was also presented. In 2013, further much-awaited new films by Slovak filmmakers should be released in cinemas. We have chosen at least three of them. One of these is *Miracle* which is featured on the cover of the magazine. Director Juraj Lehotský made it as his second full-length project. He made his début with the documentary *Blind Loves* and in 2008 the film won the C.I.C.A.E Award (International Confederation of Art Cinemas Award) at the Cannes Film Festival.

In the final part of the magazine, the activities of the jubilee Slovak Film Institute (SFI) – the sole state organisation operating in the area of audiovision in Slovakia – are described. The SFI is one of those institutions which cultivate this area most strongly; however, the initiatives of the filmmakers themselves are still important. Those who got on the pages of this magazine frequently deal with depressing, problematic, controversial topics. Where then is the aforesaid optimism? It lies in the belief that these films are not just of high quality but they are also capable of appealing to foreign audiences.

► **Daniel Bernát** ( Editor-in-Chief )

## The History and Present of Film.sk

*Film.sk* is a monthly about film events in Slovakia published by the Slovak Film Institute. It has been published since January 2000 and up to 2010 it was the only film periodical in print in Slovakia. The magazine's editor-in-chief Simona Nôtová was present at its birth and she managed it until September last year. Naturally, the monthly has undergone conceptual changes over the course of its existence but it was always based on the principle of the provision of a broad range of information on the events in the local film and audiovisual milieu.

At present, *Film.sk* is comprised of permanent sections: the Interview, Topic and Review which are complemented by further regular and irregular sections. These include current film events, reports on film festivals and film presentations in Slovakia and abroad, evaluating reflections on important events, an overview of distribution premières in the given month but, in addition, the glosses or comments of experienced film journalists, contributions by filmmakers who respond to questions about the projects they are currently working on, profiles of personalities of Slovak cinema, separate texts about new Slovak films based on the accounts of directors and producers, presentations of inspirational new books from the area of film literature and several other sections. *Film.sk* also contains attachments which chart the annual results in one of the areas of Slovak cinema and provide valuable statistical data. One of the regular attachments brings readers a report summarising Slovak cinematography for the previous year, divided into a number of chapters: Legislation, Financial Support, Film Education, Film Production, Film Distribution, Cinemas, Multiplexes and Film Clubs, Film Festivals and Film Screenings. The study of Czech cinematography, which is also published as an attachment to the monthly magazine, takes on a similar structure.

Contemporarily, *Film.sk* is a well-established film magazine capable of appealing to film experts, filmmakers, students and the wider public alike. The website [www.filmsk.sk](http://www.filmsk.sk) has supported its printed version since 2001.

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## The Slovak Film Institute is Fifty Years Old

The Slovak Film Institute (SFI) is the sole memory and state-funded organisation operating in the area of audio-visual in Slovakia. The National Film Archive and the National Cinematographic Centre are the SFI's basic organisational units. The SFI is a member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), European Film Promotion (since 2006); it functions as a service workplace for the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO) and the Council of Europe cinema support fund – Eurimages. Since 2006, MEDIA Desk Slovakia has been a part of the Slovak Film Institute and the Cultural Contact Point also operates as an independent office within the SFI.

- The Film Institute in Bratislava was established on 1 April 1963 and it was placed under the directorate of Film Production and Distribution (Filmová tvorba a distribúcia) in Bratislava. The film archive also became part of the Institute; it was established in 1958 by the film historian Ivan Rumanovský at the Slovak Film Distribution Company (Slovenská požičovňa filmov).
- In 1970, the SFI was presented with a copy of the first Slovak full-length feature film *Jánošík* (Jánošík, dir. Jaroslav Siakel, 1921) which was later restored, provided with a soundtrack and in 1995 UNESCO placed it among the world cultural heritage.
- In 1972, the Film Institute came under the Central Office of Slovak Film (Ústredie slovenského filmu).
- By the end of 1976 the Film Club of the Central Office of Slovak Film was opened in Bratislava; at the present day, Cinema Lumière, belonging to the Slovak Film Institute, is located on its premises.
- In July 1989 the SFI came under the state organisation Slovak Film Production Bratislava – Koliba (Slovenská filmová tvorba Bratislava – Koliba) up to 1 January 1991 when, by decision of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic (MC SR), the Slovak Film Institute – National Cinematographic Centre was established as an independent public contributory organisation managed by the MC SR. Hence, by delimitation, the SFI also acquired producer rights to the archived films which were made before 1991 by Slovak Film Production.
- The Slovak Film Institute participated in the preparation of the extensive publication called *History of Slovak Cinematography* (Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie, 1997); currently the second, updated edition is in preparation.
- In 2001, the SFI became a full member of the prestigious International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF).
- In 2002, the SFI published its first DVD (Pictures of the Old World/Obrazy starého sveta, dir. Dušan Hanák, 1972); since then it has published dozens of other DVDs in over 500,000 copies.
- In 2002, the SFI started to implement the long-term integrated audiovisual information system project, SK CINEMA, for processing, storing, interconnecting, organising, searching and presenting information from the SFI's individual departments.
- In 2006, the Government adopted the draft Project of the Systematic Restoration of Audiovisual Cultural Heritage and Making It Accessible with the objective of rescuing cinematographic and audiovisual works and gradually making them accessible to the public. This is the SFI's long-term priority project.
- In 2008, the Audiovisual Act entered into effect. It regulated and re-defined the position, tasks and activities of the SFI.
- In 2008, SFI's shop Klapka.sk was opened. It presents a broad offer of filmological literature, DVDs and CDs and other materials.
- Since 2011, in association with the Radio and Television of Slovakia, the SFI has implemented the national project entitled Digital Audiovision in order to systematically digitise the audiovisual heritage and make it accessible. Two specialised digitisation workplaces should also be established as part of the project.
- In September 2011, Cinema Lumière was opened in Bratislava. Films are shown in two screening rooms and the cinema is operated by the SFI.



## SLOVAK FILM DISTRIBUTION IN 2012:

# We Are in the Middle of Europe

► Miro Ulman

Slovakia is in the middle of Europe, not only in geographical terms, but also based on the preliminary distribution results for 2012. This conclusion derives from a press release issued by the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO) during the 63rd Berlin International Film Festival. We have not achieved the top positions with regard to year-on-year indicators, as we did in 2009; nevertheless it is pleasing that, even in a crisis, we are keeping close to the European average.

In 2012, 3,436,269 viewers visited Slovak cinemas. That was 4.64% fewer than in 2011, but it should be noted that, according to the preliminary results, the year-on-year decline in admissions was 2.2% across the European Union (EU). For instance, Italy (9.9%) or France (6.3%) recorded a more dramatic drop than Slovakia. Moreover, these were the fourth highest admission figures in Slovak cinemas since 1998. As the number of screenings remained approximately the same as in 2011 – 114,900 screenings even represents a year-on-year increase of 0.10% – the average admission per screening fell from 31.39 viewers in 2011 to 29.91 in 2012. That means a drop of 4.74% and the historically lowest average admission per screening in the era of independent Slovakia. But the average admission fee increased from EUR 4.79 in 2011 to a record EUR 5.11, which resulted in an increase in revenues of 1.71%. In all, audiences paid EUR 17,548,181 for admission.

In 2012, twenty-one Slovak and co-production full-length films were made, and only seven of these were minority co-productions. Last year seventeen Slovak films, including five minority co-productions, were released in Slovak cinemas. However, the fact of many films does not automatically mean many viewers. While in 2011 the

domestic films share in total admissions was 10.06%, including minority co-productions, and after subtracting them the share dropped to 4.76%, in 2012, a total of 103,759 viewers went to see Slovak films, which represents only 3.02% of the total admissions. After subtracting the results of minority co-productions, this number falls to 81,852 viewers, being 2.38%. This is a huge drop, especially for minority co-productions, as 21,907 viewers represents only 8.7% of the admissions to minority co-productions in 2011. Only in 2010 were fewer viewers (9,297) curious to view this part of local production in the past few years. But in 2011 over 100,000 people saw Jakub Kroner's film *Lóve* within seven weeks and the minority co-production *Identity Card* (*Občiansky preukaz*, dir. Ondřej Trojan) was even more successful. Last year's fall in admissions to domestic releases was due, especially, to the lack of a hit, but also due to the related decline in the number of screenings by almost a half (from 8,074 in 2011 to 4,876 in 2012) and the drop in average attendance per screening. While in 2011, 37.59 viewers, on average, went to see a 100% Slovak film or majority co-production, last year it was only 21.86 viewers. This drop was even more marked for minority co-productions. Compared with the excellent average

## DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST-RUN SLOVAK AND CO-PRODUCTION FILMS IN SLOVAKIA IN 2012

MOVIE TITLE	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION YEAR	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	RELEASE DATE	SCREENING FORMAT	NUMBER OF SCREENINGS	ADMISSIONS	GROSS BOX OFFICE	AVERAGE ATTENDANCE PER SCREENING	AVERAGE ADMISSION FEE	DISTRIBUTION COMPANY
1. Confidant (eŠteBák)	Juraj Nvota	2011	SK/CZ/PL	19/4/2012	DCP	842	25 310	122 237.78	30.06	4.83 €	Continental Film
2. So Fine (Tak fajn)	Pavol Janík	2012	SK	12/7/12	DCP	631	13 502	65 897.47	21.40	4.88 €	Continental Film
3. Dancing on Broken Glass (Tanec medzi črepinami)	Marek Tapák	2012	SK	21/6/2012	DCP, DVD	573	10 281	38 410.19	17.94	3.74 €	Film Europe
4. Tigers in the City (Tigre v meste)	Juraj Krasňohorský	2012	SK	7/6/12	DCP	352	7 420	34 082.09	21.08	4.59 €	Continental Film
5. Evil (Zlo)	Peter Bebjak	2012	SK	12/4/12	DCP	370	6 852	31 436.62	18.52	4.59 €	Continental Film
6. Made in Ash (Až do mesta Aš)	Iveta Grófová	2012	SK/CZ	13/9/2012	DCP, Blu-ray, DVD	66	2 409	2 976.59	36.50	1.24 €	ASFK
7. Bells of Happiness (Zvonky šťastia)	Marek Šulík, Jana Bučka	2012	SK	2/9/12	DCP, Blu-ray, DVD	49	1 504	1 213.70	30.69	0.81 €	Filmtopia
8. Men of Revolution (Muži revolúcie)	Zuzana Piusi	2012	SK	19/1/2012	DVD, Blu-ray	48	1 129	1 893.99	23.52	1.68 €	ASFK
9. Angels (Anjeli)	Róbert Šveda	2012	SK	3/5/12	DCP	140	956	4 005.55	6.78	4.19 €	Continental Film
10. Immortalitas	Erik Bošňák	2012	SK	1/3/12	DCP, DVD	130	777	3 010.75	5.98	3.87 €	Film Europe
11. The Gypsy Vote (Cigáni idú do volieb)	Jaroslav Vojtek	2012	SK/CZ	8/11/12	DCP	30	278	1 000.02	9.27	3.60 €	Bonton Film
12. The Grasp of the State (Od Fica do Fica)	Zuzana Piusi	2012	SK	17/11/2012	DVD, Blu-ray	4	302	14.7	75.50	0.49 €	LEON Productions
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100% Slovak films and majority co-productions</b>					<b>3 235</b>	<b>70 720</b>	<b>306 311.75</b>	<b>21.86</b>	<b>4.33 €</b>	
1. The Blue Tiger (Modrý tiger)	Petr Oukropec, Bohdan Sláma	2012	CZ/SK	22/3/2012	35 mm, DCP	473	6 716	23 928.32	14.20	3.56 €	Continental Film
2. In the Shadow (V tieni)	David Ondříček	2012	CZ/SK	20/9/2012	DCP	501	5 371	26 554.14	10.72	4.94 €	Continental Film
3. 7 Days of Sin (7 dní hříchu)	Jiří Chlumský	2012	CZ/SK	1/11/12	DCP	351	4 658	22 426.29	13.27	4.81 €	Itafilm
4. Alois Nebel	Tomáš Luňák	2011	CZ/DE/SK	16/2/2012	35 mm, DCP	141	1 903	7 115.32	13.50	3.74 €	Forum Film Slovakia/PubRes
5. Don't Stop	Richard Řeřicha	2012	CZ/SK	28/6/2012	DCP	175	1 362	6 361.47	7.78	4.67 €	Forum Film Slovakia
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Minority co-productions</b>					<b>1 641</b>	<b>20 010</b>	<b>86 385.54</b>	<b>12.19</b>	<b>4.32 €</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>All Slovak and co-production films</b>					<b>4 876</b>	<b>90 730</b>	<b>392 697.29</b>	<b>18.61</b>	<b>4.33 €</b>	



admission of 53.32 viewers per screening in 2011, last year's minority co-productions attracted only 12.19 viewers on average. And these included, for instance, the holder of the European Film Award for Animation *Alois Nebel* (dir. Tomáš Luňák) and the Czech Academy Awards candidate *In the Shadow* (*V tieni*, dir. David Ondříček).

Just for comparison, based on the share of admissions to domestic productions of the total admissions, in 2012, France was the most successful among the EU countries with a 40.5% share. Outside of the EU, the highest admissions to domestic productions were recorded in Turkey (46.6%).

## 226 New Releases

While in 2012 we only came close to the record for the number of premières of Slovak titles (the highest number, eighteen, was recorded in 2009), the total number of new films in Slovak cinemas was historically the highest (since 1945). Sixteen distribution companies (on 1 August 2012 Bontonfilm started operating on the Slovak market and it took over film distribution from Tatrafilm which now only operates cinemas) released 226 films in our cinemas, which represents twenty-six more than the previous maximum in 2010. Out of the total number of films, thirty-eight were released in film clubs. The highest number of premières was recorded in September (27) also thanks to Project 100 – 2012; by contrast, the lowest number (ten) were released in December. Distributors released films from 24 countries: most of the premiered films came from the USA

(93), while France and the Czech Republic ranked second with 23 premières.

## Most Viewers Saw *Ice Age 4: Continental Drift*

In 2012, Tatrafilm/Bontonfilm was the most successful distribution company. It is the clear leader with 48 premières, 79 films screened in 2012, with a 37.77% audience share and 38.74% share of gross box office. The company had three out of the four most viewed films of the year: *Ice Age 4: Continental Drift*, *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2* and *Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted*. Continental Film was ranked second (admissions share – 23.10%, gross box office share – 23.29%); it had the following films in the TOP 10: *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*. Forum Film was ranked third (viewer share – 12.69%, gross box office share – 12.39%), it distributed the James Bond movie, *Skyfall*. The film with the highest attendance for 2012 was *Ice Age 4: Continental Drift*. It was viewed by 244,567 people (in 2011 the equivalent was *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* with 212,214 viewers).

Unlike previous years, no Slovak films were ranked in the TOP 10, nor TOP 20. The best attended domestic film *Confidant* (*eŠteBák*) with 25,310 viewers was ranked 39th. Pavol Janík's début *So Fine* (*Tak fajn*) also managed to exceed the 10,000 mark (13,502 viewers) as well as the first film made by Marek Ťapák *Dancing on Broken Glass* (*Tanec medzi črepinami*, 10,281

viewers). With regard to minority co-productions, *The Blue Tiger* (*Modrý tiger*) was the most successful title in 2012 with 6,716 viewers. For comparison, in 2011 the previously mentioned *Lóve* attracted more than 20,000 viewers in the first three weeks – 26,811, 22,424 and 20,905 viewers.

The final part of the vampire series *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2* entered Slovak distribution history last year – 94,197 viewers during the opening weekend is a new Slovak record. In addition, during the same weekend commencing 15 November, Slovak cinemas recorded the highest weekend box office ever, i.e. over EUR 630,000.

While in 2011, 155 premiered films were still available on 35mm film, i.e. 78.28%, the figure for 2012 was only 61 films (27.23%). It is interesting to note that, in 2012, after unsuccessful negotiations with distributors, the new film by Zuzana Piussi *The Grasp of the State* (*Od Fica do Fica*) was made available on the Internet. From 20 November to the end of the year, 12,834 viewers from 65 countries (including India, Bahrain, Tanzania and Barbados) saw the film via the Piano system, which enables website operators to charge for on-line content. This film was seen by more viewers than last year's third most attended domestic film in cinemas. In 2012, only two Slovak films were also released in 35mm copies (minority co-productions *Alois Nebel* and *The Blue Tiger*) and all the premiered films except for two films by director Zuzana Piussi (*Men of Revolution*, *The Grasp of the State*) were available on DCP media.

## Slovak Films in Czech Distribution

2012 was also an exceptional year with regard to the distribution of Slovak films in Czech cinemas. According to the Union of Film Distributors (UFD) of the Czech Republic, sixteen Slovak and co-production films were screened in the cinemas of our neighbour to the west (among them a record eleven premières), and these were viewed by 370,850 viewers. The Czech national candidate for the Academy Award *In the Shadow* was the most successful; from its première on 13 September the film was viewed by 190,106 people up to the end of the year (it was the second most successful minority co-production in Slovakia with 5,371 viewers). And how did other Slovak premières

fare in the Czech Republic? *Lóve* was premiered on 12 January (14,225 viewers), *The Blue Tiger* on 23 February (97,203 viewers), *Apricot Island* on 22 March (1,559 viewers), *Obscurantist and His Lineage or The Pyramids' Tearful Valleys* (*Tmář a jeho rod aneb Slzavé údolí pyramid*) on 3 May (388 viewers), *Don't Stop* on 14 June (4,477 viewers), *Confidant* on 5 July (13,882 viewers), *So Fine* on 9 August (1,438 viewers), *The Greatest Wish* (*Najväčšie pranie*) on 20 September (7,443 viewers), *7 Days of Sin* (*7 dní hříchů*) on 1 November (36,582 viewers) and *Made in Ash* (*Až do mesta Aš*) on 15 November (1,607 viewers). This was the first time that majority Slovak films had higher admissions in the Czech Republic (33,045 viewers) than all the minority co-productions in Slovakia (21,907 viewers).

2013 looks set to present a record number of domestic premières and also attractive foreign titles. We will see how successful they are in attracting audiences. ▲

## TOP 10 SLOVAKIA (1 January – 31 December 2012)

ADMISSION

1. <i>Ice Age 4: Continental Drift</i> .....	244 567
2. <i>The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn - Part 2</i> .....	180 766
3. <i>Skyfall</i> .....	154 675
4. <i>Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted</i> .....	133 436
5. <i>The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey</i> .....	102 311
6. <i>The Dark Knight Rises</i> .....	91 242
7. <i>Hotel Transylvania</i> .....	91 216
8. <i>American Pie: Reunion</i> .....	65 171
9. <i>Brave</i> .....	64 704
10. <i>Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows</i> .....	61 570

Source: Union of Film Distributors of the SR



# Discoveries and Mistakes of Feature Film

► Katarína Mišíková

In 2012, the hopeful production and stylistic trends heralded in the previous year by *The House* (Dom) and *Apricot Island* (Marhuľový ostrov) were confirmed. The hint of a certain continuous development of feature production lies not in any school, movement, stream or free grouping, but the authors' poetics and genre preferences allow us to sense that feature film in Slovakia has gained its second wind.

The new releases announced for 2013 confirm the upward trend to date. The reasons can also be found in the functioning legislative framework for the support of cinema but, when looking at the budgets for the individual films, it is quite clear that the key to success in no way lies solely in the state subsidies.

Eight feature films with a Slovak majority share is just two more than in 2011; however, the more marked generation stratification and genre diversification merit attention. After a period dominated by intimate auteurist films, genre audience films became the hot assignment of 2012. The new generation of filmmakers that matured professionally in a cinematographic environment with almost no means, managed to create new production platforms. Three of last year's films got no state funds for shooting (*Evil*, *Angels*, *Immortalitas*) and only one of them used the distribution subsidy (*Angels*). It is no surprise that

D. N. A. Production was the signature beneath the two watchable items of these three guerrilla projects. In addition to art films this company also has several respected television productions in its portfolio.

With regard to genres, last year brought two new films: the horror *Evil* (Zlo) and the action sci-fi *Immortalitas*. Both were inspired by well-established Hollywood elements, but that is all they have in common. *Evil* is an exemplary genre exercise which maximises its effect with minimum means without making any contrived effort to make a statement. It spreads tension, it evokes fear and it winks conspiratorially at an informed viewer. It draws on the favourite found-footage procedures and motivates the emergence of a film by making a series about paranormal phenomena. This strategy has several advantages: it creates an impression of authenticity enhanced by shooting in real locations, it realistically motivates

work with the space off-screen (*Evil* is shown only in hints or off-screen); it enhances the participation of the audience by means of the cinematographer who, in certain moments, moves from behind the camera to in front of it. Director Peter Bebjak works with quotations (e.g. *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Shining*, *The Exorcist*) in a self-reflexive manner, he uses genre clichés with minimum special effects (e.g. a haunted house, holy water, a zombie) and from time to time he spices them up with humour – for instance when the two scary girls are taken away by their mother or when the rescued cinematographer returns in the end for his forgotten camera and pays for it – how else – with his life.

*Immortalitas* by director Erik Bošňák has been criticised so much that one is almost ashamed to "kick the corpse". The film whose makers mostly still attend the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts could have been quite a nice amateur effort – as demonstrated by the stiff acting performances, awkwardly ridiculous special effects and the naïve and dramatically unfinished story. However, in such case, the film should not have pretended to be a metaphysical deliberation about the eternal fight between good and evil with a touch of the mystery of the four elements or the temptation in paradise. And, primarily, it should never have been put on general release. Paradoxically, this incomprehensible decision on the part of the company Film Europe has probably brought the filmmakers more damage than benefits.

*Dancing on Broken Glass* (Tanec medzi črepinami), by director, screenwriter and main protagonist Marek Ťapák, does not conquer any new genre territories but it returns to the socialist-realistic tradition of a musical – dancing folklore film. It thus pays tribute not only to our cultural heritage but also to the author's father, actor, director and dancer, Martin Ťapák. Times have changed so he does this using a different ideological background and in a new garb. Instead of melding folklore with industrial motifs, Ťapák chose to link Slovak folk songs with world music. The film is based on a performance of the Slovak Folk Art Ensemble (SĽUK) of the same name and, in addition to the attractive musical arrangements, it also features photogenic panoramas of the Slovak countryside. However, it encounters the pro-

blem of transforming a stage performance into a film. The film is composed of non-homogeneous scenes and not even the poetic interfaces are able to link them into a more cohesive formal framework; instead of archetypal ideas emerging from the emotional memory of the protagonist, they become the shards of more or less inventive filmic solutions for capturing the individual choreographies. Despite the professional work of the camera, high-quality editing and the performances of the musicians and dancers, *Dancing on Broken Glass* is "folklore from a can" (Elo Havetta), substituting the authentic relationship to folk roots with sycophantic kitsch.

For years the comedy genre has represented a baptism of fire for Slovak filmmakers and only a few filmmakers have emerged from the fire without burns. The year 2012 brought one less unsuccessful and one extremely unsuccessful attempt at light summer comedy. *Tigers in the City* (Tigre v meste) by director Juraj Krasnohorský builds on several unconventional narrative ideas (e.g. casting an actress in the main male role or the multiple denouement of the story), mixing genres (romantic comedy and thriller) and attractive, even postcard or advertising visual solutions. The film was trailed as being new, funny, light, colourful, modern, original and with a happy ending, i.e. as a light colourful bubble. But when this bubble bursts, the impression it leaves is mixed. A "message" would not be fit for the *Tigers in the City*, but the over-frivolous approach to the script resulted in losing the more consequential points of situations, hence audiences with a more advanced film literacy, capable of multi-layer understanding, may have lost interest in playing the game which only pretends to be intelligent.

Unfortunately, *So Fine* (Tak fajn) might have better served solely as an exploitation of the soundtrack on commercial radio which usually selects the loudest trash from local music production. In *So Fine* you can find all that trash nicely added to the "feel good" clip sequences. Director, cinematographer and screenwriter Pavol Janík Jr. based his script on a collection of holiday anecdotes and made a film in which "everyone who ever spent a holiday at the seaside can find him/herself". The quality of the story of the three friends who go on holiday together and

where, despite all the twists and turns, everything ends well, matches this strategy of the director. The author has really missed the point because, in addition to the simple plot, characters and physical humour, he can only provide predictable punch-lines (e.g. throwing stones or the sea urchin in the shower). These cannot be saved, not even by the details of the enormous bosom of the main female protagonist or the grimaces of the male protagonists.

*Angels (Anjeli)* by Róbert Šveda was named as a gay film for depicting the romantic relationship between two men. This is somewhat simplistic because, if the lovers were heterosexual, not a lot would change. While Šveda's début *Demons (Démoni)* was a film about the demons of love, *Angels* are primarily about dying, hence also about the final things in life. The film which was made as a divertissement amongst friends whilst waiting to make *Čubirková* was filmed in non-standard form as a video on digital single-lens reflex cameras. Despite this, the filmmakers managed to not only achieve a visual balance but also the intimacy of a chamber drama. This intimacy is not disturbed, rather enhanced by the references to the director's other projects and role models (most evident are the links to Bergman and his *Cries and Whispers* and to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*), as well as Biblical allusions. This transforms *Angels* into a personal film which draws the audience into the author's universe. However, the unbalanced emotional narrative tone, at times gently hinting, at others exulting, does not suit the film, nor does the senseless over-simplification of the ending.

Juraj Nvota dealt with the topic of normalisation in *Music (Muzika)* and he returned to the same period with his film *Confidant (eŠteBák)* – the story of a man who involuntarily becomes the instrument and opponent of power. He builds his story in particular on the attractive casting and standard quality of filmmaking. The genre characteristic "bitter comedy" equates to a softening view of the past. The story is based on authentic archive materials, but it shows only a deformed cliché. It was intended primarily for a young audience who did not experience the communist era but instead of offering an understanding of history, the film affords only a naïve distortion of the past (wiretapping of the writer), vulgar

schemes (luxury goods bought in special shops using convertible-currency vouchers or the communist concrete apartment buildings) and the unpardonable vindication of collaboration with the regime. It depicts the weakling, not dissimilar to Tóno Brtko from *The Shop on Main Street (Obchod na korze)*, as an inconspicuous fighter against the regime(!).

The greatest discovery of the year is undoubtedly Iveta Grófová's film *Made in Ash (Až do mesta Aš)* which veers inspirationally on the verge of feature, documentary and animated film. The final product was preceded first by honest documentary and subsequently by scriptwriting-dramaturgic preparation which balanced non-fiction scenes with non-actors with staged scenes. The rough story about young women from a socially disadvantaged environment who come to the town of Aš – the symbolic end of the (post-communist) world – solely to slave away first as seamstresses and then as mattresses for sex tourists, offers a painful view of the market aspects of human relations. Due to the non-expressiveness of the main character, the film has the potential to be close to the merciless observation of Ulrich Seidl, if it didn't display allusive narration and if it didn't penetrate the intimacy of emotions, dreams and desires of the main protagonist. Grófová managed to achieve a strange sensitivity thanks to the animated scenes which visualise the main hero's inner world in a diary form. In turn, recordings from the web camera evoke the distance between separated lovers and the forlornness of the girl in the big world. Shots made with cell phones and discreetly aestheticised taciturn shots of intimate scenes subjectivise the narrative.

It appears that the honour of Slovak cinema is no longer borne solely by documentaries. Not only because documentary filmmakers are resorting more and more frequently to the expressive means of feature film but also because young female directors are making social dramas with a remarkably unsentimental sensibility and young male directors have found a way of putting a craft fine-tuned by commercial production into the service of the auteur cinema. ▲

## A Rich Year, But Not a Year of Big Auteurist Films

► Mária Ferenčuhová

The auteurist documentary has long lacked continuity in Slovakia. After 1990 the Film Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts was virtually the only institution to lead would-be filmmakers towards developing author's strategies in non-fiction film, even though there was no interest in these strategies in practice. Nowadays it would seem that better times are dawning for the auteurist documentary since the inception of the Audiovisual Fund and in part also thanks to the contract Radio and Television of Slovakia concluded with the Government.

Documentary is finding its way more and more frequently into cinemas – not only during film festivals but also in regular film distribution. In 2006, *Other Worlds (Iné svety)* by director Marko Škop was the sole original title in distribution. In the more fruitful years of 2008 and 2009, the number of full-length documentaries produced for cinemas exceeded 30% of the entire majority Slovak film production.

However, when evaluating the documentaries made in 2012, it would be a mistake to focus just on the distribution titles. There were only four, two of which were made by director Zuzana Piussi. And only two of the four, *Men of Revolution (Muži revolúcie)* by Zuzana Piussi and *The Gypsy Vote (Cigáni idú do voľieb)* by Jaro Vojtek, arrived in cinemas courtesy of well-established distribution companies. *Bells of Happiness (Zvonky šťastia)* by Jana Bučka and Marek Šulík was distributed by a new distribution company, Filmtopia, which distributes films mostly in alternative spaces, not in regular cinemas. *The Grasp of the State (Od Fica do Fica)* by Zuzana Piussi was distributed through the Internet within the fee-paying service Piano.

All four of the films distributed have something

The Grasp of the State (Od Fica do Fica) • PHOTO: LEON Productions

in common. They focus either on Roma issues or on politics, more specifically on elections, or on both. The films about Roma, *Bells of Happiness* and *The Gypsy Vote*, have a further element in common, i.e. the motif of a documentary play, which is evocative of some formats of private television companies. While the *Bells of Happiness* admitted this format and balanced the charming artificiality of the role play with a refreshing invasion of scarcely comprehensible reality, the urgency of Vojtek's film was watered down by the never-subsiding performance of the protagonists, the Sendreis, as if it were not Sendrei's objective to enter local politics but just the role which he decided to play in society and in the film. However, something substantial permeates from *The Gypsy Vote* which also characterises the socially engaged films by Zuzana Piussi: Jaro Vojtek, as if coincidentally, managed to show the reasons why we are not able to change the current situation in our society from the bottom or from within a community. Just as in *The Grasp of the State*, in *The Gypsy Vote* we can also feel the absence of a vision, but even so the inadequate organisation of those who want to change matters, or the inability to estimate or



react to the needs of one's own target group.

The films by Zuzana Piussi, probably the most prolific Slovak documentary filmmaker, have lately focused on social-political topics: she resolves the issues of political culture, problems of civic ethics and even focuses on the phenomenon of national pride and expressions of extremism. Her film *Disease of the Third Power* (*Nemoc tretej moci*, 2011) and all the three films she made in 2012, *Men of Revolution*, *Fragile Identity* (*Krehká identita*) and *The Grasp of the State*, together create a sort of "tetralogy about Slovakia". They present a somewhat unflattering image of the country, which is sometimes captured soberly and accurately, at other times is presented in a grotesque and distorted way; flat at some points, and in turn monstrously blown up. *The Grasp of the State* belongs to the flatter, biased films, making highly selective use of the available information. Despite the "neat" editing and distinct narration underlined by the author's comments and animated insertions, the film becomes amorphous in the end. Hence, the bleak impression it leaves is twice as big as it might have been, there is no resolution of the situation captured and the film lacks point.

The film *Men of Revolution* or its first part, which is inversely structured, is also missing a punch-line – and it isn't even finished: from general, tessellated information on the events from the revolution in November 1989 to the first free elections in June 1990 it progresses to an almost documentary investigation of the case of Ján Budaj and his departure from politics. The collection of talking heads is enlivened by the confrontation with archival materials from 1989 and 1990, but also by the mutual confrontation of the individual current testimonies. *Men of Revolution* explores this topic but far from exhausts it.

I dare designate the *Fragile Identity* as Piussi's best film so far. It is not only her purest film in visual and structural terms, but it also establishes a parallel which leaves a strong, even sinister impression. The Pánis-esque rhetoric and the literally religious raving of several patriots glorifying Slavonic culture as if it were the only one in Europe finds its counterpart in the droning of the crowds in the streets, and what seems in the case of a few individuals like an oddity would become monstrous if it were to affect the masses. The por-

trait depicted by Zuzana Piussi in this film is again not flattering. However, it is impressive and, in a certain sense of the word, less biased than any of the author's previous films.

In addition to *Fragile Identity* more than fifty other documentaries were screened at festivals in 2012. At first sight, this figure seems to be strikingly high, but many of these films are short students' films. Even though the jury of the Students Film Festival Áčko in Bratislava decided not to award the Best Documentary, I believe that some of the films screened at least deserve a mention. In *No Closet Issue* (*WeC verejná*) Katarína Hlinčíková tried quite successfully to create a visual-anthropological essay on the culture of public toilets, taken as a synecdoche of the nation's culture. The sociological aspect of this film became lost to the benefit of some charming details; however, in any case, we have to appreciate the author's will to make a "symptomatology" of Slovakia and depict it in a playful and attractive manner. *Zuna* by Mária Martiniaková focuses on the seemingly exclusively women's topic of natural birth. The journalistic dimension is sensitively linked to the extremely perceptive view of the author. Martiniaková has made educational or popular-educational films from the very beginning of her studies and *Zuna* is one of her best.

Mária Rumanová managed to create a charming portrait of two Bratislava nightingales, even though it is a pity that she shot her film *Bezmocná hŕstka* virtually whenever the main protagonists had time to spare, which limited their film portrait by a quite significant dimension. By contrast, Ľubica Sopková decided to make her portrait of Robert Roth through the professional prism of the actor and his character. Her *Interlude* (*Medzihŕa*) is literally an avant-garde film where Roth's roles in Samuel Beckett's and A. P. Chekhov's plays overlap with pantomime in which only the author directs Roth. However, with regard to the documentary form, this film is considerably hermetic and mannered. With this documentary, Sopková enters the territory of feature film direction which she currently studies at the Academy of Performing Arts.

There were several stylised non-fiction films screened at festivals last year. The semi-documentary by Jana Mináriková *25km²* was shown at the Jihlava International Documentary Film



Festival in the Czech Republic and at the DOCSK festival in Košice. The film is a sort of metaphorical sci-fi slapstick about life after an accident, blitz activities and allergic reactions to mobile phones. *The Star* (*Hviezda*) by Andrej Kolenčík is in turn a touching social tragicomedy about a worker who experiences his fifteen minutes of fame as an actor in the theatre adaptation of the worst movie of all time and... it changes his desires. The originally documentary project of Iveta Grófová *Made in Ash* (*Až do mesta Aš*) also moved beyond the borders of stylisation into the territory of feature film.

Exceptionally personal films made by the cinéma vérité or direct cinema method are a contradiction to such stylised or feature "non-fiction" films. One of these is *Camino* by Jana Bučka where the author asks the same question, with the same interest, as the filmmakers did in *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Cronique d'un été*, 1961) fifty years ago: can film deliver a truthful depiction of oneself, of reality? The answer, in both cases, is quite sceptical but positive in that it does not lead to resignation, but rather to a reflection of one's own documentary procedures.

Two TV series in 2012, *Cans of Time* (*Konzervy času*) and *Celluloid Country*, also provided a reflection of film materials and an examination of what they actually capture. The first one focuses on private film archives, the second on what official cinematography produced in the individual decades. *Cans of Time* identifies some symptoms of Czechoslovak society through individual stories from 1939 to 1989, emphasising the 1960s and 1980s, while *Celluloid Country* chronologically tells the history of Slovak non-fiction film, pointing to the historical-political context of the whole country. Both TV series are characterised by the fact that the handwriting of a number of authors can be discerned in them. Nevertheless, both TV series are more balanced than the first series of *Slovak Cinema* (*Slovenské kino*) which is very diverse in terms of quality and concept. And that is definitely good news at a time when one is perplexed to discover quite how some documentary series were ever coupled together.

2012 was not a year of big auteurist documentaries. Nevertheless, it was a year rich in documentary films. ▲



The Blue Tiger (Modrý tiger) ■ PHOTO: Continental film

# Animated Production Is Not Stagnating

► Eva Perďochová

In 2012, it was mainly secondary schools and academies that produced new films. However, it cannot be said that professional animated film is stagnating. Despite facing persistent problems with production and distribution, animators are working on a number of interesting projects. We can look forward to their release in 2013.

The number of premières from last year may give the impression that animated film is stagnating. It was mainly films made in 2011 that were screened at festivals; the same holds true for the four films that went into cinema distribution. The comics *Alois Nebel* set into motion by rotoscoping was premièred last year, as was the feature film *The Blue Tiger* (*Modrý tiger*) which was made by Czech filmmakers in cooperation with the Slovak animator basis. The release of two short films into cinema distribution was also a success. *Dust and Glitter* (*Dust and Glitter*) made by Ové Pictures was screened before the full-length feature film *A Night Too Young* (*Přiliš mladá noc*, dir. Olmo Omerzu). The story, inspired by the visit of animator Michaela Čopíková to San Francisco, is currently going the rounds of the international festivals and has received several awards. *The Last Bus* (*Posledný autobus*) can be considered as one of the most successful home-grown animated films of recent years. It was screened in cinemas prior

to *Le Havre* (dir. Aki Kaurismäki). *The Last Bus* is receiving one award after the other from international festivals.

The on-going problem of presenting short films through the traditional distribution channels is giving rise to slow, gradual changes in the creative environment. Several full-length projects are in the initial development phases. Their distribution should be easier, but their production is all the more complicated. A good example, for instance, is the project produced by Bfilm which seeks to bring eight animators with different styles under one umbrella – a full-length adaptation of fairytales written by Pavol Dobšínský. *The Kingdom of Time* (*Kráľovstvo času*) is now in the script-writing phase. The film of Patrik Pašš jr. and Peter Budinský (the author of *tWins*, 2011, which was successful at festivals) *Heart of the Tower* (*Srdce veže*), another film by Ivana Laučíková and the full-length 3D animated film *Baron Munchhausen* (*Barón Prášil*) being made by Attack Film are in the same

phase. If even one of them were to be completed, it would be an event of historical importance – Viktor Kubal made the only two Slovak full-length animated films to date and thirty-two years have elapsed since the last of them was made (*The Bloody Lady/Krvavá pani*).

Festivals and the Internet are the most extensive distribution channels for short films. The funds invested will definitely never see a return but, with regard to presentation, it is an excellent space as well for more alternative genres, such as short absurd sketches *Concerto et Block* or *The Stories of Mr. Finger* (*Príbehy pána prsta*). The more and more popular animated video clips are also distributed via the Internet and last year the Ové Pictures duo was most productive in this area.

The share of Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS) in the production and broadcasting of animated films for children is still small; nevertheless, the interest of authors in the production of children's films is growing. The co-production of RTVS in the TV series of Katarína Kerekesová *Mimi & Lisa* (*Mimi a Liza*) was a great success. The first episode of the series about the friendship between a healthy girl and a handicapped girl was made in 2011 and three further episodes were made in 2012. This year, the first seven-episode season should be completed and broadcast. Fool Moon produced *Stones* (*Kamene*, 2010) which achieved great international success; the two-year-old film won a further eleven awards last year.

Vanda Raýmanová would like to follow up on the TV bedtime story tradition, but she is just at the beginning. Her short film for children *Who's There?* (*Kto je tam?*, 2010) which has been successful at festivals, has also been distributed successfully, especially abroad. Croatian and Brazilian television bought the broadcasting rights and the French version of the film is part of Belgian cinema distribution. Her series in preparation *The Tots* (*Drobci*) is based on this short film. In addition, Raýmanová is working on another short animated film for children *Bob and Mia* (*Bob a Mia*).

Older authors are also making films for children. Ivan Popovič's marathon with the educational series *If I Only Had a Screw Loose!* (*Mať tak o koliesko viac!*), for which he won the 2012 Igric Award for idea and script, came to an end after thirty-six episodes. Radio and Television of Slovakia discontinued the collaboration with the author due to

the bad financial situation. According to Popovič's book which served as the basis for the series, there are still sixteen episodes missing.

Jaroslav Baran also continued in the production of a TV series in 2012, as he completed parts 21 to 24 of *Sheeplive* (*Ovce.sk*). The TV series is used for the education of children in eleven European countries and in China. In addition, Baran is making the 3D animated series *School Behind School* (*Škola za školou*). The first part was premièred at the Cairo International Film Festival. He is also developing the co-production film *Mr. Toti* (*Pán Toti*).

The TV series for children *Vim and Tom* (*Vim a Tom*) is the first for Jana Znašíková and Katarína Zegerová from the Animoline studio. In 2012, they made the pilot episode with support from the Audiovisual Fund. After viewing this pilot episode, Czech Television expressed an interest in co-production.

With regard to television animated production for adults, the commercial TV channel Joj holds a significant position. Four new episodes of the TV series for adults *Local TV* (*Lokal TV*) were broadcast up to the end of 2012. The series seeks to criticise the Slovak media environment and the means which the media use, but does it in the same way as do the castigated media. Hence, it only fits into the media machinery which lives from the presentation of various attractions. Despite all this, both parties involved deserve to be appreciated – the authors and the TV. There has been a lack of animated series for adults in our country and *Local TV* is a trailblazer in a certain way.

This brief summary of activities shows that animated film is not stagnating, rather that several projects are overlapping in the development phase. Animators have mainly concentrated their attention on the production of series and on the completion of older author's projects, such as *Fongopolis* (*Fongopolis*, dir. Joanna Kozuch) or *Dream and Snow* (*O sne a snehu*, working title of a film by Ivana Šebestová). Even though several episodes of TV series, the film *Pandas* (*Pandy*) by Matúš Vizár and the surrealist *Moon* (*Mesiak*) by Ondrej Rudavský were completed last year, they were not released in Slovakia. Hence, unless the conditions alter drastically, several interesting premières await us in 2013. ▲



# The Director on Her Own Route

► Mariana Jaremková

The second film by director Mira Fornay, *My Dog Killer* (*Môj pes Killer*), has achieved several international successes since its international première at Rotterdam IFF 2013 where it won the main award – the Hivos Tiger Award for best full-length feature film. This only goes to show that its subject is topical across countries.

***My Dog Killer* was made as a co-production with the Czech Republic, where you found a partner willing to accept your method of working...**

– I work with Mr. Schwarcz from Cineart TV production and this co-production is based on our mutual understanding of the project and on certain obvious levels of enthusiasm and, of course, mutual trust. I don't believe in co-productions solely on the basis of financing, as that can only bring problems. For me, only if the co-production partner is dedicated and involved in the project deeply enough, both mentally and creatively, only then will he/she seek out a route for the film, not for themselves.

**Have you encountered any negative experience?**

– There is no such thing as a bad experience; I always learn from every experience and any experience is largely good, however hard it might be. I have learned that I have to give careful consideration to whoever I am going to work with on a project, because I am not good at making compromises on my own route, and I now understand my way as being that of the auteurist film.

**Is it imperative for filmmakers from a small country to look for a foreign co-producer?**

– I wouldn't call it imperative. In order to make a good film, it is necessary for the conditions to be as ideal as possible, so to have **enough** money is important – not too little and not too much. And if the local system of my town, city, region or

state has limited finances to support me, I think I should try to find the right partner without the limitation of size imposed by my country and nationality.

***My Dog Killer* is as much of an auteurist film as your debut *Foxes* (*Lištičky*). Do you consider that to be a creative necessity?**

– I believe that to be creative, original, daring and open to observation is a necessity for making an auteurist film and a film is the best way for me to communicate my ideas and images with others, as I believe in the gift of critical thinking. I'm interested in filmmakers with clear signatures and the courage to develop their ideas, their own specific way and never to repeat themselves just for the sake of success. But to have only auteur cinema would be dangerous and, in a way, boring. Filmmakers must have the opportunity to make their choices and choose a direction to exhibit their strongest talent. For me, cinema is a road to understanding not only myself, but other people.

**What is your opinion of the various creative workshops which a script goes through, even for a number of years?**

– Every project needs something different. I started developing the *Killer* under the Nipkow programme in Berlin and it suited me well, as it gave me a space for my work. Then I continued working on it on my own with help from my script editors. Both were able to express their opinion clearly, which was important. Waffling around only confuses me. I believe that residential programmes are great – you are given the space, solitude, freedom and time to write. But workshops, where you have to pay to be taught something or to be led somewhere? I'm not sure. However, as I said, it's not for me, but it might be great for someone else for sure. For me, most of these "development programmes" are killing the basic idea of auteurist film, which is based on finding the original way of doing film in a specific way, not according to rules established by others. This is only my opinion.

**What provoked you into making a film about racism?**

– Prejudices are dangerous and racism is based on the most dangerous of them all. I was intrigued

by the increasing number of young people who are joining the club of extreme movements in my countries of Slovakia and the Czech Republic. I started to deal with this issue because it was difficult for me to understand this sudden political movement. And if I am not able to understand something, film presents the opportunity to clarify and find out more about the dark sides of our human race. I decided to do it from an inner point of view – from an intimate perception of one of the young extremist boys and show his ordinary life without commentary and surely I put him under the pressure of an absurd conflict. I tried to understand and raised questions in my film why this is happening and I would like the audience to ask with me.

**Domestic appraisals of *My Dog Killer* frequently mention that the film is European...**

– I'm very happy about this, as I think national identity shouldn't be the primary identity for any film or filmmaker. A film should have its signature; the author should be visible behind it. European film was always about authorship which always trumped Hollywood productions not on the financial level, but on the mental level. I understand that reviewers/film critics need new waves, national waves, and I very much understand that we – the people – need labels to have easier orientation in the huge amount of information around us but as for me, as an author, I can't think in national terms. Maybe it's because of my complicated family background, but mainly thinking nationally in the first place would deny the principles that I maintain in my work. I am grateful for the national funds because without them I wouldn't be able to make my films, but I am also grateful that these days there are some very wise people that let me observe a concept of national identification and allow me to be critical about it and express my opinion in freedom and without any persecution. That's great. ▲





■ PHOTO: PubRes

# A Killer's Attitude

► Katarína Mišíková

It is claimed that a director's second full-length feature film is a real test of his or her talent. Mira Fornay could scarcely have received a more resounding affirmation of her matching the promise of her début *Foxes* (2009) than the prestigious award for first and second films of young directors from the progressive Rotterdam Film Festival. This not only caused a local cultural sensation (it is the first victory at the Rotterdam IFF for Slovak cinema), but she also confirmed the direction of Slovak film as a (literal) "Central European tiger".

Regarding its success in Rotterdam, the significant social topic and closed film form, nothing other can be predicted for the Slovak-Czech co-production *My Dog Killer* than a victorious advance through the festivals and acclaim from critical reflection. However, I believe that the real value of the film lies not in the A-list award, but in the qualities it brings to the trend it joins. For we are currently experiencing something which may not be particularly healthy but, for a theoretician and critic, is an inspirational phenomenon in Slovakia, when a socially-oriented auteurist film becomes the mainstream in cinematography.

Mira Fornay studied fiction directing at FAMU in Prague and she has more international experience than more recent débutants – graduates from the Film and Television Faculty at the Academy of Performing Arts, Zuzana Liová, Iveta Grófová and Mátyás Prikler. However, together with them she defines the currently quite clearly

legible line of new social drama. Personalities profiled in detail with substantially different signatures have a number of things in common: the non-sentimental reflection of reality in a specific space-time in Central Europe, an emphasis on socially topical themes, collaboration with non-actors, inspiration from non-fiction procedures, consequential visual concept. With regard to racism, Martin Šulík's *Gypsy* can be viewed in tandem with *My Dog Killer*. However, even though *Gypsy* is also based on reality and it is mostly non-actors playing in the film, the approach to the topic is different. It is not a film about the racial prejudices of the majority towards a minority, but an introspective immersion into the inner world of one member of the Roma community. Conversely, *My Dog Killer* is a deliberation on how racial intolerance – and the attitude to otherness in general – shapes us from the cradle to the grave.

Eighteen-year-old Marek is at the centre of

the story. An ethereal, even androgynous, young man with a tough image: a shaved head, tattoos, a camouflage suit, combat-style boots. He lives on the Slovak-Moravian border with his alcoholic father. His mother has left them long ago. Marek and his father are under threat of repossession so they would like to sell their apartment and move to the vineyard. They just need his mother's signature on the sale agreement. And so Marek has to confront his trauma: his mother who abandoned the family and bore a Roma "bastard". He hides this shameful blemish from his shaved and tattooed friends who respect him thanks to his pit-bull Killer. Nomen omen: Killer really is a killer and the story cannot end other than tragically.

But Killer is a bit more than just a killer dog. It is Marek's avatar, it represents the features the boy would like to have: strength, aggressiveness, combativeness. Marek wears the insignia of the adopted identity on his body: a tattooed letter K on his neck, the portrait of his dog on his shoulder blade. Killer is the determinant focus of his identity through which he both defines himself and affords him a sense of belonging. For it is apparent that Marek, and also the world he inhabits, are without a stable centre. His life was affected by the absence of a mother figure and father's authority. Maybe that is the reason behind his ambivalence, the disjuncture between his physical appearance and his social image. The boy appears as timid rather than aggressive. A gang of skinheads took over the function of family and its boss symbolically assumed the role of his father (the fatherly connotations of this character are also referred to in the film by the celebration of his son's birth). Families themselves in this environment seem to be dysfunctional: relations between partners are disrupted, relations between siblings ruined, children run away to street gangs. However, *My Dog Killer* is not a sociological film, hence we perceive the destroyed world as the background for the fate of an unusual anti-hero and not as its simple social determination.

We see that Marek is constantly in motion in the course of the film. He passes through the derelict environments of the industrial-commercial zone, residential quarter, pub or various transitional places: the motorway, the road, the station, by foot, motorbike or car. The other characters are also constantly on the move: the mother is

looking for her younger son, she needs to place him somewhere, to agree with her brother who lives in a new house without even a pathway leading to it; Marek meets his gang in the changing room in the gym, at the garages, in the corridor of the concrete apartment building. His is a makeshift world: everything at home is packed and prepared for moving, although the accommodation is not yet prepared in the vineyard. He is unable to find any stable place, merely brief moments of rest as he is waiting for someone. But, even then, below the surface he is boiling. The camera breathes down his neck all the time, it submerges into his shaved, almost vulnerable skullcap. It is an invisible observer which, seemingly impassively but with growing tension, watches Marek's non-expressive conduct and waits to discover how the unbalanced and ambivalent character will turn out. This character ambiguity is emphasised also by his grey clothing. He is entitled to the bright red colour of his T-shirt and boxing bag only during training, where he learns to transform his suppressed hatred and humiliation into aggressiveness. As he trains his dog Killer, he himself is trained. It is solely a matter of time before the released violence finds its object.

The indecipherability of Marek's character is the key element of the effect Mira Fornay achieves by the de-psychologised and observatory narration. Marek is found in almost every shot, he defines the extent of our knowledge of the narration. However, the narration, adopting the method of a nouveau roman, is non-communicative and stubbornly adheres to only describing the exterior. The face with sharp features is impenetrable in the long shots of waiting. In other shots it is diverted off-camera. Marek confines his communication to terse sentences. The conversations of others are also very matter-of-fact. All information surfaces slowly and seemingly incidentally – in hints and silences.

The director has enhanced this effect by casting non-actors and by directed improvisation without clear and precise dialogue. As a consequence, the characters appear relaxed and the authentic stylisation is strengthened by the dialect as well as by the chronological narration, the absence of non-diegetic music and sounds, and by the realistic details of everyday life. The descriptive narrative strategy creates tension, raises questions

and thus enforces the emotional engagement of the viewer without having to identify with Marek. It stimulates the desire to understand him and to peer into his inner world. But, as it is hardly possible to understand racism, it leaves questions unanswered. Marek's impenetrability creates the impression that his character may at any time become either humane or violent. And that this fateful tipping-point does not have to be a conscious decision. That is why Marek's contact with his half-brother Lukáš is so full of discord. Marek detests him physically (he does not want to ride in a car with him, he unwittingly wipes the helmet that Lukáš held in his hands) but, on the other hand, he gets into a situation where he involuntarily defends him and his mother and he experiences further public humiliation. The viewer constantly anticipates that Lukáš's interest will awake some emotion in Marek. Then the motivation to kidnap his brother and leave him to Killer is all the more unclear. Does Marek want to wreak revenge on his mother? To vent his anger for his humiliation? To boost his self-confidence? I assume that his deed is almost as instinctive as Killer's biting and tearing reflex. It grows from the depths of his subconscious (symbolically, Marek begins to follow his mother and Lukáš in the underpass). Marek does not adopt a radical attitude, the murder of his brother is not planned, but rather a consequence of past actions. Just as, without thinking, he binds Lukáš with the rope Killer uses to train his murderous bite, he calmly pours wine into the demijohn while Killer gorges on Lukáš's blood. He calls his mother to tell her that Lukáš is with him, then he hangs up. The awareness of deeds and their consequences is revealed only by the tears shed in the long semi-detail during the night-time motorbike ride. Together with the early prayer for the Roma scapegoat with which the mother, unknowingly, says goodbye to her son, these are the only emotionally tense moments of the film characterised by a discrete suppression of emotions.

The director has used a narrative strategy where the motivations of the main protagonist are concealed and no judgments are made. Fornay does not "tackle" the social problem with

her film, she rather analyses the conditions in which the problem has emerged. She does not tell a tale about crime and punishment. After the story ended, Marek maybe started a new life, paid off all his debts, helped his father build the vineyard. All this with the awareness of what he had done. The circular structure of the storyline, which starts and ends with work in the vineyard, gives the story a closed dramaturgical frame, but at the same time it refers to the vicious circle of shame and hatred.

Who else other than the mother will miss a small Roma boy? Probably no one in a society immersed in racism. Fornay does not depict xenophobia as an attribute exclusive to skinheads but as the majority attitude of a variety of generations and social strata. Of those who vent their frustration for loafers and freeloaders in a pub from which Roma are banned because they steal. Of those who gain the respect of their adolescent peers by humiliating others. Of those who are daily massaged by TV newscasts showing marches of extremists and who boost their national pride by singing patriotic songs. Of those who, whilst listening to a brass band, reminisce about the old days under the affectionate supervision of pictures of saints and portraits of Jozef Tiso. Of those who build nouveau riche houses and think that they can steal from relatives who cause them shame. But also young Roma who do not want to learn to play the violin because they will not play at being a gypsy for anyone. ▲

**Mira Fornay** (1977, Bratislava)

She completed her studies in directing at the Prague FAMU with her short film *Small Untold Secrets* (*Malá nesdělení*, 2002) which was shown at several film festivals around the world, including the Rotterdam IFF, and received awards, for instance, at the Festival of East European Cinema in Cottbus. Fornay also studied at the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield, UK. Her full-length debut *Foxes* (*Lištičky*, 2009) competed in the International Critic's Week section at the Venice Film Festival. Her current film *My Dog Killer* won the Hivos Tiger Award at this year's Rotterdam IFF.

**My Dog Killer** (Moj pes Killer, Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2013) **DIRECTED AND SCRIPT BY:** Mira Fornay **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:** Tomáš Sysel **EDITED BY:** Hedvika Hansalová **CAST:** Adam Mithál, Irena Bendová, Libor Filo, Marián Kuruc, Mária Fornayová and others.

# Thanks? Fine?

► Tomáš Hudák

The full-length feature debut of Mátyás Prikler *Fine, Thanks* is a social drama with minimalist elements which captures the world during the economic crisis. The film is actually made up of three stories and it is not clear why they are joined in a single film – their topics, narration and, in part, their styles also differ. What they do have in common is a bleak atmosphere and emptiness in various senses of the word. However, the film exhibits a peculiarity which defies classification, making it impossible to liken it to role models, thus rendering it all the more comprehensible why it was screened at the Rotterdam Film Festival.

*Fine, Thanks* is based on a short film *Thanks, Fine* which was also well received, thanks to its participation in the Cinéfondation section at the Cannes IFF. This short film was supplemented by two further stories and became part of the "big" film with almost no changes. One of the new stories follows on directly from the original film,

it features the same family (or part of it) and develops what one of the characters previously mentioned only briefly. Even the point of demarcation disappears and one story segues smoothly into the next. This makes the dissimilarity of the initial story all the more marked, since it follows a different family and it is fairly loosely connected.



ted to the other stories. The final, approximately twenty-minute, scene is a sort of epilogue. This is where we learn what links these families; nevertheless, the scene moves forward especially with the last story.

The main characters of the film are the members of two families. The film concentrates almost exclusively on the relations within the family, which appears to be a closed world. With the exception of one character, we know practically nothing about their lives outside of the family. If the characters are influenced by their environment, there are no specific cases, but rather symptoms of the times. The loss of the job of one of the characters is quite typical; however, it is not dealt with any further in the story and we can only assume whether it somehow affects subsequent events, and the same character accusing his wife of adultery is also typical. However, the character immediately rejects the accusation because he realises that the problem lies "within" the family and not beyond it.

The film's most marked feature is probably its bleakness. This is caused by the greyiness of the concrete apartment buildings, the dusk, or by over-emphasising empty spaces. Even the daytime shots from a new house in the first part of the film impart an impression of cold. The prolongation of shots beyond the framework necessary to capture the action is a simple and effective means, leaving aside the fact that there is no action in the shots and the acting is, in most of the cases, low-key and reduced to basic emotions, especially anger.

This, *inter alia*, leads to a feeling of alienation. It is a traditional modernist topic, but the film does not speak about "some" present time because this present time is clearly defined at the beginning by the economic crisis. The crisis remains in the background all the time but it is not the topic of the film. The crisis defines the environment in which the characters exist and thus, more or less directly, affects their lives. The impact of the crisis is shown in the dismissal of staff, the need to save money and, last but not least, in the press conference of Prime Minister Robert Fico.

We feel the crisis most strongly in the first part of the film. Entrepreneur Miroslav is in the foreground and we watch how he faces up to, or does

not face, the crisis over the course of a single day – he has employed his brother and tasked him with dismissing staff, we see a meeting, but also a tennis match or an argument with his apparently mentally unstable wife. This story does not have any action, it is composed of short situations without causal links, hence it is sort of a glance at life. We are left to assume whether the individual situations are unique or if this is everyday routine.

The illusion of daily routine is important because we do not incorporate the behaviour of the characters into the structure of the story (there is no story), but we understand it as a sign of the time. We do not have to know a lot about the characters, we do not have to know their psychology in detail, it is quite sufficient just to see hints of their mutual relations. The film does not need to document the time any further, as it uses the formal means or *mise-en-scène* already referred to. The filming through glass or the reflection in glass, possibly with an object in the foreground, is particularly marked, as it enhances the feeling of distance and creates sort of a barrier, invokes an impression of alienation.

Pensioner Béla is the main protagonist of the second story – even though the characters surrounding him are active and their activities only "touch" on him. Béla has lost his wife and, as his children consider him incapable of living on his own, they place him in an old people's home. We never learn how far he is capable of taking care of himself. The film leaves many situations like this unclarified. Instead of explaining, it leaves room for various ways of understanding the situation. However, this is a double-edged sword, as this ignorance can result in our misunderstanding the motivation of the characters. In the case of Béla's state of health, the impulsive action of his son Atilla may seem to be hardly comprehensible, hence barely believable.

An interesting change has occurred in comparison with the original short film. If we do not take the initial scenes introducing the main characters into consideration, the first scene of Béla's story was incorporated in the first part of the film. It is a scene in which he argues with his wife over money, while they watch the previously mentioned press conference of Prime Minister Fico on TV. The crisis also lurks in the background of this story, but the film does not deal with it anymore

– what is going on has, I dare say, nothing to do with the crisis (if we discount the possibility that Béla's children placed him in the old people's home solely to get hold of his apartment and other things). Even thanks to this "relocation" of the scene, the crisis "remained" in the first part of the film. The crisis can be sensed in the second story also, but it virtually does not affect it in any way. Moreover, there is just one scene in the entire film which is incorporated into another story in this way, which also means that, while Attila and Béla were present in the first part, Miroslav and his family disappear from the film for over an hour.

Even though the second story has more "action" and the causal links between the scenes are clearer, it still strives to place everyday routine in the foreground. Although a fundamental event did happen resulting in a conflict, the film largely shows situations which do not directly impinge upon the story: Béla's loneliness, clearing out the apartment, the wake that did not turn out well. The scene where the family tries to get on the ship where the wake is to be held is particularly interesting. Actually, it has no relevance for the story and it does not develop the characters; instead it rather serves to define the period: the family booked the ship but they cannot get on board because a film crew is working there. The scene says a lot about the values of society; albeit, it has nothing to do with the crisis.

Attila and his family are the main protagonists of the last story. This time it is about a marriage crisis. Again we have no idea why the crisis occurred but we are fobbed off with learning that the spouses just "get on each other's nerves" after all those years of marriage and they take advantage of their children in their fight. Then, in one scene the son starts to "torture" his sister; however, it seems as if this is occurring for the first time. The viewer may ask whether this inclination of the son had not shown before, whether it suddenly (let us say, under the influence of his parents) occurred to him that he could exert his (male) dominance over his sister.

If we don't take into account the grey concrete apartment buildings and everything related to

them, the picture of the times mentioned so many times already is missing from the third story and the story does not have to be related to our present time in any way. For instance, Attila lost his job in the first part of the film (which is the only link between the stories for a long time), he mentions in the second part that he has a job and, in the third part, his job or its loss no longer figures, not even implicitly. The psychology of the characters is much more readily comprehensible and the shots made through glass or from "behind" it, in my view, lose their strength. We do not see everyday moments but, instead, situations creating a dramatic bridge. It is essentially a conventional story about a family crisis.

Thus, the film moves from everyday routine, symptomatic situations and de-dramatisation to a causally told story without any clear anchoring in time. I think that this disunity of the stories is the film's greatest weakness. Another question that arises is whether such a film would not be better served with using non-actors and unknown faces. However, the film, especially the first part, demonstrates the considerable talent of the filmmakers; from this perspective, the film is one of the most promising Slovak débuts of the past few years. ▲

#### Mátyás Prikler (1982, Bratislava)

He graduated from the Film and Television Directing Department at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and in 2005/2006 he studied at the Theatre and Film University in Budapest. His diploma mid-length film *Thanks, Fine* (2009) won several awards and was screened in the Cinéfondation section at the Cannes IFF. His full-length feature debut *Fine, Thanks* (2013) was screened in the Bright Future section at the Rotterdam IFF.

**Fine, Thanks** (Ďakujem, dobre, Slovakia, 2013) **\_IDEA AND SCRIPT BY:** Marek Leščák, Mátyás Prikler **\_DIRECTED BY:** Mátyás Prikler **\_DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:** Peter Balcar, Milan Balog **\_EDITED BY:** Maroš Šlapeta, Zuzana Cséplő **\_CAST:** Attila Mokos, Miroslav Krobot, Béla Várady, Vladimír Obšil, Zuzana Mauréry, Jana Olhová and others.



■ PHOTO: Andrej Bán, týždeň

# Crime and Punishment. The Cervanová Case

► Mariana Jaremková

Probably everyone in Slovakia has heard of the Cervanová case. Many questions surrounding the murder of student Ľudmila Cervanová in 1976 have not yet been clarified. Is it even possible to uncover the truth after so many years? The documentary tragedy by Robert Kirchhoff called *Normalization* (Kauza Cervanová) offers an interesting study of society... and fear. It is in Slovak cinemas since May.

At the time of its investigation and trial, the Cervanová case was the most closely followed of all cases. And, thanks to many ambiguities, the case continues to this day as a dark stain on the Slovak justice system. Was it really a miscarriage of justice? A well-orchestrated game by the secret services, a conspiracy of the communist regime and an abuse of political power? The idea for *Normalization* was born in 2004 when those convicted in this case were sent for retrial. "When I started getting interested in this case, only a few journalists paid any attention to it – mainly tabloid journalists," recalls Robert Kirchhoff. "I had to dig everything up for myself. Right from the start I felt that this was a tragic and ludicrous story. I thought about making a

documentary *Twin Peaks* or *The Thin Blue Line*. The plot: guilt, innocence, accusation – all that against the background of murder – appealed to me also because of its social aspect." Ultimately, the shooting became an eight-year detective expedition into the hidden recesses of the case of a kidnapping, rape and murder of a young woman that has not yet been closed. "When you make this type of film, you always have to deal with someone trying to lead you by the nose. Phone calls, e-mails, anonymous letters and a lot of names, situations and facts, all that directed me towards a further, apparently endless search. Of course, I was seeking the truth. Objectivity was the only criterion," emphasises the director. "The form was subordinate to it. I only gradually came

to recognise that not everyone shared my ambition ... And doors were closed..."

Eight years of investigation gave the documentary the form of a collection film, but not one that is purely collective. "This is partially a collection film. The Cervanová case is an organism, a monster that is still alive and kicking. It is a mistake to think that it has been forgotten. In 1982, it seemed that the case was over but the smouldering threads of doubts finally ignited a political cause. The seemingly closed case has influenced and still influences the lives of its protagonists, but not only their lives. I also entered this story and I had to become part of it. I believe that, in this sense, this is an engaged film. That means that from a certain moment there was no room for speculation." This docudrama also contains elements of an investigative documentary, political and detective film. How to face up to a brutal and moreover mysterious crime in a period when the evening news overflows with violence? "It depends on how one approaches the topic. The mysterious background of the story is really shocking in its bizarreness," confirms the director. "I protect and appreciate the most the trust of the protagonists and my sources. I consistently had to tread the thin line between suspicion and distrust. Winning over and convincing people was the hardest and took the longest. If we are seeking to uncover this tragedy, it makes sense

to always tell the truth to people. I really wanted the film to be understood also by those who do not know the story. Therefore, I could not have omitted any of the details of the crime that form the basis of events and then later returned to the crime. It's like a magnet."

Does the film present all the available facts in a matter-of-fact and complex manner, or can a certain degree of author's licence be found in the film with regard to the interpretation of some facts? "It is really difficult to strictly apply some author's principle in this genre. The best is to get immersed within the topic. What I have experienced with this film cannot be transferred. But it is my life. When I started to think about it, I tried to figure out how to find some fixed points in the endless current. I eventually found those fixed points, at least for myself, after countless attempts. I suspect that you cannot simply leave this topic, like – look, this is what happened. Because this topic is still alive," states Kirchhoff.

Despite the years that have passed, *Normalization* is not about the past. "It is a film about why it is necessary to doubt. Time distorts everything. Despite certain ramifications, it is exactly this case that changes in every period – like a chameleon. Why is it so? In this respect the film is unbelievably contemporary," concludes the director. ▲

*Normalization* (dir. Robert Kirchhoff, Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2013)



Director Robert Kirchhoff (left) during shooting ■ PHOTO: Atelier.doc




 PHOTO: Pavol Pekarčík

# 3 + 3 = Velvet Terrorists

► Daniel Bernát

Three documentary filmmakers, Peter Kerekes, Ivan Ostrochovský and Pavol Pekarčík, came together on account of the full-length project **Velvet Terrorists**. They made a film about three men who expressed their hatred towards the regime during communism. Nevertheless, this documentary is (also) about love. It will be screened in Slovak cinemas this autumn.

Stano Kratochvíl, Fero Bednár and Vladimír Hučín are the protagonists of *Velvet Terrorists*. The film bears witness to deeds that they committed or planned in the 1970s and 1980s, but the picture remains in the present days and shows how former convicts sentenced for terrorist acts live today. "On the eve of May 1<sup>st</sup>, Stano Kratochvíl attempted to blow up the rostrum where the communist officials were going to sit. He didn't want to kill anyone, he just wanted to eliminate the symbol. Fero Bednár planned to assassinate President Gustáv Husák, but no one in the CIA took him seriously. And Vladimír Hučín blew up communist billboards and display cases," says director and producer Peter Kerekes by way of explaining the past of the characters.

The film consists of the separate stories of each of the three protagonists and the filmmakers

collaborated in the making of all three of them. But while Kerekes was interested in linking the past with the present day, Ivan Ostrochovský was primarily interested in the present. According to the latter, the final film joins the past to the present time with a tendency towards the present. "Peter can direct on location and he likes it so he can afford to talk about the past which requires a certain type of reconstruction, hence a certain feature film logic which is inherent to Peter," says Ostrochovský. "Pavol and I prefer a more cautious observational method of filmmaking which is related to events underway now. Hence, the reason for the tendency towards the present day. To put it simply, Peter likes to reconstruct old stories and I like to observe them."

With regard to *Velvet Terrorists*, Pavol Pekarčík highlights in particular the extreme life experience

of the protagonists. "It was not common for someone to want to cancel the May 1<sup>st</sup> celebrations, kill the First Secretary of the Communist Party or even eliminate the entire communist dictatorship. This is what the main protagonists had been through during the normalisation period." And Peter Kerekes adds, "Ultimately, we made a film about love. After years of living alone, Stano is seeking a partner. Fero has settled down with his wife and two children; he reminisces about the romantic 'terrorist' period. Vladimír is courting a young woman; we watch how a relationship develops between them." Communism and terrorism just became the backdrop of the film about love because each of the protagonists also had romantic reasons for doing what they did. "Stano wanted to impress a young lady in Sered', the other two had partners who they used to go shooting with and prepare activities, almost like Bonnie & Clyde," says Peter Kerekes who also made the full-length documentaries *66 Seasons* and *Cooking History*.

As regards *Velvet Terrorists*, the audience will not have to live through the full utilisation of archive materials, but the film deviates from the serious rigidity of talking heads and contains humour. Even though Pavol Pekarčík notes that,

if someone was imprisoned for the crime of state terrorism because he disseminated pamphlets declaiming "Away with communist dictatorship" or tried to topple the May 1<sup>st</sup> rostrum at night when absolutely drunk, this invokes laughter jointly with tears. "Peter and Pavol know how to create funny situations and they do create them," thinks Ostrochovský in turn. "On the other hand, the topics of resistance and heroism encompass a layer of pathos which we wanted to minimise and we used humour as a weapon against pathos-tisation," continues the director. In connection with humour, he also refers to the risk of mocking the protagonists who do not deserve to be ridiculed as they managed to present their opposition to the totalitarian system and risked not only their personal freedom but also their lives. "Many times we encountered the opinion that their deeds were futile and their ideas unrealistic. We were enthralled and, to a certain degree, even inspired by their courage. It is not only their life stories that prove that they are really courageous, but also the fact that they played along with us; we send up their stories slightly but we do not ridicule them. They are simply 'terrorists' who can make fun of themselves," concludes Ivan Ostrochovský. ▲



**Velvet Terrorists** (dir. Peter Kerekes, Ivan Ostrochovský, Pavol Pekarčík; Slovakia/Czech Republic/Croatia, 2013)

PHOTO: Martin Kollár



■ PHOTO: Artileria

# We Are to Believe a Miracle

► Daniel Bernát

Director Juraj Lehotský made his début in 2008 with the full-length documentary *Blind Loves* and his first film already became a small miracle. Its international première took place at the Cannes IFF in the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs (Directors' Fortnight) section; it won the C.I.C.A.E. (International Confederation of Art Cinemas) Award at the Festival. It was also screened at other prestigious festivals, foreign cinemas and TV and received awards in Slovakia and abroad... Five years later, Lehotský is back with a new film. It is called *Miracle* and this time it is a feature film. It will be screened in Slovak cinemas in the autumn.

In the documentary *Blind Loves*, Juraj Lehotský moved empathetically in the vicinity of several sight-impaired protagonists, he observed everyday situations in their lives and at the same time he tried to show what they were going through on the inside – their ideas, their desires, their view of the world. And love plays an important role. There is a lack of love in *Miracle* in a certain sense, although it is not totally absent from the second full-length project of director Lehotský.

This time, in collaboration with screen-writer Marek Leščák (he also co-wrote the script for *Blind Loves*), he recounts the story of the problematic teenager, Ela, who is placed in a juvenile re-education centre. It turns out that, after running away from home, she took up with a thirty-year old boyfriend, Roby. She moved in with him and she loves him. But they are not allowed to meet so Ela decides to run away from the re-education centre.

"I had to make the decision whether I was going to continue with the tried-and-tested documentary method or to enter the new arena of feature film, which would perhaps be more difficult for me," explains Lehotský on his search for a creative path after his successful documentary *Blind Loves*. "Eventually, I opted for the feature film but I wanted to hold on to something that I liked from my previous work, I wanted to base my new work on what I knew intimately. Primarily, I didn't want to leap into something which was moving away from the veracity, authenticity and brutality of life. I think that I was tempted to create a new 'life', a film story which would become real," continues the director. Before this film story came to life, Lehotský and Leščák visited re-education centres where they familiarised themselves with the real destinies of abandoned and lost girls. "These stories had one thing in common – the parents failed to find a path to their children, they did not build a relationship and did not give them what children are expected to get – love, the ability to comprehend what is and what is not right in life. We heard many stories of girls who experienced really atrocious things and we strove to transfer some of the details into the film," explains Lehotský. However, the film is not based on any specific real-life story.

The cinematographer of the film, Noro Hudec, noted during the filmmaking that there were only a few simple images in the script with regard to the story, choice of characters and shooting me-

thod. "On the basis of the script, we decided to shoot this film realistically, i.e. we sought to apply a cinematographic approach reflecting a realistic view of the world. Hence, we tried to make the camera a part of the story; it was not to call attention to its presence unnecessarily for artistic or other ambitions, and at the same time we did not want just to film the reality crudely, we wanted the camera to be accessible to the viewer's idea of modern aesthetics," reveals Hudec.

The filmmakers wanted to make an evocative and, at the same time, a broadly authentic film. This also led to their choice of the main character which is played by a non-actress – Michaela Bendulová. Experienced actor Robert Roth plays the leading male character. "In our case, it was quite impossible to consider a professional actress aged 15; we had to rely on a non-actress. But I think that, even if we had chosen a young girl with acting experience, her performance would have reeked of theatricality and artificiality," says Lehotský. "It was important to find a credible girl coming from a harsher milieu. At the same time, however, the girl was expected to be talented, to be able to perform in a civilised manner, to remember her lines, to play the tenser and more dramatic moments... Today I can reveal that our non-actress mastered everything wonderfully. We cast a girl from a re-education centre who was able to bring something peculiar and miraculous to the film," reflects the director and co-screenwriter of *Miracle*. ▲

**Miracle** (dir. Juraj Lehotský, Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2013)



■ PHOTO: Artileria



# The Slovak Film Institute Was Almost Shut Down

► Mariana Jaremková

The Slovak Film Institute celebrates its fiftieth anniversary; during its existence it has undergone several changes, from almost ceasing to exist to finally becoming a respected institution. It has been working steadily since 1999 under its General Director Peter Dubecký and today it most certainly does not trail behind the Central European standard.

**The adoption of the Audiovisual Act in 2008 was a milestone in the existence of the Slovak Film Institute (SFI). How did it fare in practice?**

– I think that the Audiovisual Act fundamentally changed the position of the SFI as it is a legal empowerment which clearly stipulates the duties of the SFI as a memory and collection institution. It created the room for the systemic solution of the issue of archiving of audiovisual works; I have in mind in particular the acquisition and deposit obligation which had not previously been defined by law. Hence, in the past, we witnessed the making of many films, in the 35 mm format at that time, of which the SFI received combined copies, solely thanks to good relations, but no documentation to these films, such as scripts, stills, posters, production lists, etc. Consequently, it was a very necessary step in order to maintain the audiovisual heritage. On the other hand, I was glad that – with one exception – all authors of Slovak films made up to 1991 with the state having a majority share accepted this solution with regard to the exertion of the producer's rights. Ultimately, the Act significantly helped to prepare the Digital Audiovision national project as these copyrights were crucial for the project. I would like to thank all those who supported the Audiovisual Act – Members of Parliament and, of course, the old and new management of the Ministry of Culture who fostered this Act and succeeded in its implementation. All Slovak filmmakers can be proud of the fact that the Minister of Culture Marek Maďarič managed to put into force two key audiovisual laws, the Audiovisual Act and the Act on the Audiovisual Fund.

**Does the Act respond to the demands of rapidly changing circumstances in the audiovisual environment? Was it amended?**

– Of course, it's possible to imagine some modifications and I think that circumstances may require a minor amendment to the Audiovisual Act in the coming three to five years, but I perceive the amendments as cosmetic rather than fundamental. The Act in its current form is definitely very good and there is not much in it that needs changing. Those changes that I perceive, from the SFI's perspective and from the perspective of the deposit and acquisition obligations, are related to completely new media that were not

defined five to six years ago. At that time, cinema operators did not know much about DCP; they only suspected that a change was anticipated. At that time no one assumed that in 2013 only a few Slovak films would be made on 35mm material. The SFI has undergone changes to adapt to this trend. I do hope that putting the Digital Audiovision project into operation this year will resolve the issue that was most pressing, i.e. that the digital workplaces in Cinema Lumière will be completed and the entire process will move forward just as planned.

**It took eighteen years to adopt the Audiovisual Act. Do you feel the handicap from those eighteen years?**

– Definitely, yes. I stated previously that all Slovak filmmakers are happy except one. It is a drain on the resources of the SFI to have to litigate for years with director Juraj Jakubisko as to who is authorised to exert the producer's rights, as the SFI is the legitimate legal successor of the original producers of films made prior to 1991 and it never questioned Juraj Jakubisko's copyrights. However, I regard this as the price to be paid for mistakes made in the past. You have to take into consideration that the 1990s were extremely difficult for Slovak cinematography. When looking back at the SFI's fifty years of existence, it is also necessary to state that the SFI was just one step away from being virtually eliminated. When I started working here in 1999, delegated by the then Minister of Culture, Milan Kňažko, not only did I find this institution in total disarray, but actually the question of what to do with the building in which the SFI is housed was being considered, i.e. we were already taking the deeds from the Real Estates Register. I regard the years 1998 and 1999 as having been extremely difficult and I am glad that, together with my close colleagues who I managed to win for the SFI's vision, we survived the harsh (also) political position, as the ending of the Mečiarism period brought about very serious problems. It was not easy to discover that dentist's offices were already being planned in the premises of the Documentation Department (the dentist was the son of the General Director of the Koliba Film Studios of that time). It is good that one does not wish to remember the bad, that we erase it from the memory and rather remem-

ber the positive things. We have to realise that this institution had never before been in such serious jeopardy and it was really tough to seek out ways for starting the processes of getting the SFI in a sustainable condition.

**Was the archive itself, i.e. the national film heritage, jeopardised too?**

– When I was delegated to manage the SFI, the staff were ready to depart the building. All the archival collections were contracted to be kept in the Koliba Film Studios. That means that we had rented premises which were totally unsuitable for the archiving of film material, not to mention the film negatives – damp cellars with unstable temperature, where the film materials were considerably damaged. When I was appointed Director, the contract was already signed by one party, Mr. Ondruš, the Director of the Koliba Film Studios at that time, and the other party, represented by the previous director of the SFI, Marián Kováčik, only wanted to have the contract stamped and put into force as soon as possible. They sent a driver with the contract, but I got hold of it and asked someone to hide it, promising that we would send it subsequently. I am glad that we succeeded in recovering the collection from Koliba and started the restoration and preservation of the audiovisual heritage. We took over the entire document archive of the Koliba Film Studios, including scripts, documentation which is slowly awaiting processing, as a great number of these documents have been garnered since 1948. It was a significant moment that helped to renew confidence in this institution. Moreover, there were huge debts to be paid to copyright organisations, royalties for filmmakers, which was one of the first things that we resolved. Therefore I think that the relation of the audiovisual environment to the SFI is correct and open in the long run.

**With regard to filmmakers, it is necessary to mention the role of the SFI in the presentation of Slovak film abroad.**

– We managed to stabilise the participation of Slovakia in the Marché du Film in Cannes and also in the European Film Market at the Berlin Film Festival. The entry of the SFI into European Film Promotion was important and we now have our representative there. The representative of Slo-

vakia in Eurimages, Professor Zuzana Gindl-Tátrová, also has her background in our institution. The promotion of Slovak works abroad is nowadays clearly visible.

**What has filled you with gratification and satisfaction over the last five years?**

– As a director looking back at the past five years, I have to say that, in addition to the results of the work of all departments, I am pleased that for the first time we have released a series of Slovak films in France (and for the francophone market) and further series are in preparation. I hope that this year we will also manage to break into the English market. We are preparing the release of *The Sun in a Net* (*Slnko v sieti*) in collaboration with a London publisher, as well as films by directors Hanák, Jakubisko and Solan. All this would not be possible if the audiovisual heritage restoration and preservation project did not function and if films were not being restored and digitised. It is fantastic that *My Dog Killer* (*Môj pes Killer*) won in Rotterdam, but it is important, during the presentation of Slovak film abroad, to show that our cinematography has a history. I am also pleased that we managed to publish several fundamental monographs of filmmakers that had been missing up to that point – Štefan Uher, Juraj Jakubisko, Albert Marenčin, Paľo Bielik, Ján Kadár, and others. I am glad that the SFI has maintained its position in Slovak culture and people have a positive relation to it.

**What position has the SFI managed to achieve in the context of post-communist countries?**

– We are definitely not lagging behind in anything. As for the volume of archived collections, ours is incomparably smaller than in the neighbouring countries – the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary – not to mention the fact that the Czechoslovak Film Institute Prague partially took the place of Slovakia in the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) where it represented us up to the partition in 1993. I consider 2001 to be a crucial year, as the SFI became a full member of FIAF in that year, which made it possible to standardise some activities in the SFI, especially with regard to the National Film Archive. We enjoy very good relations with Poland and Hungary but, naturally, we collaborate mostly with our

Czech colleagues. As far as the technological basis is concerned, we started from scratch in many things. We built new depositaries, many things were fully re-catalogued, the only filmological library in Slovakia started to be systematically built... Speaking of financing, I think that many of our neighbouring countries envy us. It's probably not appropriate to say that one of the institutes is better than the others. What is important is that we are not lagging behind in the Central European ambit. As for digitisation, along with Poland we are even leaders in the Central European region.

**What challenge does the SFI face now?**

– I would like to conclude some outstanding issues and continue in others. I will build my concept on the evident priorities, whether it is the restoration and preservation of audiovisual heritage, the Digital Audiovision project, SK CINEMA project or Cinema Lumière. It is also important for me to extend the SFI's activities towards new media.

**What has the SFI become after fifty years of existence?**

– The SFI is currently an audiovisual institution not to be disregarded. It not only takes care of archive collections, paper, documentation, film, audiovisual and digital collections, but also forms an excellent bridge between our audiovisual past and the audiovisual present. I think that this link could function in the future as well, because, thanks to the fact that we have managed to stabilise the basic foundation of the SFI, we can currently look forward to seeing the activities branching out to the work of individual experts and the entire very pleasant team at the SFI. All of us are keeping our fingers crossed. ▲



■ PHOTO: Miro Nôta



# Slovak Cinema Is Becoming More Visible

► Daniel Bernát

The National Cinematographic Centre (NCC) is a part of the Slovak Film Institute (SFI). What is concealed behind this name that arouses respect? A lot of work, organising, travelling,... All this in the interest of Slovak film. The Director of NCC, Alexandra Strelková, could talk about all this (and much more), so let us give her the floor.

**The NCC plays a crucial role in the promotion of Slovak cinema. What does *film promotion* mean to you and when is it most efficient?**

– Within the SFI, the NCC is the body taking Slovak films as close as possible to professionals and the public, both at home and abroad. We are quite a specific film centre as we operate under a single roof with the National Film Archive (NFA) and are also responsible for promotion of the Slovak audiovisual heritage. With this background, we differ from many other countries where archives and film centres, working mainly with current film production, are separate entities. Work with archives is extremely interesting for me, it overlaps with the presentation of new films and, I dare say, we really do represent Slovak cinema as a whole. The disadvantage is that, if archives abroad have their promotional departments and, in parallel, there is also a film centre, more people specialise in the activities, while in our case the entire promotional work rests on the shoulders of just a few people. Still, I enjoy it very much when Iveta Grófová's debut *Made in Ash* is co-presented by the producer Barbara Kipsová at its world premiere at the Karlovy Vary IFF and, the day after, her father, Stanislav Szomolányi, presents *The Sun in a Net* which is introduced at the Festival amongst the treasures from the archives. This is, of course, an exceptional case, but I'd like to say that what is most efficient is to present films in the broadest possible context. After having discovered good new Slovak films, festival programmers show interest in our archives, and vice versa. So, we collaborate with film festivals and forums for upcoming films, we connect people, provide them with contacts and information about the Slovak audiovisual industry, we supply databases and statistics, prepare promotional catalogues, with the NFA we publish books and DVDs of Slovak films, etc.

**Let's talk about international promotion. The awareness of Slovak cinema and collaboration at the international level are certainly developing. Could you describe this development?**

– I think that today we are more "visible" than, let's say, ten years ago, and the position of Slovakia and the presentation of our cinema is at a level comparable with other countries in our region; this is thanks to projects carried out at

film markets, such as the presentation pavilion in Cannes, which we organise together with Czech colleagues, or the stand of three countries at the Berlin market. These are activities without which we would nowadays be absolutely lost in the sea of the film industry. It is also thanks to those films that were made and were successful at international forums in the past few years. Also thanks to our producers and directors who have started to travel more, network and collaborate with foreign partners. The upsurge in documentary filmmakers continues and we are becoming more visible with our feature film production, films made by female directors, etc. However, that does not mean there is nothing to improve, or that we have resources (financial, personnel) for everything that needs to be done. Quite the contrary. In any case, I would like to have Slovak films talked about more as "European" than branded "Central European" and, of course, I would like "Slovak cinema" to operate as a trademark.

**Filmmakers and producers themselves, their awareness, ambitions, courage, language skills, consistency, responsibility... also evolve. Have you noted any perceptible changes in this respect?**

– Yes. The ambitions, courage, consistency, and others are personal traits which are a prerequisite for professionalism; awareness and language skills are matters of personal development and education and enhance professionalism. It is positive for our work that Slovak filmmakers are showing more direct interest in their international promotion, they take part in workshops, co-production projects, etc. They realise that they have to think about the presentation of their projects much earlier than with the distribution print of their film in their hands, not only with regard to the marketing strategy, but also in terms of financing.

**The SFI is a member of European Film Promotion (EFP); what are the advantages of this membership for the local audiovisual environment and what are the obligations?**

– There are thirty-five European film organisations in EFP dealing with the promotion of their national films and talent. It is a network of people and contacts. We carry out joint projects aimed at actors, producers and directors; at the same



time, the promotion of films at selected markets beyond Europe can be supported through EFP. Each country gets involved in the projects when it has a suitable representative, a suitable project, when filmmakers show interest and when there are enough funds, as most of the projects incur some costs. In EFP, we deal with specific issues in working groups, exchange experience, contacts, references to festivals, producers, media... No network can work without such collaboration. Then I use informational input in our work with Slovak films and filmmakers.

**More and more foreign experts have visited Slovakia recently, and most of them say that, in order for Slovak films to succeed worldwide, they should air the leading questions and deal with the topics typical of our region. Do you agree?**

– Selection of the topic is important. However, the form and the overall treatment of the topic are crucial. We frequently see very similar stories coming from various countries, and their reach and success really depend on how original they are and in what quality they are made. Sometimes the content dominates the form and I don't like it when, after a film is screened at a festival, you feel (and hear) that the film was shown at the festival "only" because it would have been "politically incorrect" to reject it. A film should have everything that makes up a film, i.e. it should possess a topic which is treated in an original, conceptual and honest manner in filmmaking terms, an innovative or experimental approach is welcome, and you should gather from the film that the authors have a rapport with their work, they know why they made it and what they want their work to say – locally or universally. And I also need to feel that they know why they are presenting it where they are presenting it.

**How can the SFI help filmmakers in the production phase or in the initial phase of the preparation of film and audiovisual projects and then in their presentation abroad?**

– Our options depend on the phase at which we get to know the project, on the author's ambition and how prepared he/she is to collaborate with us. As there are just a few of us in the NCC and we do a variety of things, we cannot go through

the entire cycle from development to international screening with each project in an intensive manner. Within our capacities, we consult on the possibilities of presentation at various international forums, we try to help with contacts, with the planning of the festival strategy and with the onward festival life of the completed film. We do not support projects financially, but we share our experience, contacts, promotion channels, help them with networking and travel...

**The distribution of information from abroad to Slovakia by way of conferences, workshops, presentations of films, literature, is also important. What are demand and supply in this area?**

– In addition to our newsletters, information on deadlines for various projects, events and grants on our website and in Film.sk, we are partners to international events in Slovakia. Film festivals are important, we have a number of them (Art Film Fest, Bratislava IFF, Febiofest, Cinematik, Fest Anča and others) and I am happy that several international events have become regulars to Slovakia – MIDPOINT for screenwriters, MAIA for producers, DOK.Incubator for documentary filmmakers. Film students of the Academy of Performing Arts have established the Visegrad Film Forum. FORUM is another important event where we organise a regular panel of upcoming films. There are also other more or less regular events, so there are sufficient events on offer and interest is growing. These events help filmmakers to become knowledgeable, boost their courage and present themselves in a better way, which, in return, helps our work.

**Which conditions in your profession would require optimisation?**

– We can always complain about the lack of funds and, really, there is never enough money for all the projects I have in mind. I am glad that our activities have now received additional financing from the Ministry of Culture and the Audiovisual Fund. The Fund also supports the individual presentation of films and filmmakers, and the workshops already mentioned. However, there are also many things that are not so greatly dependent on money, i.e. the functioning of our audiovisual environment: how we collaborate, how we combine things and events towards the

greatest possible synergy. Communication and the logical interconnection of projects are often lacking. The SFI is funded in part from the state budget and within our work we cover as much as possible from our audiovision without neglecting or discriminating against anyone. However, the conditions for collaboration with the independent environment have not really been standardised yet. We need contact persons in production companies who deal with promotion, and we also need "organised partners", i.e. associations of creative professionals – producers, directors, cinematographers, composers, actors, who are interested in how their profession is developing and in what could be improved. Together we could determine certain standard conditions, reciprocity of collaboration, we could complement each other within individual projects. There is a real lack of a film commission in Slovakia, irrespective of whether or not we have tax incentives. Last but not least, we must improve the quality of presentation through electronic media.

**Which of this year's planned events and activities of the NCC do you consider to be a priority?**

– We are celebrating several anniversaries this year. It's the fiftieth anniversary of our Institute, twenty years of the independent Slovak Republic, hence, "new" Slovak cinema; there are several significant anniversaries of Slovak films and filmmakers. Also, our film centre is ten years old. On this occasion, SFI has published an interesting book, *Best of Slovak Film* (in English) with Peter Hames presenting classical Slovak films. We are launching a new website, releasing our first Blu-ray discs, and continuing in the production of digitally restored archives on DCP... We organise profiles and retrospective screenings in Slovakia and abroad: the Slovak and Czech film showcase took place in Ljubljana in April, a Slovak focus is announced for June at Transylvania IFF in Cluj, in Melbourne we will screen our treasure *The Sun in a Net*, a big showcase of Slovak films will be organised in Tbilisi in the autumn... We continue with presentations at film markets in Berlin and Cannes. With the successful launch of Slovak films at IFF Rotterdam and the Hivos Tiger Award for *My Dog Killer*, 2013 has so far been really Slovak-film-friendly. For me, everything we do is a priority. ■



■ PHOTO: Miro Nôta





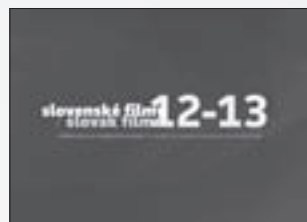
### Václav Macek: Ján Kadár

The book by film historian, Václav Macek, published in both Slovak and English, investigates the film journey and the trials and tribulations that the significant Slovak film director, Ján Kadár, winner of the Academy Award and Golden Globe, encountered during his lifetime. The author analyses Kadár's films, examines how they came into existence, explains the context of the period, introduces the festival life of his works and the reactions of film professionals and audiences, and succeeds in inter-linking Kadár's artistic career with events in his personal life. At the same time, he attempts to capture the nature and course of Kadár's collaboration with his Czech colleague, Elmar Klos, as these two made a total of eight full-length feature films together, including *The Shop on Main Street* (*Obchod na korze*, 1965). After leaving Czechoslovakia, Ján Kadár continued making films in Canada and the United States. The English version of the book was published by FOTOFO Central European House of Photography in cooperation with the SFI and the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava.



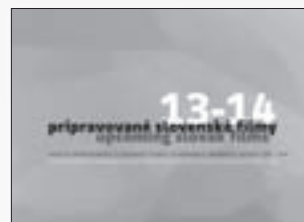
### Peter Hames: Best of Slovak Film (1921 – 1991)

The British film historian and film critic, Peter Hames, writes about thirty-five Slovak films made between 1921 and 1991 which are among the key works of Slovak cinematography. Hames writes in the form of brief observations detailing the characteristic attributes of the given work. Excerpts from media reactions to the given film are added after every contribution. The book also includes profiles of the directors who made the selected films. The films were chosen by Slovak experts in Slovak film history – Václav Macek, Jelena Paštéková, Martin Ciel, Peter Michalovič, Mária Ferenčuhová and Martin Kaňuch.



### Slovak Films 12 – 13 (A Guide to Slovak Films and Film Industry)

The bi-lingual Slovak-English handbook provides information on Slovak films made in 2012 and about projects planned to be premiered by the end of 2013. Projects are divided into the following chapters: Full-length Feature Films – 2012, 2013; Full-length Documentary Films Released and in Preparation – 2012, 2013; Short Films Released and in Preparation (selection) – 2012. Each film includes a brief summary and the names of the filmmakers, information on distribution, festival participation and awards, the filmography of the director and contact information on the producers. In addition, the publication also includes a Practical Guide with important statistical data related to Slovak film production or distribution and information on support from the Audiovisual Fund, Eurimages and the MEDIA Programme. The reader will find a directory with contact data of selected production and distribution companies, film festivals and showcases, film schools, institutions, professional and interest groups and associations, and television companies at the end of the handbook.



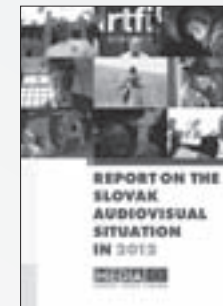
### Upcoming Slovak Films 13 – 14 (A Catalogue of Upcoming Slovak Films with Expected Theatrical Release in 2013 - 2014)

The bi-lingual Slovak-English catalogue includes titles with the distribution premières planned for 2013 and 2014. The publication includes a total of seventy-eight films divided into the following chapters: Full-length Feature Films (In Development, In Production, In Post-production), Full-length Documentaries (In Development, In Production, in Post-production), Full-length Animated Films (In Development, In Production) and Short Films. The catalogue includes twenty-six documentaries, thirty-six feature films, three animated projects and thirteen short films. The individual films contain information on filmmakers, the completion date and planned release date, budget, eventual participation in co-production forums and markets, filmography of the director, a short synopsis and contact data of the producers.



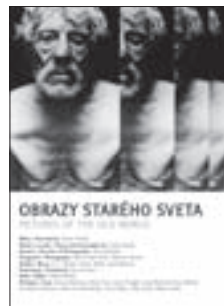
### Renáta Šmatláková, Martin Šmatlák: Film Profiles

The bi-lingual Slovak-English publication contains information on sixty-eight Slovak directors of full-length feature films. The book includes filmmakers who made films from 1921 to 2005. The date of birth, schools attended, film and other creative or teaching activities, membership in film associations and awards won are given for every director. Of course, the filmographies of the filmmakers are sequenced chronologically, with a selective bibliography. A study entitled Film Direction and Film Reflection is appended at the end of the publication.



### Report on the Slovak Audiovisual Situation in 2012

The Report on the Slovak Audiovisual Situation contains basic information on various branches of local cinematography and on events in the audiovisual space. It explains the legislative background, describes the situation in film education, summarises information on Slovak film production, provides an overview of support granted by the Audiovisual Fund, MEDIA programme, the Council of Europe cinematographic fund – Eurimages – and the Literary Fund. One part of the Report is dedicated exclusively to cinema and video distribution, and cinema and film club statistics. The Report also provides information on film festivals, showcases and awards for Slovak films and filmmakers, as well as including a directory of institutions, associations, funds and other entities operating in Slovak audiovision.



## Slovak Film of the 1940s and 1950s

The Slovak Film Institute, in association with Petit Press, has issued a collection of ten Slovak films made in the 1940s and 1950s. Director Paľo Bielik is prominently represented in this collection – *Wolves' Lairs* (*Vlčie diery*), *Forty-Four Mutineers* (*Štyridsaťštyri*) and *Captain Dabač* (*Kapitán Dabač*). Bielik also participated in the making of *Beware!* (*Varuj...*) where he also starred in the title role. The collection also includes full-length feature debuts by directors Peter Solan and František Žáček (*The Devil Never Sleeps*/*Čert nespí*), Jozef Medved' (*The Quadrille*/*Štvorylka*), Vladislav Pavlovič (*St. Peter's Umbrella*/*Dáždnik svätého Petra*), in collaboration with director Frigyes Bán and Ján Kadár (*Cathy/Katka*), who later won an Academy Award for *The Shop on Main Street* (*Obchod na korze*) made in collaboration with Elmar Klos. Ján Lacko's comedy *Luck Will Come on Sunday* (*Šťastie príde v nedeľu*) and the musical comedy by Josef Mach *Native Land* (*Rodná zem*) complete the collection. The DVD contains an English menu and subtitles.

## Slovak Film of the 1960s I and II

This collection of films focuses on the 1960s. There are a total of 21 DVDs in two special packs. In addition to a later documentary *November 1989 As Seen by Slovak Documakers* (*November 1989 očami slovenských dokumentaristov*), the collection contains e.g. the following titles: *Jánošík* (*Jánošík*, dir. P. Bielik), *The Song of the Grey Pigeon* (*Pieseň o sivom holubovi*, dir. S. Barabáš), *The Sun in a Net* (*Slnko v sieti*, dir. Š. Uher), *The Boxer and Death* (*Boxer a smrť*, dir. P. Solan), *The Organ* (*Organ*, dir. Š. Uher), *Dragon's Return* (*Drak sa vracia*, dir. E. Grečner), *Our Daily Day...* (*Deň náš každodenný...*, dir. O. Krivánek), *The Prime of Life* (*Kristove roky*, dir. J. Jakubisko), *Celebration in the Botanical Garden* (*Slávnosť v botanickej záhrade*, dir. E. Havetta), *322* (*322*, dir. D. Hanák), *Before Tonight Is Over* (*Kým sa skončí táto noc*, dir. P. Solan), *The Bells Toll for the Barefooted* (*Zvony pre bosých*, dir. S. Barabáš), *The Wonder-Maid* (*Panna zázračnica*, dir. Š. Uher), *Three Daughters* (*Tri dcéry*, dir. Š. Uher), *A Pact with the Devil* (*Zmluva s diablom*, dir. J. Zachar) or *Birdies, Orphans and Fools* (*Vtáčkovia, siroty a blázni*, dir. J. Jakubisko). Again, an English menu and subtitles are available.

## Pictures of the Old World

One of the finest films of Slovak cinematography – the documentary *Pictures of the Old World* (*Obrazy starého sveta*) was made in 1972. It was made by director Dušan Hanák, inspired by the photographic series created by Martin Martinček. Hanák visited remote corners of the country in order to uncover the inner beauty of old people and sensitively read their "stories" from their faces and hands. "I admired those old people for a number of reasons. They lived on the margins of civilisation, sometimes excluded from the village community, and their wisdom was related to their inner strength and positive thinking. They had both humour and universal humanity," said the director in an interview for Film.sk. The DVD bonuses include Hanák's extraordinary short films *Old Shatterhand Came to See Us* (*Prišiel k nám Old Shatterhand*), *Artists* (*Artisti*), *Learning* (*Učenie*), *The Mass* (*Omša*), *A Day of Joy* (*Deň radosti*). The DVD contains an English menu and subtitles in several languages, including English.

## The Man Who Lies / Eden and After

This double DVD contains full-length feature films made by the French screenwriter and director Alain Robbe-Grillet. He made *The Man Who Lies* (*L'homme qui ment*/*Muž, ktorý luže*) and *Eden and After* in French-Slovak co-productions. The first was made in 1968 and the famous French actor Jean-Louis Trintignant played the title role of a foreigner through whom the director develops mystifying games. However, Slovak actors such as Zuzana Kocúriková and Ivan Mistrík star alongside Trintignant. Igor Luther was the cinematographer of the film; Robbe-Grillet collaborated with him also on the second co-production project *Eden and After* (*L'Éden et après*/*Eden a potom*, 1970). This film again is about pretending, playing, spinning yarns and merging the border between imagination and reality. In addition to French actors, Juraj Kukura and Jarmila Koleníčová also play in the film. Both DVDs contain French and English menus and subtitles.

## Jurko the Brigand The Bloody Lady

The Slovak Film Institute also issued on DVD two full-length animated films made by the prominent personality of Slovak cinema, Viktor Kubal. His *Jurko the Brigand* (*Zbojník Jurko*, 1976) is a peculiar telling of the legend of the well-known Slovak brigand Juro Jánošík and *The Bloody Lady* (*Krvavá pani*, 1980) was in turn inspired by the legend of the Bloody Lady of Čachtice – Countess Elizabeth Báthory. In both cases, Kubal was in charge of directing, script, animation and visual design and in both instances not only the visual concept of the film but also the author's unique feeling for gags, imaginative short-cuts or metaphors has to be appreciated. To date, *Jurko the Brigand* and *The Bloody Lady* have been the only two Slovak full-length animated films. The DVDs have an English menu and subtitles in several languages, including English.

## Slovak Animated Film

The collection of sixteen short animated films offers works made by significant Slovak filmmakers of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Of course, Viktor Kubal is widely represented on the DVD, but it also contains films made by the world-renowned Czech artist and director, Jan Švankmajer who made *To the Cellar* (*Do pivnice*) in a Slovak production, Ivan Popovič (*Dream the Guard/Strážca sen*), Jaroslava Havetová (*Contacts/Kontakty*, *Song/Pieseň* – together with I. Popovič), Vlastimil Herold (*Little Mouse Cooked a Gruel*/*Varila myšička kašičku*), Dagmar Bučanová (*A Ballad in Lace/Balada v čipke*), František Jurišič (*The Wise Little Pig/Múdre prasiatko*, *Cock-a-doodle-doo/Ki-ri-ri-ri*), Helena Slavíková-Rabarová (*Spring/Jar*), Ondrej Slivka (*Umbrella/Dáždnik*) and Vladimír Malík (*Baby in the Bank/Bábätko v banke*). The footage is 141 minutes in all and the DVD is provided with an English menu and subtitles in several languages, including English.



# Slovak Film Institute – Co-Producer of Audiovisual Works

► Miro Ulman

Under the Audiovisual Act, the main tasks of the Slovak Film Institute (SFI) in the areas of audiovision and cinema are the preservation, protection and restoration of the audiovisual heritage as part and parcel of the cultural wealth of the Slovak Republic. However, in the past few years, the SFI has found itself more and more frequently becoming a co-producer of audiovisual works also.

The SFI could only have started with its co-production activities from 1991 when it was constituted as an independent legal entity. Until then it was just one of the organisational units of the Slovak Film Production (SFP). Management of the film archive was one of the activities taken over from the SFP. Quotations from archived materials are the main co-production input provided by the SFI to projects. But not every use of shots from the archives which increases the

historical value and authenticity of documentaries means that the SFI is a co-producer of an audiovisual work. "Licensing of quotations for a certain period of time for an agreed fee is one of the three most important sources of income of our institution. The co-production activities of the SFI mainly concern those projects which in some way refer to the history of Slovak cinema or deal with significant Slovak filmmakers, such as Golden Sixties or documentaries about Martin

Slivka or Vincent Rosinec. I am glad that our archive collections find a place in such a context and participate in the creation, I might claim, of milestone audiovisual works that are broadcast on TV, issued on DVD and can serve for various educational projects," says the General Director of the SFI, Peter Dubecký.

In its twenty-two years of independent existence, the SFI has participated, as co-producer, in the making of documentaries, but also feature films and also in the mapping of the history of domestic animated production.

## 1991 – 1999: Feature Film, *Paper Heads* and Michael York

Everything started in a grand style. In 1992, Peter Patzak made the political thriller *Rochade* (*Rošádka*) with Michael York in the title role in a Slovak-Austrian co-production in Slovakia with financial support from the SFI. Two years later, Štefan Semjan's crazy comedy *On the Beautiful, Blue Danube* (*Na krásnom modrom Dunaji*) was premièred in cinemas. It tells the story of three bohemian friends who, in seeking excitement from adventures on the fringes of the law, exuberant fun and with no worries about the future, are brought into collaboration in the theft of a famous Andy Warhol picture from an exhibition in Bratislava. This was the first and, to date, the last full-length feature film for cinemas that the SFI has co-produced. With 57,006 viewers, in 2010 the film was still in the TOP 10 most-attended domestic films in the era of independent Slovakia.

In 1995, the SFI co-produced *Paper Heads* (*Papierové hlavy*), the first Slovak project supported by the Council of Europe cinematographic fund Eurimages. "We were glad that the SFI was able to provide its archive for such an important project. *Paper Heads* is still one of the best-attended Slovak documentaries since 1992, and the film was sold to virtually the whole world," says Peter Dubecký. In addition to the three cinema films mentioned, the SFI participated only in the production of Ján Fúzik's mid-length documentary *The Mother Is Calling I – II* (*Mať volá I – II*, 1996) about the relocation of 73,000 Slovaks from Hungary after World War 2.

## 2000 – 2008: Slivka, Ursiny, Rosinec and Winter

Eight years passed before the SFI co-produced

another project, the first majority foreign project. The thirteen-part Czech-Greek-Slovak documentary series *The Olympic Games* with the subtitle *...in the Same River Thrice* (*Olympiáda ...po treťkrát do tej istej rieky*) talks about the birth of the Olympic Games, their history, politics, symbols and about the preparations for the 2004 Olympics in Athens. A year later the SFI and the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava co-produced Maroš Berák's student film *Obedient to the President of the Republic* (*Poslušný prezidentovi republiky*, 2005). The SFI also co-produced in tandem with the Academy Robert Šulák's *There Were Horné Opatovce* (*Tam boli Horné Opatovce*, 2009) and *About Bachelors* (*O starých mládencoch*, 2010). And in 2005, the tribute to director Elo Havetta, *Celebration of a Lonely Palm* (*Slávnosť osamelej palmy*), was made by directors Marko Škop and Juraj Johanides. In the same year and subsequent years the SFI continued the collaboration in the production of news films *Chronicles* (*Le-topisy*).

The fourth full-length film for cinemas that was co-produced by the SFI was Martin Šulík's documentary *Martin Slivka – the Man Who Planted Trees* (*Martin Slivka – muž, ktorý sadil stromy*, 2007) which is a tribute to Martin Slivka, one of the most prominent figures of Slovak cinema and culture.

A further four films were made in 2008. The portrait of the Slovak music legend Dežo Ursiny entitled *Snapshots* (*Momentky*) was distributed to cinemas. *The Optimist* (*Optimista*) by Dušan Trančík, the portrait of Ľudovít Winter, who modernised the spa town of Piešťany despite the envy and resentment of several political regimes, was premièred at the IFF Bratislava and later issued on DVD. The mid-length film by Marek Šulík *The Journey of Magdalena Robinson* (*Cesta Magdalény Robinsonovej*, 2008) about a prominent Slovak photographer who lost both parents during World War 2, suffered in concentration camps and after decades observes with horror the renewed interest of part of the Slovak public in fascist ideas and the veneration of representatives of the First Slovak Republic, was shown with great success at festivals. The mid-length documentary by Vlado Balco *Between 4 – 5.6* (*Medzi 4 – 5,6*) was the last project in 2008.

The film is a personal lifetime summary of the works by cinematographer Vincent Rosinec.

## 2009 – 2011: from TV Series to TV Series

The period between 2009 and 2011 was very rich in co-production projects of the SFI. If we count the individual episodes, then the final figure amounted to 59! In 2009, the SFI co-produced two mid-length films by Zuzana Piussi: *Hero of Our Time (Hrdina našich čias)* about the significant Slovak film critic Pavel Branko, and her investigation into the destiny of the film studio entitled *Koliba (Koliba)*. Tomáš Hučko's documentary *Before This Film Is Over (Kým sa skončí tento film)*, (2009) was dedicated to Tibor Vichta, a prominent screenwriter, dramaturge and teacher at the Academy of Performing Arts. *Ilja (Ilja)*, (2010) by Ivan Ostrochovský was another mid-length documentary from this period; it is a film about the composer, Ilja Zeljenka.

The Largest volume of co-productions was concentrated in three big projects. In 2009, *Golden Sixties* (*Zlatá šedesáta*) in co-production with the Czech Republic brought together twenty-six portraits of important personalities of Czechoslovak film, Albert Marenčin, Juraj Jakubisko, Eduard Grečner, Igor Luther, Ivan Balada and Dušan Hanák amongst others. Martin Šulík directed this series, and also a two-part full-length film for cinemas *25 from the Sixties, or the Czechoslovak New Wave* (*25 zo šesťdesiatych alebo Československá nova vlna*, 2010). Unlike *Golden Sixties*, the film presents an overall view of the phenomenon of the Czechoslovak new wave by means of twenty-five key films with comments by their filmmakers and film historians.

In *The Slovak Cinema* young documentary filmmakers look at the history and present of Slovak cinematography. In 2010, six episodes were made (directed by Peter Kerekes, Robert Kirchhoff, Ivan Ostrochovský, Diana Fabiánová, Lenka Moravčíková-Chovanec, Dušan Bustin) and two years later a further four were made by Miro Remo, Zuzana Liová, Zuzana Karasová and Lenka Moravčíková. The thirteen-episode documentary *The Magic World of Animated Film* (*Čarovný svet animovaného filmu*) was made over a period of eight years. The screenwriter and co-director Rudolf Urc looks at the history of Slovak animated film in the series, its most

remarkable, most distinctive works, the trends and the authors. *Celluloid Country* (*Celluloid Country*) in turn deals with the history of Slovak documentary. Martin Šulík and Ivan Ostrochovský were the directors of the series. According to Ostrochovský, *"this is a series which seeks to draw a picture of Slovakia mainly through documentaries and news films. It attempts to answer the question of why, in a certain period of time, a given image was preferred and whether Slovak films show how we are or rather how we would like to be."* The whole project has nine episodes and so far five have been completed.

## 2012: We Are Carrying On

2012 was no exception to these activities. In the course of the year, the SFI concluded five co-production agreements. This led to the making of Igor Sivák's film *Shadows of the Barbarian Night* (*Tiene barbarskej noci*) about the monks against whom Operation K was aimed in 1950, and Zuzana Piusi's film *Men of Revolution* (*Muži revolúcie*) – a mosaic of subjective views of former revolutionaries from 1989. Both films together with *The Woman Rabbi* (*Rabínka*) by Anna Grusková – a film about the destiny of Gisi Fleischmannová with the agreement signed in 2011 – have already been released into distribution or at festivals. A further three projects with agreements signed in 2012 are now awaiting their premiere: *Lyrik* (*Lyrik*) by Arnold Kojnok, the full-length documentary *Normalization* (*Kauza Červanová*) by Robert Kirchhoff and *The Carlton Legend* (*Legenda Carlton*) by director Peter Krišťufek. The Polish-Slovak project *The Last Wave* (*Posledná vlna*) by director Andrzej Titkow is in production: the agreement was signed in 2011.

Hence, it appears that the trend set by recent years is going to continue. As the General Director of the SFI, Peter Dubecký, says: *"We will make decisions based on our possibilities and type of project, whether we are going to co-produce or not, because there are many projects related to cinematography that would probably never come into existence if the SFI did not contribute to their making as co-producer."* ▲



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