

special edition  
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on slovak cinema

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**film**

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# SLOVAK FILM INSTITUTE AND SLOVAK FILM COMMISSION JOIN FORCES TO PROMOTE SLOVAKIA AT INTERNATIONAL FILM MARKETS.

EUROPEAN FILM MARKET,  
BERLINALE 2020



MARCHÉ DU FILM,  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES 2020



editorial



— “It is misleading to create the impression that a film couldn’t be successful without good marketing,” says the Slovak director and producer Ivan Ostrochovský in the interview. “In short, you have to make a film that you believe in,” he adds. This is his third appearance at the Berlinale – this time as the director of the feature film *Servants* and also as co-producer of the film essay *FREM* by director Viera Čákanyová. The protagonist of *FREM* is an entity which is not human. The film asks what the world will look like when people stop dominating it – either due to a climate disaster or the uncontrollable development of artificial intelligence. The reflection on the limits of anthropocentric thinking was made from the AI perspective. The director shot it with a small crew in the harsh conditions of Antarctica and made a film she believes in.

— The Czech director and producer Václav Marhoul believed, in particular, in himself when he started to track down the holder of the rights to Jerzy Kosiński’s book *The Painted Bird*. He had been preparing the film for over eleven years. According to the Slovak co-producer Zuzana Mistríková, Marhoul obtained the rights thanks to his convincing motivation and vision. “For people who have similar rights, it is usually much more essential that someone knows why and how, than arriving and offering a lot of money,” says Mistríková in the interview.

— The low-budget comedy *Loli Paradicka* became a hit with audiences in Slovakia last year and was the third best-attended of the domestic films. It even surpassed several films with a much higher budget. That 2019 favoured Slovak cinema is demonstrated not only by the fact that, in a country with a population of 5 million, over a million viewers came to cinemas to see domestic films in just one year. The English issue of *Film.sk* carries an overview of last year’s distribution and festival successes of Slovak films, three separate texts with a more extensive evaluation of domestic feature, documentary and animated production, three reviews, an overview of films expected in 2020 and also a selection of classical titles that the Slovak Film Institute issued on DVD and Blu-ray.

— Next year we will commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the year the first Slovak feature-length film *Jánošík* (1921) was made. Its producer, the American Slovak Ján Závodný, used money acquired by selling his cinema and even ran into debt just to have the film made. He believed it made sense. Later, the film lay forgotten for almost 50 years in a sea chest in his garage. Until the Slovak Film Institute detected it. Závodný donated *Jánošík* to the Institute in 1970 and even delivered it in person from the US. Ján Závodný died on 18 February forty years ago and you can find his profile in this issue too. ▶

— Matúš Kvasnička / 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 it is 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 2012. 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 milieus.

— *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, 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 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.

— From January 2018, the monthly *Film.sk* is published in a larger format, in full colour, with a modern layout and with some new sections. Its role continues to be to provide information about film and film events in Slovakia, but it also reflects the conjunction of the Slovak and foreign audiovisual environments to a greater extent.

— 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 (SFI) is the sole state-funded memory and archive institution operating in the area of audiovision 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. Creative Europe Desk Slovensko is also part of the Slovak Film Institute.

The Film Institute in Bratislava was established on 1st 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* (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 1st 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 played a part in the preparation of the extensive publication entitled *History of Slovak Cinema* (Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie, 1997); the second, updated issue of the book has been published in 2016.

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 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, 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 are part of the project. SFI's digitisation workplace is located in the basement of Cinema Lumière in Bratislava. The national Digital Audiovision project was concluded on 30 November 2015; however, it will be retained until 2021.

In September 2011, Cinema Lumière was opened in Bratislava. The cinema is operated by the SFI. ▲

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— text: Miro Ulman —

photo: TV Joj —

2019:

# A Million at Slovak Films

The figure in the title is not support from the Audiovisual Fund for the production of Slovak audiovisual works – that is much higher. It is the number of viewers who attended cinemas last year to watch Slovak films. While, in 2018, all the premiered Slovak films were seen by 234,446 viewers, last year their number can be recorded in the magical seven digits for only the second time in history.

— A glance at the statistics shows that total attendance in Slovak cinemas increased by 9.46% year on year and the number of viewers – 6,529,320 – was the second largest in the era of independence. The gross box office takings of EUR 37,258,401, which represented a year-on-year increase of 12.76%, are actually the highest for this period.

— While, in 2018, the share of domestic films (including non-première titles and minority co-productions) in the total attendance was 4.21%, in 2019 this share achieved an excellent 16.47%. This was due also to the fact that attendances at three of the domestic films exceeded 100,000 viewers. The best-attended Slovak film in 2019, *The Rift* (*Trhlina*) was seen by 262,588 viewers. Along with the new films, *The New Year's Kiss* (*Šťastný Nový rok*, 201,858 viewers) and *Loli Paradicka* (*Loli paradička*, 123,144 viewers), *The Rift* ranks 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> in the Top 10 Slovak films since Slovakia gained independence. More viewers were curious to see *Loli Paradicka* than, for instance, the new film by Quentin Tarantino.

— Last year, 43 Slovak full-length films and blocks were released in cinemas – 27 feature films (of which 15 were minority co-productions), 14 documentaries (4 minority co-productions), 1 animated film and one animated block. Four short Slovak animated films were screened prior to the main films – *Wild Beasts* (*Divoké bytosti*, SK/CZ, 2019, dir. Marta Prokopová, Michal Blaško) prior to *Liyana*; *Music Box* (SK, 2019, dir. Joanna Kožuch) prior to the documentary *The Lonely Runners: Moving on!* (*Osamelí bežci: Ideme ďalej!*, 2019); *Persona Grata* (SK, 2018, dir. Daniela Krajčová) prior to *And Breathe Normally*, and *The Kite*

(*Šarkan*, CZ/SK/PL, 2019, dir. Martin Smatana) prior to *The Big Bad Fox and Other Tales*.

— Peter Solan's film *The Barnabáš Kos Case* (*Prípad Barnabáš Kos*, CS, 1964) was re-released as part of the travelling showcase Project 100 – 2019; it was digitally restored by the Slovak Film Institute.

— Marek Slobodník's début *Africa by Pionier: 15,000 Kilometres on the Smallest Motorbikes* (*Afrika na Pionieri*) was the best-attended domestic documentary with 16,293 viewers and Lenka Kny's romantic comedy *Closer to the Stars* (*Ženská na vrchole*) was the most successful minority co-production – it was seen by 69,894 viewers.

— Thirteen distribution companies presented Slovak films in cinemas; this time, the most active of them was Continental Film with eleven domestic premières.

— It is gratifying that last year the average attendance per screening of a premiered 100-percent Slovak film or majority co-production more than doubled on the previous year, specifically from 22.87 viewers in 2018 to 49.30 viewers in 2019. As for feature films, *The New Year's Kiss* had the highest average attendance per screening (88.46), and *The Calling* (*Volanie*) for the documentaries (32.78).

— While, in the past, attendances at domestic films grew largely thanks to minority co-productions, recent years have shown an opposite trend. The share of viewers of Slovak minority co-productions constituted only 22% of the overall attendance at domestic films and the average attendance at these films was only 25.42 viewers. ▶

**Distribution of premiered Slovak and co-production films in Slovakia in 2019 / 100% Slovak films, majority co-productions and 50/50**

	SLOVAK TITLE / ENGLISH TITLE	DIRECTOR	YEAR OF PRODUCTION	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	RELEASE DATE*	NUMBER OF SCREENINGS	GROSS BOX OFFICE (€)	DISTRIBUTOR
1.	<i>Trhlina / The Rift</i>	Peter Bebjak	2019	SK	24-01	3,622	262,588	1,541,225 €
2.	<i>Šťastný nový rok / The New Year's Kiss</i>	Jakub Kroner	2019	SK	05-12	2,282	201,858	1,213,733 €
3.	<i>Loli paradička / Loli Paradicka</i>	Richard Staviarsky, Vito Staviarsky	2019	SK	18-07	1,813	123,144	696,389 €
4.	<i>Kto je ďalší? / Who's Next?</i>	Miro Drobný	2019	SK	22-08	1,375	63,070	218,147 €
5.	<i>Amnestie / Amnesty</i>	Jonáš Karásek	2019	SK/CZ	31-10	1,304	48,430	282,988 €
6.	<i>Ostrým nožom / By a Sharp Knife</i>	Teodor Kuhn	2019	SK/CZ	21-02	1,292	39,588	229,132 €
7.	<i>Afrika na Pionieri / Africa by Pionier: 15.000 Kilometers on the Smallest Motorbikes</i>	Marek Slobodník	2019	SK	05-09	675	16,293	89,328 €
8.	<i>Skutok sa stal / Never Happened</i>	Barbora Bereznáková	2019	SK/CZ	12-09	790	15,141	91,407 €
9.	<i>Nech je svetlo / Let There Be Light</i>	Marko Škop	2019	SK/CZ	26-09	579	14,726	55,904 €
10.	<i>Casino.\$k / Casino.\$k</i>	Ján Sabol	2019	SK	26-09	1,066	14,399	89,026 €
11.	<i>Websterovci 2 – Zo života pavúkov / The Websters 2 – From Life of Spiders</i>	Katarína Kerekesová	2019	SK/PL	26-09	509	6,819	33,382 €
12.	<i>Ukradnutý štát / The State Capture</i>	Zuzana Piussi	2019	SK/CZ	10-10	201	4,838	19,748 €
13.	<i>Volanie / The Calling</i>	Erik Praus	2019	SK	31-10	100	3,278	11,885 €
14.	<i>Punk je hned! / Punk Never Ends!</i>	Juraj Šlauka	2019	SK/CZ	21-03	149	3,084	10,187 €
15.	<i>Malá ríša / Little Kingdom</i>	Peter Magát	2019	SK/IS	21-11	382	2,638	15,099 €
16.	<i>Cesta do nemožna / The Impossible Voyage</i>	Noro Držiak	2019	SK/CZ	30-10	85	2,309	8,644 €
17.	<i>Dobrá smrť / The Good Death</i>	Tomáš Krupa	2018	SK/CZ/FR/AT	21-03	301	1,744	7,790 €
18.	<i>Svetozár Stračina / Svetozár Stračina</i>	Pavol Barabáš	2019	SK	05-09	108	1,635	3,919 €
19.	<i>Mohyla / The Monument</i>	Andrej Kolenčík	2019	SK	04-04	22	765	1,894 €
20.	<i>Osamelí bežci: Ideme ďalej! / The Lonely Runners: Moving On!</i>	Martin Repka	2019	SK	7-11	54	666	1,370 €
21.	<i>Nero a Seneca / Nero and Seneca</i>	Marek Čapák	2019	SK	28-11	13	232	901 €
22.	<i>Stratený domov / Lost Home</i>	Juraj Mravec Jr.	2019	SK	12-10	27	212	912 €
23.	<i>Hľuché dni / Silent Days</i>	Pavol Pekarčík	2019	SK	11-10	26	148	544 €
24.	<i>Obliehanie mesta / The Siege</i>	Zuzana Piussi, Vít Janeček	2019	SK/CZ	02-05	12	43	69 €

**Sub-total 100% Slovak films, majority co-productions and 50/50**

**16,787 827,648 4,623,622 €**

\*dd-mm

source: Union of Film Distributors of the Slovak Republic (Únia filmových distribútorov SR)

note: The films are sequenced based on the number of viewers

	SLOVAK TITLE / ENGLISH TITLE	DIRECTOR	YEAR OF PRODUCTION	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	RELEASE DATE*	NUMBER OF ADMISSIONS SCREENINGS	GROSS BOX OFFICE (€)	DISTRIBUTOR
1.	Ženská na vrchole / Closer to the Stars	Lenka Kny	2019	CZ/SK	07-11	1,498	69,894	417,218 € Continental film
2.	Posledná aristokratka / The Last of the Noblewomen	Jiří Vejdělek	2019	CZ/SK	24-10	1,106	43,342	258,610 € Forum Film
3.	Teroristka / Shotgun Justice	Radek Bajgar	2019	CZ/SK	04-04	1,190	41,832	217,520 € CinemArt SK
4.	Sklenená izba / The Glass Room	Julius Ševčík	2019	CZ/SK	14-03	1,285	40,371	228,213 € Garfield film
5.	Vlastníci / Owners	Jiří Havelka	2019	CZ/SK	21-11	576	9,890	55,646 € CinemArt SK
6.	Hodinárov učen / Watchmaker's Apprentice	Jitka Rudolfová	2019	CZ/SK	12-09	571	5,189	22,759 € Bontonfilm
7.	Na streche / On the Roof	Jiří Mádl	2019	CZ/SK	07-02	429	4,544	24,543 € Continental film
8.	Pomaľované vtáča / The Painted Bird	Václav Marhouš	2019	CZ/UA/SK/PL	19-09	276	4,348	22,138 € Magic Box Slovakia
9.	Pražské orgie / The Prague Orgy	Irena Pavlásková	2019	CZ/SK	17-10	377	3,020	17,368 € Magic Box Slovakia
10.	Voda čo ma drží nad vodou / Water Keeping Me Afloat	Tomáš Magnusek	2019	CZ/SK	28-11	274	2,548	13,227 € Continental film
11.	Hovory s TGM / Talks with TGM	Jakub Červenka	2018	CZ/SK	03-01	217	2,513	12,045 € Bontonfilm
12.	Chvilky / Moments	Beata Parkanová	2018	CZ/SK	02-05	133	2,011	6,013 € ASFK
13.	Môj dedo spadol z Marsu / My Grandpa Is an Alien	Dražen Žarkovič, Marina Andree Škop	2019	HR/LU/NO /CZ/SK/S/BA	06-06	542	1,541	7,814 € Continental film
14.	Jiří Suchý / Jiří Suchý	Olga Sommerová	2019	CZ/SK	10-10	188	1,424	5,951 € CinemArt SK
15.	Uzly a pomaranče / The Scent of Oranges	Ivan Pokorný	2019	CZ/DE/SK	13-06	440	1,170	5,329 € Continental film
16.	Všetko bude / Winter Flies	Olmo Omerzu	2018	CZ/SI/PL/SK	09-01	68	597	2,309 € Filmtopia
17.	BATAstories / BATAstories	Peter Kerekes	2019	FR/CZ/SK	10-10	42	569	2,279 € Filmtopia
18.	Vietor / The Wind. A Documentary Thriller	Michał Bielawski	2019	PL/SK	28-11	42	499	1,215 € ASFK
19.	The Sound is Innocent / The Sound Is Innocent	Johana Ožvoldová	2019	CZ/FR/SK	26-11	10	151	264 € Filmtopia
<b>Sub-total Minority co-productions</b>						<b>9,264</b>	<b>235,453</b>	<b>1,320,462 €</b>
<b>TOTAL All premiered Slovak and co-production films</b>						<b>20,051</b>	<b>1,063,101</b>	<b>5,944,084 €</b>
<b>TOTAL All Slovak and co-production films screened in 2019</b>						<b>26,471</b>	<b>1,075,029</b>	<b>5,968,856 €</b>

\*dd-mm

source: Union of Film Distributors of the Slovak Republic (Únia filmových distribútorov SR)

note: The films are sequenced based on the number of viewers



— text: Matúš Kvasnička —

photo: Silverart —

## What Will 2020 Bring?

In addition to Ivan Ostrochovský's Servants (Služobníci) which we present in another section, premières of further majority Slovak films are also expected in 2020.

— After his successful road movie *The Interpreter* (Tlmočník, 2018) with Peter Simonischek and Jiří Menzel, director Martin Šulík will make *The Man with Hare Ears* (Muž so zajačími ušami) this year. The film's protagonist is Jozef, a 60-year-old writer. He believes there is nothing that can surprise him any longer until his phone rings one day. The subsequent series of events turns his life upside down and, among other things, his literary alter ego – the man with hare ears – starts appearing to him. Šulík is also preparing a new documentary – a portrait of the world-renowned mime, Milan Sládek.

— The makers of *The Report* (Správa) promise a story filled with suspense and emotion that will appeal to the viewer with the thrilling drama of escape, the absurdity of historical development, but also the inner strength of a man who stood up to the perversity of the system. In this film, director Peter Bebják tells the story of Alfréd Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba who managed to escape the Auschwitz death camp and give a report of the genocide. The report reached W. Churchill and F. D. Roosevelt and influenced the course of WW2.

— General Milan Rastislav Štefánik tragically died in 1919 in an air crash. What really happened? *The General* (Generál) about one of the key figures of modern Slovak history directed by Jiří Chlumský is also searching for the answer to this question. Milan Ondrik will star in the title role.

— "He wanted to escape from the world into a monastery, but he had to flee in order to save life itself and so that he could understand how brutal political power distorts the character." This is how the makers of *Kryštof* characterise the story. The film directed by Zdeněk Jiráský talks about faith, hope and sacrifice.

— The political thriller *Scumbag* (Sviňa) was already released in Slovak cinemas in February. Inspired by the domestic reality, it talks about how power functions and about a system with no border between crime and law. Mariana Čengel Solčanská and the well-known produ-

cer Rudolf Biermann are the directors of this film – it is Biermann's directorial début. *Summer Rebels* (Letní rebeli) by director Martina Saková is also a début. Little Jonáš is the protagonist. Summer holidays at his grandfather's full of adventure and an extraordinary friendship are ahead of him.

— *Perinbaba: Two Realms* follows up on the successful fairy tale *The Feather Fairy* (Perinbaba, 1985) by one of the most significant Slovak filmmakers, Juraj Jakubisko. The actress who played the original Feather Fairy, the late Italian actress Giulietta Masina, was also billed

to appear in the sequel by using modern technologies "resurrecting" deceased actors. The main protagonist of this new film is Lukáš, the son of the original protagonists, Alžbetka and Jakub, who fought for their love in the previous film. Now Lukáš himself has to fight. The filmmakers promise a "21<sup>st</sup> century family film" with elements of the fairy tale world.

— Slovak film will again have what traditionally has come to be a strong year where documentaries are concerned: *All Men Become Brothers* (Všetci lúdia budú bratia) by director Robert Kirchhoff deals with the phenomenon of Alexander Dubček, the face of the Prague Spring of 1968. +/- 90 by Marek Kuboš is, in turn, a collective portrait of Slovak documentary filmmakers. Two films made by Jaro Vojtek will also get to audiences – *Paradise on Earth* (Raj na zemi) about photographer Andrej Bán and *7 Days* (7 dní) about the life of people who travel for work. Peter Kerekes comes with the story of a woman jailed for killing her husband, *The Censor* (Cenzorka), and Pavol Pekarčík focuses on the lives of people on the front line in the Donetsk Region in *The Hole* (Diera). Ladislav Kaboš brings a portrait of the famous Brazilian architect Hans Broos in *Rough Poetry Architect* (Architekt drsnej poetiky) and, in turn, Martin Palúch has made a portrait of actor Ivan Palúch who also shone in the late 1960s in world cinema; however, the communist regime put an end to his acting career. ▶

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## Slovak films on DVD and Blu-ray

[www.klapka.sk](http://www.klapka.sk)



Amnesty —

— text: Eva Vženteková —

photo: Michal Stašák/AZYL Production, Artileria, Punkchart films, nutprodukcia, STAVIARSKY —

# Signs of the Times

In 2019, seven new full-length feature films of exclusively domestic production received their première in our cinemas and Slovakia also took part in the production of five further films as a majority co-producer, in four cases together with a Czech partner and in one, unusually, with an Icelandic partner.

Two more films at the margin of basic genres, a trick film and a partly staged documentary were also made in Slovak majority co-productions. These fourteen more or less dramatic-feature opuses were complemented by fifteen other films made with Slovak minority participation in predominantly Czech partnership. The above participation ratio does not signal quite optimal positions even though it suggests a natural Czech-Slovak affinity. Putting film budgets together can set in motion a spiral of pragmatic calculations that might not favour the development of supra-regional themes and creative interests. The most successful, in film terms, example of a majority and exclusive producer prototype in this year's feature productions are the Slovak-Czech *Amnesty* (*Amnestie*) with a domestic creative driver and a significant Czechoslovak theme, and the exclusively regional *Loli Paradicka* (*Loli paradička*).

#### Close to the Protest Climate

The fullness of a feature film is determined by the attractiveness of the narrative together with the knowledge and depth of the deliberation. The ambitions and ideas of the filmmakers are opened by a theme either with huge demands, or even developed from a banal plot. *Let There Be Light* (*Nech je svetlo*) and *By a Sharp Knife* (*Ostrým nožom*) are ambitious films as regards society's account of the present times (if we don't consider the events that happened fifteen years ago – as an inspiration – to be a historical event). A model build-up of the story and characters pertains in both films and the director's approach abrades it by observing realistic situations and deeds; however, it does not completely superimpose it, and thus it leaves a light collision between the engaged social criticism and its slightly more cumbersome shape. In the depth of penetration, Marko Škop's *Let There Be Light* has a more concentrated but also socially less demanding ground plan of a rural micro-space, even though it attempts to confront it with its foreign counterpart. By contrast, Teodor Kuhn's *By a Sharp Knife*, taking place in a metropolis, rather lacks characteristically populous, varied spaces, which do not have to be missing in a model drama as the most important thing, but it does emphasise the fact of its being a model.

While Kuhn presented the well-known case of an unsolved murder in the confrontation between the offensive hero and the sapless and corrupt units of the police-judicial system, in an equally critical view Škop submitted an elementary power-manipulative network defied by a local macho who works abroad. The not quite harmonious relationship between the author's pressure on the story and the ability to resist this pressure by an obsessional shape formed from within leads in both films to more explicit positions and emphasis on the legibility of the warning, even rousing undertone. The fact that both plots are based on the key situation of an innocent, even sacrificial, death and subsequent defiance against injustice, confirms the affinity of both films with the current domestic protest climate which was activated by the mafia execution of a young investigative journalist.

### Storytelling Let Off the Leash

The film *Casino.\$k* also reacts in its theme to the upsurge in social-political critique and the pillorying of corruption-nepotistic practices. Hence, in the image of unhealthy relationships, it intended to react to the increasing demand for domestic films corresponding to the wave of massive dissatisfaction. If *Let There Be Light* searches for pathological social phenomena on the ground plan of a small rural community and finds expressions of radicalisation in the lap of the local authoritarian-nationalistic Catholicism and *By a Sharp Knife* profiles the image of urban extremism in the line of the powerful versus the helpless, then Ján Sabol's *Casino.\$k*, with a title somewhat pretentiously referring to Scorsese's well-known film, heads towards the more extensive territory of the higher and middle classes in the political, media and business-gambling environment. Here it diagnoses

ous spaces in the familiar domestic environment. The director of *The Rift*, Peter Bebjak, probably the only Slovak filmmaker who currently functions as an audience brand, continues after *The Line* in the effort to find and locate domestic facts in a genre-tuned film image. The image of the corruption-mafia power in the eastern border zone is replaced in *The Rift* by a higher power controlling a specific space of nature. The menacing supernatural power comes under the shield of simulated reality which provides the viewer with direct continuity with the film image, and the film with independence from reality. The filmmaking expertise enhances the real prototypes of the environment and characters into a new attractiveness, multiplied by a mysterious tension, even though the attributes of magnetic forces, hallucinations, illusions, the withdrawal of conscience, loss of personality and mysterious identities do not

lying and self-harm remains in the portrayed captivity of the new-age self-presentational, egocentric offensive in which man's reality is lost and ultimately transformed to a used attraction. From the filmmaking perspective, the dynamically designed documentarism of adrenaline ascents to the peaks of inaccessible objects captivates in the second part of the film, and the description of bullying in the manner of clip writerism in the third part. However, the initial testimony about bullying and the escape into self-destruction is spilt into a stage show in an almost preaching evangelistic format. The educational-preventative protection of a young person against the "terror" of virtuality gets carried away by its own mania and thus itself becomes the subject of diagnostics.

In turn, in *The New Year's Kiss* (Šťastný Nový rok) by director Jakub Kröner, the world of Internet reality is almost excluded. Actually, the only character who does

from more laborious attributes, then enticing storytelling mixing hysteria with sentiment flows over the marketing chessboard of *The New Year's Kiss*. It plunges the selective elements of the film's domestic colouring into the universality of romantic fiction. The scene of mass intoxication with Lennon's Christmas song on a peak in the Tatras is one of the culminating images of voluntary colonisation of the home space.

### Authenticity Instead of Constructions

The "zoography" of the films *Punk Never Ends!* (*Punk je hned!*) and *Silent Days* (*Hluché dni*) (the latter is a sort of counterpart of *Blind Loves/Slepé lásky*) constitutes a strong programme opposition to the above films. They exemplify the prejudiced relationship to reality which conditions their plot and protects authenticity against superior constructions and external interven-



*Let There Be Light* —

immoral and illegal behaviour, spurious manners, and it subtly points out a certain continuity with the previous regime. However, the film does not in any way manage to accomplish its ambitious assignment and intention. If *By a Sharp Knife* partially overspills the film attractiveness into the explicitness of the accusation of society, *Casino.\$k* totally dissolves within its attractive topography. It is not just storytelling let off its leash and an overestimate of the adequacy of the theme and alluring environments linked with high-quality actors – the value of the film is also vitiated by its collusion with the casino sponsor of the film in the form of direct promotional shots.

### The Director as Audience Brand

*The Rift* (Trhlina) extends the attractiveness of current parallel worlds by way of the magic of mysteri-

always quite organically outgrow the motivations behind the actions, relationships and space-time dimensions from which the story and its characters grow.

Even though *The Rift* aspires to communicate with the young generation, it respects the "classical" formats of the storytelling build-up and suggestion. Miro Drobny's *Who's Next?* (*Kto je ďalší?*) has detached itself from these. It presents the young protagonists of the digital age via their own selfie-YouTube culture. It brings to cinema screens the language and communication methods of the virtual space which separates reality from its trendy smart version. So, the image of the new "reality" in its result deepens the reflected shallowness and inconsistency of the story build-up and motivational factors. The emptied space is filled with a large emotional mush as an instrument threatening with emotional blackmail. The important theme of bul-



*Punk Never Ends!* —

not experience a happy ending in this fairy tale about happiness is a young influencer – gold-digger. In this way, the film duly condemns modern communication networks and manners and returns the viewer to the old, good, well-tried classical non-Internet humanity and solidarity, including the reliable Tatra Mountains which take on a glamourous image in the film derived from the appearance of the characters and interiors – even though this domestic film glamour is, in the typical Slovak way, linked with profanities coming out of men's and women's mouths which makes the cinema audiences laugh (but irritates in the case of the well-known deciphered recordings). Even the character of an otherwise bad capitalist (see the film *Little Kingdom/Malá ríša*) enjoys the "lemonade" protection of a good guy. If we register an edifying intention behind the pomposity of *Who's Next?* and *The Rift* creates a genre picture

tions. The films show characters from the lowest social strata whose mental unpretentiousness and way of life are more exposable before a curious camera. Unlike *Punk Never Ends!*, Pavol Pekarčík's *Silent Days* with a cultivated composition is lightly dominated by an academic approach concentrated on an objectivising disinterested observation of the "naked" reality which is, in part, staged by the author by the documentarist image of segregated persons and groups. Juraj Šlauka's *Punk Never Ends!* occupies veristic positions and forces its way between the plausibility of non-actor characters and the contrived story which brings them together. Initially, the experience from authentic protagonists and situations of the declassed strata is a strong attraction of the film which later wavers somewhat based on the possibilities of their harmonisation with the story line. David Kollar's accompanying music doesn't help; the music itself →

is excellent, but its nature is considerably parallel to the visual component, it does not conform to it which does not leave a mark on the quality of the music, but it fragments the film's schematic zoography.

#### How a Roma Princess Awoke a Sad White Prince

— It is the stylistics of the characters and the story, mastered in a comprehensive manner, that distinguish a similarly authentic film, *Loli Paradicka* (*Loli paradička*, the title of the film based on an eponymous Roma song used in the film, means "red tomato"), from *Punk Never Ends!*. These two films have in common the awakening of the title characters in the end, albeit in a far more tragic form in *Loli Paradicka*. That a Roma girl with better times dawning for her was kidnapped by a criminal gang rattles the audiences, thanks also to the ability of the storytelling to attract them to the film's protagonists. The

opens up considerations about the possibilities of her extricating herself from slavish captivity – whether the evil spectre, which haunts the ritually pious Roma girl in her dreams, victoriously accomplishes its work, or whether another force, which won't let her perish, overcomes it...

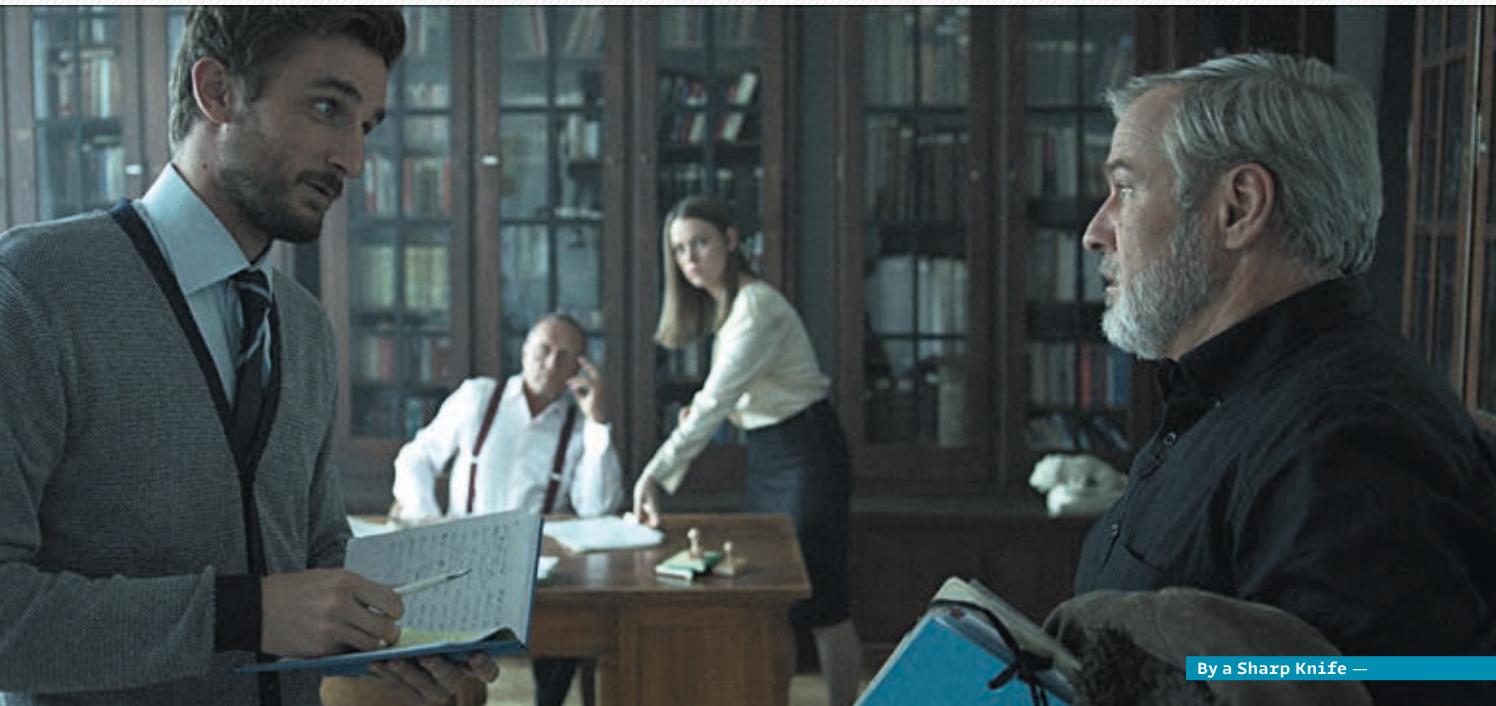
#### Education, Tedious Ostentatiousness and an Attractive Scan of the Past

— Stories from the present are complemented by films bound by the historic anniversaries in 2019. The hundredth anniversary of Štefánik's death is represented by an intersection of feature and animated film, *The Impossible Voyage* (*Cesta do nemožna*) by director Noro Držiak and the educational film for younger teenagers *The Monument* (*Mohyla*) by Andrej Kolenčík. *The Impossible Voyage* is both more inventive and also markedly

tric story smother the big-budget story.

— *Amnesty* (*Amnestie*) is the imaginary winner among the films made on the occasion of political-social anniversaries. The impeccable, offensive directing with a resourceful bond between the multifarious audio and visual components, submitted the first view of the events associated with the political breakthrough of 1989 in domestic feature film production for cinemas. The producer-screenwriter base in the person of Maroš Hečko used a guaranteed partnership with Ján Karásek, currently perhaps the most talented non-auteur director in Slovakia, to prepare the sophisticated and assertive project, and clarify his respectable value ambitions. The broad map of historical events in which the prisoner, over the course of a few months, becomes one of the leading representatives of the country in which he was persecuted, installed an attractive image of a com-

years after its emancipation, faces the pressure of its own identity and the provoked, personalising relation to the domestic elites. The general criticism used by *Amnesty* to scan the past bears fruit which also includes polemic reactions. They mostly concern the morally discredited character of the revolutionary tribune, as a certain lack of distinction between the character of the hero and his heroic deed discredits not only the revolutionary act, but also the revolutionary context in whose name it was needed. *Amnesty* sought not to be a celebration but a critical reflection of the past which to this day lacks a uniform state-forming myth. The filmmakers were under no obligation to contribute to it, but it is certainly true it didn't happen. While the Štefánik myth carries an anti-monarchy, pro-republic and national-emancipation ethos, from which both the films made on Štefánik's anniversary stemmed without a seed of up-dated consideration,



By a Sharp Knife —

melodic mellowness of succinct dialogues, the familiar connection of the characters with the environment, the insertion of a magic line into the business environment at the fair, creates the basis for unique collisions of naivety with scepticism and fanfare with stubbornness, multiplied by the cruel victory of the tempter. The camper-trailer bearing the Roma girl, who at the end of the film is kidnapped by her own kin for prostitution abroad, drives on the highway in an open metaphor of the clandestine violence of other such anonymous transports in our vicinity. *Loli Paradicka* also creates a rich space around the exhibited corpus. The rough ending of the film makes it clear that the parents of the young Roma girl mentioned in the replicas insisted on her getting married to the selected groom because they wanted to protect her from her gullibility towards Roma criminals. The final awakening of the girl from her naivety

more blessed in budgetary terms, but sometimes superficially mundane. Both films present a more or less edifying picture of a historical character and less fruitful work with a national myth.

— The parable of *Little Kingdom* about the reshuffling of society in the critical 1944 could captivate by its more voluminous reflection and up-date of the past, if the demanding project directed by Peter Magát did not suffer from an old-fashioned expressive narration, the escape to expressional phrases and its tediously ostentatious layering of dramatic situations. The characters of the drama have their emotions visible in their faces, but their behaviour and the language they use do not match the environment surrounding them. Even though the major topic of opportunism and perfidy, small and big betrayals has a potential, the inner pressure on the dystopian parable and a too anthropocen-



Loli Paradicka —

munity damaged by a lack of freedom. Human criminality is confronted in the film with the punishment of resistance to oppression, the political coup with anarchy, revolution with revolt and a thief-adventurer with the nomenclature party thievery. The wide social scope, from the representatives of power to criminal losers, consists of several cleverly interlinked story lines equipped with dynamics. The deeds and attitudes of several characters with suprapersonal, but also greedy and vengeful, motifs converge around the historical events in a fictitious plot. The image of the leathered Catholic dissent refers to clerical subordination, the image of secular anti-regime resistance to family continuity, and the image of State Security more to its figures than characters.

— In the film, the big theme of post-revolutionary amnesties from the early 1990s reflects the current post-revolutionary skepsis of the country which, thirty

and *Little Kingdom* continues mechanically to strengthen the anti-Nazi and anti-capitalist line which the communist regimes used to build their victorious image, the political-social coup of 1989 does not have a positive image of revolutionary change even after the pioneering *Amnesty* in feature film. Of course, it is purely a coincidence that the same actor played the corrupt member of parliament and cheating husband in *Casino.\$k* as well as the morally corrupt revolutionary tribune in *Amnesty*. But this fact is all the more chilling. The absence of a celebration and social ethos that would enthral the viewer when re-experiencing the historical event in film is, however, above all a sign of our times. ▲



Lost Home —



The State Capture —

— text: Erik Binder —  
photo: Filmtopia, D1 film, partizanfilm, K2 Studio —

# Without the Anniversary of the Revolution, under the Sign of Death

**While we celebrated various anniversaries of the “eight” years two years ago, even 25 years since the independent Slovak Republic was established, 2019 occurred under the sign of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. If Slovak filmmakers were quite frequently inspired by anniversaries two years ago, it now seems surprising that last year’s domestic non-fiction production does not contain a full-length documentary explicitly elaborating on the events that happened thirty years ago, even though a new chapter in the history of Slovakia commenced with those events.**

— The reason evidently has to be sought in the direction our society is now taking. Artists in general react more promptly to the more burning topics of the day and to various matters brought to the fore by the modern history of Slovakia. These stem directly from the division of power after the fall of the regime hence, from this point of view, even last year’s documentaries are linked to the events of November 1989. The revolution’s attribute “velvet” itself can be deemed another reason, as it suggests that everything happened without casualties. However, the post-revolutionary decades have shown that what may have started in a “velvety” manner does not have to continue in the same way, hence concepts such as assassination, mafia or corruption come onto the scene. And this time the Slovak crew records, directly on the spot, an even more demanding situation in the world – specifically the conflicts in Syria and Iraq which are hard to resolve.

— However, there were just a few directly politically engaged films over the course of the previous year, as if most of the documentary filmmakers had accomplished their long-term plans. That is also the reason why we saw films so varied with regard to their theme. Almost every single one of them presented a variety of moral or philosophical dilemmas. This can probably also be attributed to the fact that in several cases death was their unexpected common denominator.

— And finally, something on a lighter note – the title of one of the documentaries, *Africa by Pionier: 15,000 Kilometres on the Smallest Motorbikes* (*Afrika na Pionieri*) causes concerns for the lives of its protagonists in the minds of those viewers familiar with the mentioned means of transport.

## A Good Death

— Let’s start a bit more positively and give death the attribute “good”. Is there anything at all like a good death? The question of the moral justification of euthanasia is one of those where it is hard to find a clear answer. Every case probably has to be assessed individually, based in particular on the mental and physical states of the patient who is thinking about an assisted voluntary exit from the world. Presumably, only those who suffer from muscular dystrophy can imagine what life with this diagnosis is like. Director Tomáš Krupa managed to arouse so much empathy for the protagonist of his film *The Good Death*, Briton Jeanette, in the viewers, even without any emotional blackmail and pathos whatsoever, that after this experience only very few left the cinema with →

a conservative attitude to this issue. As the saying goes: Life is one of the hardest.

#### A Violent Death

The deaths of the journalist Ján Kuciak and his partner Martina Kušnírová have now resonated in Slovak society for almost two years. Either by shocking us as something that we maybe associated only with fictional gangster movies, or by the fact that no one has yet been sentenced for this double murder. This fact was also definitely reflected in the open end to Zuzana Piussi's film *The State Capture* (Ukradnutý štát). On her path to the truth she grills perhaps everybody willing to say something on camera. However, the viewer will feel considerable frustration from the contradictory opinions and statements (the director probably felt the same). Ultimately, frustration turned out to be the central idea of the entire documentary, although it was perhaps not the original intention.

Our investigative documentarist number one also takes a stand against political power and the power

the politically motivated murder which Vladimír Mečiar, Prime Minister at that time, discredited with his memorable statement: "This murder never happened". Director Barbora Berežnáková entitled the documentary, among others also about the kidnapping of the former Slovak president's son, Michal Kováč Jr. to Austria, *Never Happened* (Skutok sa stal). Oskar Fegyveres, Remiáš's friend and, like him, an eyewitness and participant in the kidnapping, accompanies us throughout the film. Thus, in a short time, we already have a third work dealing with this affair, but also with the social climate in the second half of the 1990s. Hence, *Never Happened* could have discouraged several viewers who have already seen the well-made documentary *Mečiar* or the less well-made feature film *Kidnapping* (Únos); however, it is Berežnáková's film that sheds most light on the case as it offers a broader range of opinions and presents quite a transparent and compact view of the case. The 1990s in Slovakia meant for many the death of the democratic ideals carved out on the squares of cities in 1989.



*Silent Days* –

of money in another film, *The Siege* (Obliehanie mesta). The town under siege is beautiful Kremnica with a rich history and, in particular, rich mineral resources. It is a question of the future as to whether the local fauna and flora will fall victim to transnational corporations, or activists with ecological preferences win, or maybe a consensus will be achieved and the town and its surroundings will still be beautiful and, at the same time, they will thrive from industrial development. In *The State Capture* Piussi is more of an active observer and she leaves it to the viewers to come up with their own opinion. In *The Siege* she is somewhat needlessly more inclined in favour of the activists and she doesn't afford the viewers overmuch space for them to come up with their own view. Instead, she rather expresses it.

#### The Death of Democratic Ideals

Róbert Remiáš was murdered in 1996, approximately seven years after the social situation in Eastern Europe changed radically. We learned in the news about

#### Against Death by Sleeping in a Coffin

Life without "smoking ganja" and without snowboarding? If so, then only in a monastery! To kiss earthly pleasures and joys good-bye and devote one's life to the community or God and spend it in an Orthodox monastery is a life choice. In his documentary *The Calling* (Volanie), Erik Praus watches in Ukraine what leads several individuals to take such a resolute step. The arguments of several protagonists might sometimes be less comprehensible, but the older the monks get, the more logical their justifications appear. That is because of their life experience and wisdom. The question is whether it was really necessary for the film to be more than an hour long and whether the film with the same amount of information would not have had a better impetus if it had been only half its length, but that is a matter for the taste of the individual viewer and how much the viewer likes longer, artistic shots with a thought-out camera composition. The filmmakers will probably not manage to put a brake on the swift period we are living in and the superficiality of society. However, briefly shortly after the screening, *The Calling* at least rouses the need to think about these phenomena.

#### Death to the Third World in Slovakia!

Another of the "documentaries" which erode the border between documentary and fiction film was made by Pavol Pekarčík in Slovak Roma settlements. It is evident that many shots in *Silent Days* (Hluché dni) are staged but, at the same time, the characters play themselves based on how they really live. It is good that we get to watch several stories that also follow a story arc and the film ends appropriately with a story of children who built a bathroom for themselves. Not functional, but still a bathroom – as their dad somehow shies away from doing so and would rather play computer games. As if the children who are the protagonists of the film didn't have enough problems of their own, they are, moreover, hearing-impaired. However, the younger generation doesn't lack life optimism, while the older ones are only impassive, as though resigned. It is not only the role of these individuals to see to it that their children do not later fall into the ruts they are in, but also the role of the whole of society.

#### "Suicide" on Motorbike

More precisely on a motorbike of the Pionier marque. Everyone who experienced the socialist era knows what I'm talking about, while the younger ones should google it. The fashion of making travel documentaries in which a group of "suicidal" daredevils take off on long journeys with such means of transport as a Trabant, Lada or Pionier might be difficult for some of us to understand. Happily for us, we follow their fates only in the gloom of club cinemas. So, we enjoy the beautiful shots of nature without fearing for our lives and we marvel at the endurance of the engines of these marques just as at the courage of the travellers and filmmakers. Fortunately, nothing untoward happened to anyone in Africa by Pionier: 15,000 Kilometres on the Smallest Motor-

bikes and the five men led by director Marek Slobodník and cinematographer Martin Kochaník returned home safely after their wanderings around Africa.

#### Death of Traditions

The death of folklore due to the fact that Slovaks are not anchored in their own traditions, the death of folklore due to the shallowness at tendentious political presentations throughout the last century, the death of folklore due to new musical trends popular with teenagers (this is the opinion of the author of this text) and finally, also the death of the composer himself. That much to the leitmotif of death in the documentary *Svetozár Stračina* by director Pavol Barabáš about the music composer with an extremely rich portfolio. We get to know the musician as a modest, spiritually rich man, but also as a man who often succumbed to his emotions and repeatedly caused an unpleasant atmosphere in the workplace. However, always with a positive result – for it was Stračina's objective that when listening to his compositions the listeners would never say that the work is "shoddy". The documentary *Svetozár Stračina* cannot compete with, let us say, a documentary about Slovak hip-hop with the younger generations, but that is why it is always important to draw attention to our roots by way of cinema. In order to avoid being witnesses to the real death of traditions in the future without any possibility of resurrection.

#### On the Road to Immortality

That is where the "lonely runners" are – three poets, Ivan Laučík, Peter Repka and Ivan Štrpka. The arts group was formed in 1963 and survived the hazards of normalisation and even the ban on writing. The three "meet" again after years and director Martin Repka recorded it on camera in the optimistically sounding documentary *The Lonely Runners: Moving on!* (Osamelí bežci: Ideme ďalej!). The elderly gentlemen reminisce about the beautiful and also less beautiful times and they have definitely not lost their sense of humour, even though one of them has already passed away. The film can provide precious new information to those who are not involved, while for the insiders it is an obligation. Undying optimism can also be felt from the Slovak minority documentary by director Olga Sommerová Jiří Suchý, screened in the Czech Republic with the sub-heading *Tackling Life with Ease* (Lehce s životem se práť).

Why is it that, out of all the documentaries made in 2019, the older the protagonists are the more optimistic they sound? Maybe that is because memory is selective and it voluntarily remembers more of the happier moments than suffering, and it surely inadvertently idealises the past. But let us also peer positively into the future. The year 2020 should not be any worse than the previous year with the trends as set in Slovak documentary production. Moreover, the leitmotif will probably be something other than death. ▲



The Kite —

— text: Eva Šošková —  
photo: BFILM (2), Fool Moon —

# Education and/Is Politics

Just as animation is carried out in temporal and spatial layers, animation also lives in the media world – it goes through a number of media and film genres. In particular, 2019 displayed the multi-layers and viability of Slovak animation. What functions does use of the technical possibilities of animation have in the domestic audiovisual works that it brought? Untraditional in the context of previous works – predominantly educational and political.

Martin Smatana's *The Kite* (Šarkan, 2019), which won several international awards (Stuttgart, Annecy, São Paulo, Taiwan...), was the most successful last year. It received its world première at the Berlinale, and it was also successful at home. It won the Slovak Section at Fest Anča International Animation Festival and in cinema distribution it accompanied the French omnibus film *The Big Bad Fox and Other Tales* (Le grand méchant renard et autres contes..., 2017).

After *Mimi & Lisa* (*Mimi & Líza*), *The Kite* is another work which offers children's audiences an unusually demanding topic. After the visually impaired Mimi, it is the physical handicaps deriving from ageing and the withering away of the human body that lead to the most difficult of all topics – death. The concept of the film does not bring anything new to children and it strengthens the myth of life after death in heaven – above the clouds; nevertheless, it does so in an interesting manner in stylistic terms. The bodies of the puppets consist of several layers of fabric which peel away and are blown away by the wind as one of the characters ages. Even though *The Kite* is intended for children, it is not expressly educational, as it focuses more on the emotionality of children.

Full-length films combining live action with animation techniques made on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Milan Rastislav Štefánik's death sought to educate. While animator Andrej Kolenčík targeted younger children with his film *The Monument* (*Mohyla*), Noro Držiak focused on older children and young adults in *The Impossible Voyage* (*Cesta do nemožna*, 2019). Both films struggled with a markedly limited budget but only one manages to search for motivations for the stylistic solutions in the story. The green screen in *The Impossible Voyage* looks unauthentic and unrealistic; however, the imperfection of the animation is in harmony with the imperfection of George Méliès's films at the very beginning of cinema. And the references to him are, in turn, in keeping with Štefánik's penchant for making magic.

We come to the political dimension of last year's productions through Štefánik. Paradoxically, works created under the totalitarian regime were characterised by political satire and social involvement to a much greater extent than works made after the Velvet Revolution. The absence of ecological themes is most bewildering. Under the totalitarian regime, this topic →

resonated at least in works, if not directly with the people. Nowadays it resonates in everyday life, but not in the works. The committed revival of civil society in the last few years not just in Slovakia but also all over the world, partially also influenced domestic animated works. In 2018, Martin Snopek's *Monster* (Monštrum, 2018) about the general devastating influence of the political system was released in cinemas, a year previously Martina Mikušová's *Chilli* (2016) that we can perceive through the prism of feminism, competed at Fest Anča.

The international project *Happiness Machine* promoting Christian Felber's economic theory, based on human solidarity and economic sustainability as the opposites of competition and uncontrolled growth, was the

in turn, Pantopos promotes an adequate distribution of sources that leads to positive effects even on greedy individuals.

Last year's work by Michaela Mihályi is characterised by a feminist perspective. Her film *A Date* (Rande, 2019) won the Honourable Mention at Fest Anča and maybe the jury recognised specifically her choice of material to represent the "dating" protagonists. The sexual intercourse between a sanitary pad and tampon here represents the natural but overlooked connection between sexuality and the menstrual cycle. After *About Two Men* (O dvoch ľudoch, 1995) by Vanda Raýmanová, *About Socks and Love* (O ponožkách a láske, 2008) by Michaela Čopíková and others, Mihályi comes up with

city within the social system. The minimalistic dedramatised acting, the mosaic narration, a weak artistic and cinematographic accent on the dissimilarities of the characters or dedramatised dead time make it more difficult to comprehend the film which, however, stands on a strong atmosphere of a specifically "Prokopová-esque" fictional world where the macro and microworlds are inseparably connected; it is a fluid and magical whole of the world and life is its timeless spiritual element. In this very abstract respect, Marta Prokopová's films are ecological films. With regard to identities, *Wild Beasts* thematises gender-based understanding of aggressive masculinity and pacifistic femininity most strongly by way of its bear characters.

It is becoming traditional for Slovak children to be given new original series of a high standard at Christmas time. In autumn, the second season of *The Websters* (Websterovci) by Katarína Kerekesová was screened in cinemas and, just like the new episodes of *The Tots* (Drobci) by Vanda Raýmanová, *The Websters* was also broadcast on TV by the end of the year. Then, on New Year's Eve, the second season of the educational series *Ka-Boom!* (Tresky plesky) by Veronika Kocourková received its television première. All three series work on the same model of dual media production and distribution – the series also goes out to viewers in book form. Television animated series were also extended this year to another target group. By the end of 2018,



most distinctive work in 2019. Slovak animation is represented here by Joanna Kožuch's film *Music Box* (2019). It got into Slovak cinemas as the film shown prior to the full-length documentary *The Lonely Runners: Moving on!* (Osamelí bežci: Ideme d'alej!, 2019). In a break with tradition, Kožuch does not work with live actors at all in this film; however, the thin lines of the dense networks of scratches that populate the mise-en-scène of her films come to the fore from her discernible style. Conversely, Eni Brandner works with a live actor (Lukáš Latinák) in her film *Pantopos* (2019) which is a part of the same project and was also seen by attendances at Fest Anča. The main idea of *Music Box* is to show three different solutions value-wise that lead to the same material result;

*Sh\_t Happens* (2019) made in collaboration with David Štumpf about the stultifying everyday relation where the man is the one working and the woman the one waiting at home. Both suffer but accept the situation. While up till now women did the chores when their husband was absent, in *Sh\_t Happens* which received its première at the Venice Film Festival, the woman compensates for her husband's lack of attention by masturbating in the kitchen. Here the division of roles and gender identity are linked to the biblical myth of Noah's ark, wherein the film presents its socially destructive potential.

Marta Prokopová's and Michal Blaško's *Wild Beasts* (Divoké bytosti, 2019), screened in cinemas prior to *Liyana* (2017), is a film about the search for one's iden-



Another film in this year's cinema distribution, *Persona Grata* (2019) by Daniela Krajčová, treats externally imposed identity. In her art works Krajčová has long dealt with socio-political questions; however, here she is doing so as a filmmaker in a short cinema film for the first time. The animated documentary about a refugee links an authentic respondent's commentary with Krajčová's painted animation. The motionlessness of the animation partially compensates for the story reproduced in off-screen sound. The winning animated film of last year's Student Film Festival Áčko Trust Me (2019) by director Zlata Golecová is also about imposing an identity. It is about a parent who, at the beginning, does not accept that her child is different. ▲

By the end of 2018, the public television service RTVS started to broadcast *The Inklings* (Chochmesovci) – a 25-episode family animated sitcom by Róbert Šveda about good manners. The artistic designs by Ové Pictures blaze with colours and visual ideas; sometimes the animation serves to illustrate the commentary but more often it treats it ironically and sends it up. In this way, quite an entertaining audiovisual dialogue arises. The final episode puts our rules of behaviour in society into a broader cultural context and draws attention to the fact that they are only one of many. Herewith, the series acquires a political dimension typical of last year's production – it teaches people to respect whatever is different. ▲

# The Successes of Slovak Cinema

**2019 was a successful year for Slovak cinema. Films that Slovakia had a part in were screened in Berlin, Cannes and Venice. The start of 2020 was also promising as the Sundance, Rotterdam and Berlinale festivals chose films with Slovak participation for their programmes.**



The short animated film *The Kite* (Šarkan) by Slovak director Martin Smatana received its première last year at the Berlinale in the Generation Kplus competition section of films for children. The film was made by demanding puppet animation and it brings an equally demanding theme to child audiences – the ageing and eventual departure of a close one. “Children are simply interested in knowing whether we will be here forever and where people go to when they die. These are the unpleasant questions of children that can plague parents quite a lot. Actually, it may happen that the film will help them answer these questions,” said Smatana for Film.sk; this year he returned to the Festival as a participant in the programme for promising filmmakers Berlinale Talents. *The Kite* did not win at the Berlinale, but it was later awarded in Stuttgart, Annecy, at the Anima Mundi São Paulo Festival and elsewhere. In addition, from June 2019, it has been part of the film collection in the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

## Cannes, Venice, Rotterdam

Last year, the Cannes festival and its Cinéfondation section opened the road to the world to the short

student film *Pura Vida* by Martin Gonda from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. But the closest A-list festival for Slovak filmmakers, in both geographical and historical terms, is the Karlovy Vary Festival. Marko Škop’s film *Let There Be Light* (Nech je svetlo) received its première here last year in the main competition. It won the Special Mention of the Ecumenical Jury and also the Crystal Globe for Best Actor for Milan Ondřík. Marko Škop made the film about forty-year-old Milan who thinks he is doing the best for his family until he discovers that his eldest son has become involved with extremists. “The theme of nationalism or extremist youth groups is actually a secondary one. Essentially, it is a psychological drama about family failures and troubles,” said the director of this Slovak-Czech film which received the main awards from festivals in Batumi, Almaty and Tofifest in Toruń, and also several other prizes. *Let There Be Light* won in Cottbus, Germany in the youth film section. The Slovak director Teodor Kuhn won the award for Best Director at the same festival for his film *By a Sharp Knife* (Ostrým nožom) which also deals with the issue of extremism.

The Czech-Slovak-Ukrainian film *The Painted Bird* (Pomalované vtáča) by director Václav Marhoul

was selected for the main competition of the 76<sup>th</sup> Venice Film Festival. It is an adaptation of the famous novel by Jerzy Kosiński, the war story of a Jewish boy whose parents send him to his aunt living in the countryside to protect him. The aunt dies unexpectedly, and the boy remains alone in the hostile world. After its world première in Venice, where *The Painted Bird* won the Cinema for UNICEF Award from the children’s jury, the film was also screened at the Toronto Film Festival and then at many others where it won several awards. *The Painted Bird* also got into the Academy Award pre-selection of ten films in the International Feature Film Category where it represented the Czech Republic.

In addition to *The Painted Bird*, the short animated film *Sh\_t happens* by David Štumpf and Michaela Mihályi also had its world première at the Venice Film Festival. It was made in a Czech-Slovak-French co-production. This funny story about the absurd coincidences that happen to the three main characters – an exhausted plumber, his frustrated wife and a desperate stag – has lived a rich festival life since its première. One of the last places where it was screened was Sundance, the independent film festival.

The Czech-Slovak film by Mira Fornay Cook, *F\*\*k, Kill* (Žaby bez jazyka) had its world première before the end of the year at the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival. The festival in Rotterdam also included it in its Voices section. The director returned to this festival seven years after winning the main prize for her film *My Dog Killer* (Môj pes Killer). While in the earlier film she dealt with the theme of racism, in *Cook, F\*\*k, Kill* she elaborates on domestic violence and aggressiveness in general. The absurd drama shows one day in the life of a perpetrator of domestic violence, Jaroslav K., and his family.

The Slovak-Czech documentary *Alchemical Furnace* (Alchymická pec) made by Jan Daňhel and Adam Olha received its world première at the same festival; it deals with the doyen of world animation, Jan Švankmajer.

## Servants, FREM and Charlatan Captivated Berlin

Ivan Ostrochovský’s *Servants* and also the minority films *FREM* by Viera Čákanyová and *Charlatan* by Agnieszka Holland got into the official selection of the jubilee 70th Berlin International Film Festival (20.2. – 1.3.2020).

Director Ivan Ostrochovský was selected for Berlin for the third time. The festival included his film *Servants* (Služobníci) in the new competition section entitled Encounters which seeks to draw attention to new visions and courageous works. *Servants* brings the story of students at a priests’ seminary in totalitarian Czechoslovakia in 1980. The management of the seminary tries to comply with the regime and so the students of theology are confronted with the question of whether to choose collaboration or their conscience at the cost of being under surveillance of State Security.

“We wanted to tell a story from the period of communist totalitarianism which took hold of human characters

by creeping manipulation and the promise of a more comfortable life. The majority of society pretended to agree with the regime in order to become invisible and, at the same time, invulnerable,” said Ivan Ostrochovský. “The fact that our film was selected for inclusion in the new section at Berlinale shows that this theme is also transferable to international audiences,” added the director who co-wrote the script with Marek Leščák and the British screenwriter Rebecca Lenkiewicz. The well-known Romanian actor Vlad Ivanov acts in one of the title roles. The film is a co-production between Slovakia, Romania, the Czech Republic and Ireland.

This year, Viera Čákanyová’s full-length début *FREM* was selected for the Berlinale Forum section focusing on courageous and experimental films. Čákanyová shot the film over six weeks in Antarctica. She chose this location because it invokes the image of a world where man is not the main actor any longer, but just a part of the ecosystem. Artificial intelligence is the protagonist of the Czech-Slovak film which strives to show the world from its own point of view. Such a change in perspective is also important with regard to the topic of climate change.

“Shooting the film in the Antarctic was physically demanding but the greatest challenge was to provide that peculiar and disquieting view of a non-human entity in a way that would allow the viewer to relate to it,” explains the director, and cinematographer Tomáš Klein adds: “It was difficult, if not impossible, to imagine the view of artificial intelligence. The more I tried to use my head, the further away I got from my assignment.”

The new film by Agnieszka Holland *Charlatan* (Šarlatán) was made in a co-production between the Czech Republic, Ireland, Poland and Slovakia. It will be presented in a new section at the Berlinale – Special Gala. Ivan Trojan stars in the role of the healer who allegedly helped five million people but he himself had to face his demons; Juraj Loj plays his assistant.

Slovak filmmakers will also be guests at other events associated with the Berlinale. Producer Katarína Krnáčová is a member of the jury in the Shooting Stars project. Every year, an international jury chooses ten of the most promising acting talents from Europe for this project. Producer and director Tomáš Krupa from Hailstone production company gained a place among 17 filmmakers on the Emerging Producers training programme; the participants are chosen at the Jihlava Film Festival and, after the Industry Programme in Jihlava, the training programme continues at the Berlinale. Last year, Krupa impressed with his film *The Good Death* (Dobrá smrť) which deals with euthanasia and won several awards at festivals. ▲



— text: Mária Ferenčuhová —

photo: Pavol Pekarčík/Punkchart films, Juraj Chlpík/Punkchart films (2) —

# Co-productions Are a Litmus Test of the Quality of Film Projects for Me

The film career of Ivan Ostrochovský was launched with a documentary about Slovak composer Ilja Zeljenka, a short film that was impressive mainly thanks to its wonderful mix of matter-of-factness and sensitivity. Other films by Ostrochovský have a similar tension – either between humour and seriousness as in *Velvet Terrorists* (*Zamatoví teroristi*), coyness and explicitness as in *Koza* (*Koza*) or between fear and courage in his latest film, the obsessively beautiful *Servants* (*Služobníci*).

It will receive its world première at the Berlinale where the director's two previous films were also screened.

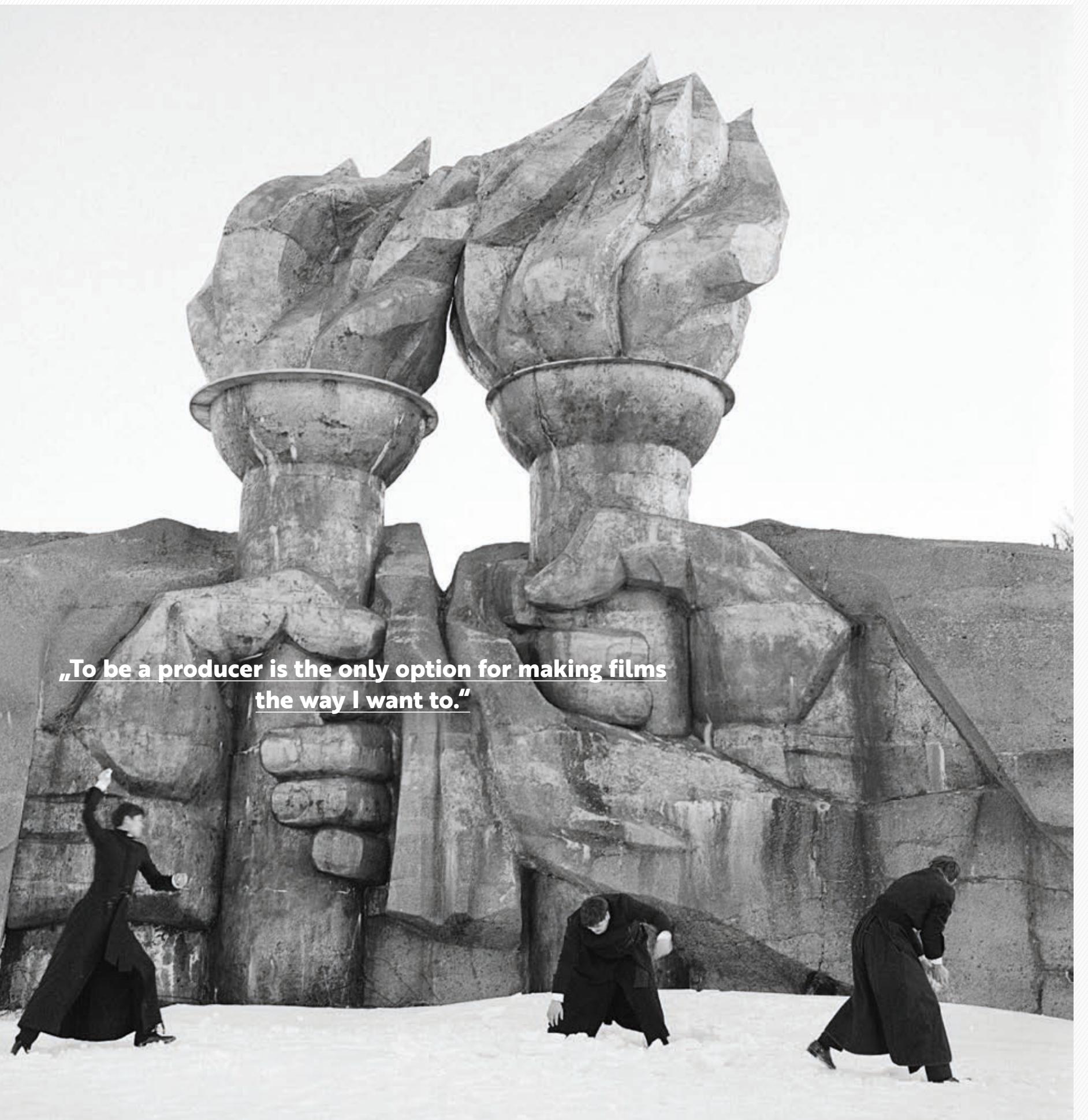
You came to cinema via audiovisual studies, you even have a PhD. in that discipline. How did you actually become a film director?

That I've become a director remains strange to me even to this very day. My drunken friend nicknamed Chimney gave me the advice to apply to the film school – actually, I realise that I haven't ever thanked him for it. So I would like to thank him in this way.

When you started making your first films, stable production companies and systematic support for independent audiovision were lacking in Slovakia. Many filmmakers produced the films they were making on their own, without any external support. You established your own company at that time too and you started to make documentary series for television. How do you perceive your production beginnings? What role did the Audiovisual Fund and the stabilisation of support for audiovision after 2009 play in this?

To be a producer is the only option for making films the way I want to. In essence, it's a necessity. I don't think you would find a producer with common sense who would approve of the way I shoot films. That is to say, first I shoot the entire film as if in a "rough version" and then I shoot the entire film all over again.

I've been producing films since 2004. The AVF has been operating since 2009. I think that the establishment of the Audiovisual Fund changed everything in Slovakia. Slovak cinema has recorded a huge upsurge, qualitative and quantitative, in the ten years of its functioning. The international successes of Peter Kerekes, Juraj Lehotský, Marko Škop, Mira Fornay, Zuzana Liová, Iveta Grófová and others are clear evidence of that. Of course, it is also important that films were made that managed to appeal to Slovak audiences and to renew interest in our cinema at home.



You made *Velvet Terrorists*, your first full-length project for cinemas, together with Peter Kerekes and Palo Pekarčík. Your full-length début *Koza* was made in close collaboration with screenwriter Marek Leščák and with a substantial input by cinematographer Martin Kollar. One thing I know about you is that you consult several editors at once about the montage of your films. So you are a team player. How does your creative team work? And how does your collaboration with film directors look when you are exclusively in the role of a producer?

— I'll start from the last point. When I produce a film for another director, I'm largely collaborating with friends, so I try to create the best possible conditions for work. I have a rule not to go to the shooting or into the editing room if I'm not expressly asked to do so. I know from experience that it can only end up in two ways. Either I get angry that the film is not good enough or I get jealous as a director that it is too good. That is why I don't like to be in the position of producer and, in essence, I don't even feel like one. I perform the activities that are usually carried out by producers and I bear the main responsibility for the project, yet I still don't feel like a producer. Just as I don't feel like a cleaning lady when I vacuum the office or wash the dishes from time to time. In short, I do whatever is necessary at the given moment in the “hole” – which is what we call our workplace – and, unfortunately, sometimes it is the tasks of a producer.

— The number of editors that I edit my films with is related to the way in which I shoot my films... i. e. a long time. It takes me four to five years to make a full-length film. It is difficult even for me to stay equally enthusiastic and maintain the energy for such a long time. Of course, those who take part in the making of the film can't always bind themselves to a single project for such a long time. Hence, it sometimes happens that I eventually edit a film with three, four, and in one case, even five editors. I think that it helps the result. Two heads are better than one. All in all, I like it when as many people from my surroundings as possible take part creatively in the making of the film. For instance, I like having other directors around when I'm shooting the film or in the editing room, which is not much in fashion nowadays.

**Many of your projects are made in international co-productions. How do your relations with foreign production companies work?**

— The question sounds as though it might be complicated, but the reality is very simple. I try to collaborate with productions that produce films, that somehow appeal to me and that I like.

**What in your view is the significance of minority or majority co-productions for the functioning of the domestic audiovisual environment?**

— In my view, this works on two levels. When I address foreign partners, I test the viability of the concept substantially, but I also examine whether the overall project has been set up well. If they were to reject me, I would have to ask myself whether I was making some sort of mistake. For me it's a sort of litmus test of the quality of projects. At the same time, I think that if a Slovak producer is not able to bring anything other than local money into a project, he's probably not doing his work very well. Because the less you “eat away” from the domestic cake, the bigger the chance that more Slovak films will be made.

***Koza* was the first Slovak film screened in the début film competition at the Berlinale. It was a very successful film at festivals, it received excellent critical acclaim at home and abroad. Did the communication or distribution strategy contribute to its success?**

— As I don't understand the preparation of the distribution or communication campaigns, I can't really answer this question. Katarína Tomková is in charge of everything related to the festival life of films. Her English is better, and, unlike me, she likes talking to strangers. Nonetheless, I think it's misleading to create the impression that a film couldn't be successful without good marketing. Then all the speculations that frequently affect the final shape of the film take up a lot of →

time and energy. In short, you have to make a film that you believe in and sometimes a good career lies ahead for it, and another time it does not. I wouldn't ever want to make films only to get them to festivals. I like festivals because perceptive spectators hang around them. That's all.

Your second, just completed, feature film *Servants* will also receive its première at the Berlinale, this time in a new competition section, Encounters. It is quite an epic film with a strong international input. At the same time, it differs considerably from your previous projects. It is very artistic, thoughtful, controlled, with beautiful black and white photography. You worked with Czech, Irish and Romanian co-production partners and the film received support from Eurimages. Moreover, British screenwriter Rebecca Lenkiewicz is co-author of the script. How did the genesis of this film appear from the production perspective?

— Simple. Marek Leščák came up with the concept. Rebecca Lenkiewicz, who saw *Koza* and liked it, wrote this script with us. Vlad Ivanov, who I've admired since I saw *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (*4 luni, 3 săptămâ-*

**How did you then look for the final shape of the film with the screenwriters and then with the cinematographer Juraj Chlpík? I am asking particularly with regard to what you said about the pace of making your films.**

— First, we were concerned with Marek about how Rebecca would react as she's not used to such a long preparation, but eventually she got used to our slow pace. We expected she would bring the precision of "western" dramaturgy to the writing and, at the same time, be a sort of editor ensuring that what the film talks about is also sufficiently comprehensible for the foreign audiences who have not experienced communist ideology. I think we managed to do that.

— I opted for Juraj Chlpík on the basis of his camera work in a short film by Matúš Libovič – mainly because the film was black and white. However, we made realisation of the film quite complicated as we did not collaborate with an architect, but we built all the locations consistently on our own, all with a view to the composition of future shots.

— I perceive a similar consistency of composition, almost even a rigidity of the film images, in Uher's *The Organ*.



**„The title *Servants* refers to the fact that we are always under the influence of some higher powers that control us, whether consciously or unconsciously, and which sometimes inconspicuously alter our deeds and attitudes.“**

ni și 2 zile) presented me with the award at the Vilnius Film Festival and so I asked him if he'd like to act in my next film. He agreed. Then Katarína Tomková found Romanian co-producers, Tudor Giurgiu and Oana Giurgiu, and also asked Mike Downey, who is the current President of the European Film Academy, to cover Rebecca in production terms.

In our country we probably know Rebecca Lenkiewicz best as the screenwriter of the Academy Award-winning black and white film *Ida* – as if the fancy black and white camera work also found an echo in *Servants*. Can this film of yours be perceived as a tribute to the Polish cinematographic school? Is the shift in the poetics and in the narration of *Servants* a result of the collaboration with Rebecca?

— Of course, Rebecca will always refer to *Ida*. I liked *Ida*, naturally, but my choice of format and colour was rather motivated by love of old Czechoslovak films. And in particular of the well-thought-out compositions in Štefan Uher's *The Organ* (*Organ*) and of the atmosphere of Ivan Passer's *Intimate Lighting* (*Intimní Osvětlení*), which for me is perhaps film number 1.

A lot of little-known faces appear in *Servants*, but also literally new-wave winks toward any viewer who knows the domestic film environment well – for instance, in the scene of the illegal ordination of the priest in the apartment, Slovak filmmakers Marek Kuboš, Robert Kirchhoff or Juraj Johanides appear, in turn, Martin Šulík plays the doctor in the film and Palo Pekarčík turns up in one scene in police uniform. At the same time, you cast the Romanian actor Vlad Ivanov in one of the key roles, and Slovak theatre director Vladimír Strnisko in another. Several Slovak professional actors also played in the film. How did you do the casting? How did you choose the faces of your film?

— I did the casting with Palo Pekarčík. My main key is to cast types. That means that for me it's not that important whether it's an actor or non-actor. Of course, it's excellent if an actor cast based on type is also an actor with a capital A. That's the case with Vlad Ivanov and Milan Mikulčík who literally showed me new possibilities in filmmaking. Director Vlado Strnisko, who was playing in a film for the first time, provided me with plenty of good advice while adapting dialogues. Juraj Johanides and Martin Šulík spent endless hours

in the editing room with me. And many of my friends gave me advice regarding the edited versions, as you did also, by the way.

**You work a lot with the human face and diverse human physiognomy which bears a lot of sociological and iconographical connotations. What fascinates you in a human being as a live statue?**

— I always anticipate that you can also enhance the acting by other means. Because, by precisely choosing the environments and human types, you can create the emotional state of the characters without having to depend solely on the actor's performance. I already utilised it in *Koza*. Furthermore, this statuesqueness of types is linked to the ecclesiastical theme in *Servants*. We deliberately repressed sacral art motifs and we created the stupor or "statuesqueness" of the church environment with human "statues".

**Cristian Mungiu also had his say in the final editing phase. Where is his input most felt?**

— Cristian gave us several good pieces of advice as to the final version of the film. He also helped us with the presentation of the film within the Les Films de Cannes à Bucarest project. By the way, that's also why the intertitle "143 days ago" appears at the beginning of *Servants*. That's exactly 4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days.

*Servants* is formally characterised by its ostentatiousness and also its subdued nature. As if inner discipline and order managed all its parts. In this case the form corresponds wonderfully to the theme, which is the functioning of the Roman Catholic church in totalitarian times. At the same time, the film is about individual stories of courage and fear, moral solidarity and the pragmatism of survival. How did you get to such a theme? What is there that appeals to you in it? And what does it say about the world of today?

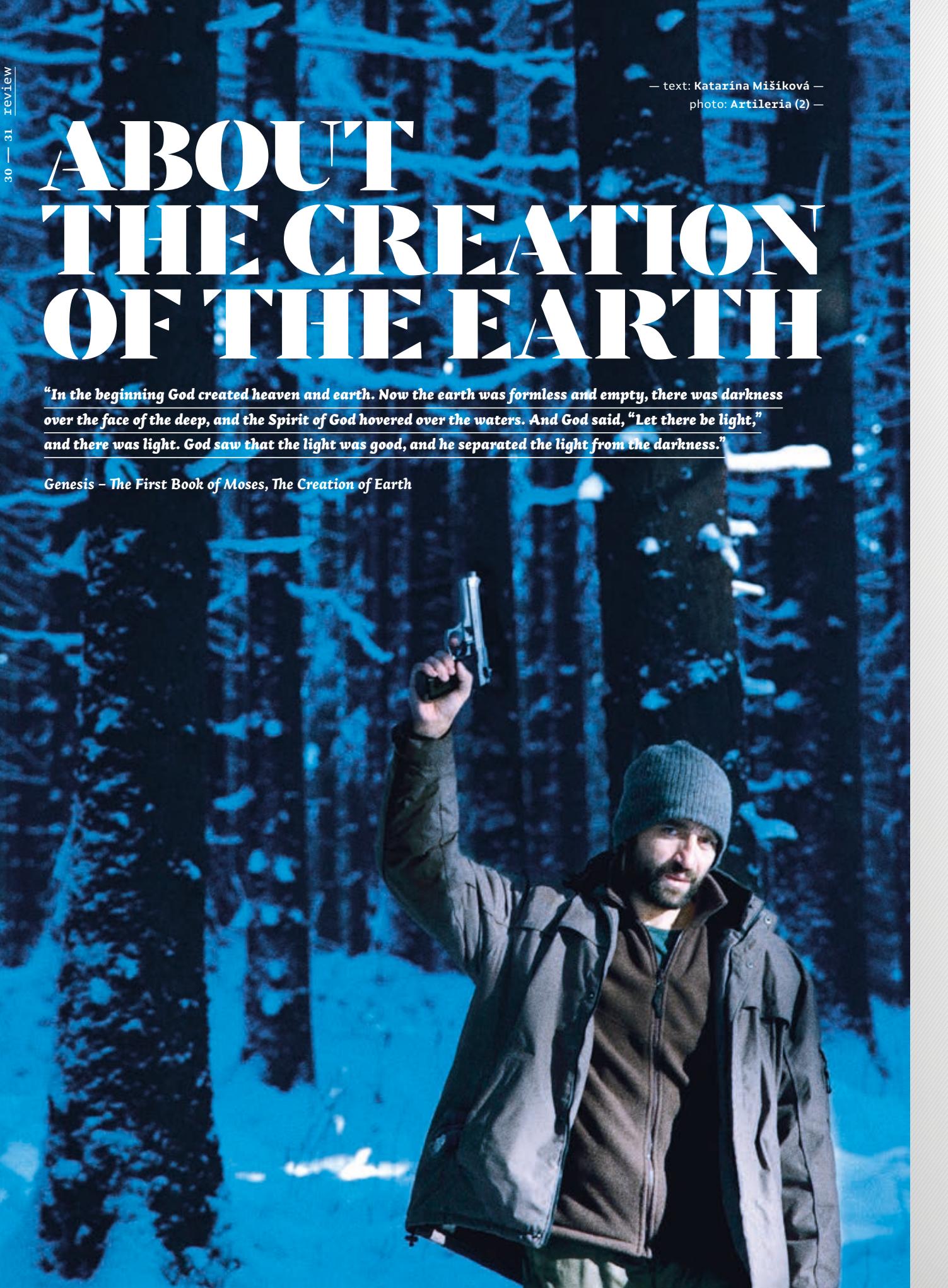
— We wanted to make a film about the socialist period in Czechoslovakia, but with an overlap with the present. One day, the Slovak actor Vlado Zborov told us his story. He studied at the theological faculty under the communists, but he was expelled from the school. Subsequently, secret police agents came up with an offer – if he collaborates with them, he gets the chance to return to school. Zborov did not return and we had a nice theme. The story of coming of age and confrontation with reality, when one has to choose which side to take, is universal and always topical. Last but not least, however, the title *Servants* refers to the fact that we are always under the influence of some higher powers that control us, whether consciously or unconsciously, and which sometimes inconspicuously alter our deeds and attitudes. Then it can easily happen that someone finds himself in a trap and serves something that doesn't correspond to his values at all. ▶

— text: Katarína Mišiková —  
photo: Artileria (2) —

# ABOUT THE CREATION OF THE EARTH

**"In the beginning God created heaven and earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, there was darkness over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness."**

Genesis – The First Book of Moses, The Creation of Earth



The title of Marko Škop's film refers to the well-known passage from the Bible about the creation of the earth and, in its own way, it also informs us of the story about another beginning – the beginning and roots of extremism. However, the film also talks about the depths that form the human world: about family and human relations and, in particular, about the need to distinguish between good and evil, between light and darkness. And it is this ability to distinguish that the protagonist of *Let There Be Light* has to acquire over a period of two weeks around Christmas.

Milan is from the Orava Region but, in order to sustain his family, he travels for work to Germany. His wife and three children expect him home for the holidays. He is a man who wants to do everything correctly: he respects traditions and shows love to his neighbours and authorities; however, as a man who has seen the world, he is also able to accept other models of life. He wants a better life for his children and believes that the route to a better life leads through education. In order to secure an education for his children, he builds houses for other families while the scaffolding around his own house appears to be permanently in place. This enlightened conservative, however, suddenly finds himself in a situation that opens his eyes. After a classmate of his son Adam, the eldest of his children, commits suicide, it comes to light that the paramilitary group Guard largely oversees the upbringing of children in a region where fathers travel for work far removed from their families.

Marko Škop built the film on the ground-plan of a dramaturgically accurately timed model drama wherein specific facts are replaced by model situations. The environment of an Orava village is intentionally void of specific characteristics: it could be exchanged for any Slovak rural region marked by strong Catholic and patriarchal traditions and a high unemployment rate. However, the analytic accuracy of how the narration follows the individual phenomena linked with the spawn of extremism introduces many realistic details into the story. The economic growth of Slovakia is just items of news on the radio for rural Slovakia; the inhabitants of the country scarcely ever experience it first-hand. The believers are regularly told in the church about loving thy neighbour but, when one of those neighbours kills himself, the community shuns his family. Public administration is not up to taking care of the winter maintenance of roads in remote villages and so the extremist movement takes charge of it; under the guise of defending their native land and citizens, the movement wants to expel anything that deviates from "normality". Without bonds to their parents, adolescents are left seeking popularity and recognition from their peers on social networks. The church enjoys greater trust with members of the community than do the police; however, the representatives of both institutions are hand in glove with the extremists. Many ideological clichés are inserted into the dialogues, which nowadays circulate not only in so-called alternative media but also among – in essence – decent citizens frustrated by life in the post-socialist economy: about how we prospered in the times of the Slovak State and that democracy is muck, that people in the West do not care for each other and that there are attacks by aggressive Muslims there, that the state is unable to take care of its own citizens. The ideological indoctrination of young people is also manifested in the phrases learned by rote and repeated by Milan's sons. Milan is not just an observer but also a product of this environment: he believes that transnational capital controls everything and, even though he himself is a guest-worker, he is annoyed that Muslims take his job; he wants to raise his children in a different way, not like the way in which his authoritative and cruel father brought him up but, at the turning point, he turns his aggression against his own son. He is not obsessed with searching for the enemy; nevertheless, he compensates for his complex sense of inadequate manhood by accumulating a collection of weapons.

A close understanding of the rural environment and its way of thinking can be sensed from all these situations, something we last saw in Slovak film *The House* (Dom) by Zuzana Liová (it was certainly no coincidence that she collaborated on the dramaturgy of Škop's film). However, Škop moves on from Liová's archetype of a patriarchal family to an analysis of the rural micro-world and indirectly also the whole of society. Because he shows how an uncorrected tradition can become demagogic, how an inferiority complex can grow into toxic masculinity and how the cruellest atrocities can be tolerated in the name of seemingly noble ideas. Even though Škop, just like Mira Fornay in her film *My Dog Killer* (Môj pes Killer), starts from the conviction that extremism is born from a sense of inferiority, he works with the theme in a totally different way. He does not

provide the viewer with the motivations of the protagonists via empathic identification but, in a sober and disciplined manner, he analyses the individual points of the vicious circle of extremism which converge in the topic of fatherhood and the assumed pattern of masculinity. Milan defines himself in opposition to his father who continually slights him for not being a sufficiently hard man. Unlike him, Milan wants to respect his wife and children, but he fails as a husband, as a father and as protector of the family. Adam also wants to be different from his father, he doesn't want to be a "traitor", he wants to be a master where he is at home. However, in his desire to be accepted, he becomes both an aggressor and a victim of brutal bullying. His younger brother Igor imitates his behaviour and chooses to terrorise their younger sister, who then turns to their robotic dog which obeys her every command.



These characters all live in a world of dominant authorities and would like to become distinct from them; however, in their efforts to gain their own power, they just adopt the patterns of behaviour of others. The priest, the spiritual father of the community, is at the top of this power hierarchy. He is no elderly clerical fascist but a young priest, enthusiastic about working with adolescents, who leads ambitious theological discourses. Even though at first sight it might seem that the priest is pulling the strings of the local community, he is just one of the links that help to keep the wheels of old prejudices and new demagogies running. But only until

real fatherly authority separates the light from the darkness, until Milan assumes responsibility for his family and his moral decisions.

Škop's approach to the stylistic aspect of the film is just as disciplined as his approach to the narration. Most of the scenes are built around dialogue confrontations in which the characters articulate their model attitudes. The visual leitmotif of light in a variety of forms runs through the key moments of the film: the light from the burning wood or glowing embers, the sharp rays of the sun falling on the faces of the children who ritually ask forgiveness from their parents before they leave for mass, the cold light of backlit shelves with Milan's collection of weapons and Adam's toy car collection, or the warm spiritual light spilling over Milan's and Adam's faces when they are reconciled at the presbytery. There are several ways of interpreting this light:

in the religious context it is a traditional symbol of the Holy Spirit, in the more secular context it is, in turn, the symbol of enlightenment, belief in progress and the ideals of equality, freedom and fraternity. Škop's film does not impose decisions on its characters, it lets them arrive at them. And, equally, it does not impose a preferred reading on the viewer: it is an accusation of the practice of Christianity and also the expression of the need for its morals as a cure for the relativism of the post-factual era. ▲

**Let There Be Light ( Nech je svetlo, Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2019 )** SCRIPT AND DIRECTED BY Marko Škop DOP Ján Meliš  
MUSIC David Solař, Oskar Rózsa EDITED BY František Kráhenbiel CAST Milan Ondrik, František Beleš, Zuzana Konečná, Lubomír Paulovič, Katarina Kormáňáková, Maximilián Dušanič, Daniel Fischer, Csongor Kassai, Anikó Vargová, Marek Geišberg, Ingrid Timková LENGTH 93 min.

— text: Martin Palúč —  
photo: partizanfilm (2) —



# DISPROPORTION OF REALITIES

The documentary with an episodic structure by Pavol Pekarčík *Silent Days (Hluché dni)* received its world première last year in Karlovy Vary. It enriches the Roma theme, which has quite a few representations in Slovak documentary filmmaking, as the director uses innovative approaches and views when depicting minorities. Not only from the formal aspect of construction of the narrative, but also from the aspects of expression and content.

— The film comprises four independent stories, with hearing-impaired protagonists – Roma children and young people – who bind the stories together. The director records them in their own community. Existential problems are present in the background; the depiction of the level of their exclusion or acceptance by the surroundings they grow up in and cannot change is emphasised. The intimate closeness that Pekarčík works with creatively to describe their everyday worries and struggles forms an important part of the account. The degree of exclusion or acceptance of specific protagonists within the structure of a traditional Roma family is very different. Age, gender and the internal setting of the family are some of the determining factors.

### Photographs Brought to Life

— Each shot of the film equates to a single scene without altering the position of the camera or angle of the shot so that any interior or exterior image maintains a constant size. The composition is static and unchanging. Any change in the proportions only takes place from within the shot. The action in any image composed in this way is reminiscent of a photograph brought to life with sound. In the subsequent composition of the individual shots-scenes, we follow the compact story of the protagonists in situations deriving from everyday life. The scene is sometimes split into foreground, middle-ground and background frames which communicate with each other thanks to the depth of the resolution. When these planes are combined within a single frame, the characters and meanings then mutually characterise themselves in the more complex scenes on the basis of the relationships between their shapes and proportions. Thereby, the protagonists are always part of the depiction in which the dialogue can but doesn't necessarily have to take place. So, the viewer actively chooses and combines the meanings on the basis of the co-existence and interaction of elements and movements within a shot that is perceived and preferred by them.

— The protagonists themselves constitute a non-negligible element; of course, due to their handicap, they do not take part in the sound-dialogue-sound effect setting. This results in the varying degree of their reactions to impulses from the outer world. Hence, each scene with a hearing-impaired protagonist functions within a dual regime – in the regime of the hearing, both viewers and protagonists, and the hearing-impaired protagonists. This is particularly evident in the case of the first two stories about adolescent Roma children – Sandra and Marián. Both are lonely, they communicate with their parents only minimally. They have their own closed worlds and their handicap wholly excludes them from the surrounding social events. The adolescents communicate with each other and with their surroundings by means of sign language or lip-reading. Thereby the communication aspect markedly affects the reality from the perspective of the individual protagonists on the one hand and the viewers on the other, as we come

to realise the disproportion of the regimes and the ambivalence of the sound-sound effect component from the perspectives of both hearing and non-hearing protagonists. The fixed framing does not impose any indicators as to how we should perceive the reality being recorded. As viewers, we are free from the views and perspectives that would impose on us instructions to assess the reality presented from the position of the majority. Hence, we can concentrate fully on the course and content of the scene without being aware of the opinion of the film's director on the depicted event. Many situations occurred in the form of covert staging, even though the reading of this procedure is reduced to a minimum by the form of the depiction, which increases the authenticity of the stories and credibility of the protagonists.

### Ronaldinho, van Damme, Even a Dream about Housing

— In the first story entitled *Sandra*, we follow the fate of a fourteen-year-old girl who is only interested in her role model – the Brazilian footballer, Ronaldinho. Only the ball and the desire to repeat the victorious gestures or to perfectly mimic the ball-juggling tricks of her idol are important to her. However, much more significant is what is going on at that moment in her closest surroundings, without her knowledge. Under the pressure of existential problems, her father's desire to take his wife and daughter and travel with them to Ronaldinho is transformed into a desire to get rid of the adolescent girl. The story ends in a solution that remains controversial from our point of view. They give her to an older Roma from the neighbourhood in the form of a sham marriage. In this case, this is not just about the image of an incompatible disproportion of realities, but also about the disproportion of moral judgments and perspectives.

— We take note of the disproportion of realities from the perspective of the hearing and non-hearing protagonists much more intensively in the story entitled *Marián*. The protagonist of action movies, Jean-Claude van Damme, is his personal role model. He identifies with him to such an extent that he deems him to be a member of his family. This story works with a parallelism of scenes to a much greater extent. When Marián's parents talk about him, he is largely absent from the image and standing somewhere on a platform where he observes the trains passing by, or he is rambling around. It is evident that the boy absorbs the rhythm of trains and his parents probably have no idea about it. They just constantly wonder why the boy goes off to the railway tracks all the time. Maybe because his inner world is full of rhythmical sounds, while his parents are occupied solely by the fact that they are expecting a baby.

— Filming the protagonists in their natural environment with an unobtrusive and non-committed camera also captures several moments of ordinary everyday life. Thereby, the disproportion of authenticity

and covert staging is another typical feature of Slovak documentary filmmaking that likes to help itself with procedures taken from feature film.

— In the third story entitled *Alena and René* we watch the story of a hearing-impaired couple who get to know each other, fall in love and eventually are expecting a child. It is a Roma love story where life with a handicap is not an obstacle and can be equal to a full-value life. It develops in congruence with the healthy members of the community. Dreams, ideas, fears and desires are depicted on an equal footing, because the relationship of Alena's hearing pregnant sister and her partner constitutes a parallel to the hearing-impaired couple. The disproportion of realities is not so evident, the members of the family communicate with each other, and the degree of acceptance is in balance.

— The fourth story, entitled *Kristián, Roman and Mária*, is a story of three hearing-impaired siblings who help and support each other, whilst by collecting and selling scrap metal they also contribute to their parents so that they can finally afford to buy a toilet. They live in a shack without running water or sanitation. Their story captures the disproportion between a dream or desire and the omnipresent everyday reality much more than all the other stories. In the end the parents' and children's dream of better living conditions materialises in the form of a game into a bitter metaphor. The boys and their sister arrange bathroom fitments found when collecting waste into an excavated pit and they

make a play of having a functioning household in this improvised dwelling, whereby they repeat the customs of their parents. A children's game of the disparity between what they yearn for and what they most miss at home.

### Metaphor of Our Deafness

— We can also perceive *Silent Days* as a metaphor of our own deafness to the regimes of realities which take place in the closest vicinity. This aspect is strengthened by the opening shot at the beginning of every story. It is a panorama which frames the country with the Roma settlement where, far removed from the majority, the segregated Roma community lives. Whereby, symbolically, it is an everyday scene and view that we have a chance to see regularly, and we do not look any closer into whatever stories take place in such a space. Each one of us thereby creates his or her own opinion of the Roma based on stereotypes of perception that are predicated on the mutual disproportion of realities. Ours and theirs. By stepping over the threshold of a Roma household, Pekarčík sought to disrupt the disproportion between the whole and the detail via approximation. He divided the whole into smaller parts and by using filmic means he uncovered other and much more subtle disproportions within the communities that we have not previously considered. ▶



**Silent Days (Hluché dni, Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2019)** SCRIPT AND DIRECTED BY Pavol Pekarčík

DOP P. Pekarčík EDITED BY P. Pekarčík, Ondrej Lehocký CAST Sandra Siváková, Marián Hlaváč, Alena Červeňáková,

René Červeňák, Karmen Balogová, Roman Balog, Kristián Gaži LENGTH 81 min.

# Eastern Europe, the 1940s

After the compelling media presentation and after numerous controversial reactions immediately after the screening in the main competition at the Venice IFF, it was clear that this film was going to attract a great deal of attention. The new co-production of Czech director Václav Marhoul *The Painted Bird* (*Pomaľované vtáčá*) is about to arrive in Slovak cinemas.

— Prior to 1989, the book *The Painted Bird* (1966) could not be published. It appeared for the first time in the Czech-Slovak language area in 1995 when it was published by the Czech publishing house Argo under the title *Nabarvené ptáče*. And it proved to be the translation event of the year, almost a sensation. This novel was written by Jerzy Kosiński (1933 Lodz – 1991 New York), in many aspects a mysterious and fascinating personality, one of the greatest hopes and then, in a certain sense, also disappointments of post-war American literature. In my view, his later novels are also good, but the truth is that, with the exception of *Being There* (1971), the later novels become steadily more and more complicated and less comprehensible, the author was heading towards formal experiments and to a sort of perplexity of meaning. Already in the novel *Steps* (1968) which followed straight after *The Painted Bird* and is actually its complement, Kosiński abandoned traditional literary narration. Regardless of this, *The Painted Bird* and *Steps* attracted enormous critical acclaim in the US and Europe, winning many literary awards, and *The Painted Bird* became an essential text that all current fictional literature relating to the Holocaust refers to and is defined against. It describes an inconceivably terrible situation of otherness in extreme conditions that are always caused by war or any other crisis. Laws and borders cease to exist, morals are

turned upside down, nothing works, and the majority outlines itself in panic against the minority. Under such conditions, Evil always breaks out, the absolutely fundamental evil hidden in each one of us beneath the fragile shell of civilisation. A shell that easily bursts.

— It is remarkable that this novel has not previously been made into a film. The Czech-Slovak-Ukrainian co-production *The Painted Bird* is the third auteur film of Václav Marhoul. It is a long film, almost three hours long. And it is in black and white, to make the viewers concentrate more on the psychology of the story, among other reasons. It consists of nine parts (chapters), the beginning of each is announced by a caption. It is traditional epic storytelling, realistically depicted. The camera copying the horizon corresponds to the regular view, the editing is "invisible", and the narrative linear. It makes no use of poetic insertions. The excellently led black and white camera itself together with an innovative use of light poeticises the image, consequently sticking to a relatively severe, but all the more emotional, explosive story line.

— Each part could function as a free-standing story, with a brief exposition and a punch line at the end. These "stories" linked by the protagonist follow within a time-sequence. The protagonist matures in each segment and develops psychologically more and more in every

segment. In line with the horrors that he experiences.

— I consider such a division to be an excellent dramaturgical solution. In essence, the novel does not contain a dramatic arc or conflict but consists of causally narrated stories which the young hero gradually experiences. Of course, this works in literature as it is expressed by way of word and parables. Such a continuous literary model would pose a problem in film which expresses itself via image. By dividing the film narration into nine clear-cut parts (without the screenwriter sacrificing the comprehensibility of the beginning and end of the whole), a peculiar series form emerges that remains functional.

— However, the problem is that, although each event is different, it is just as brutal and morbid as the previous one. And always equally brilliantly depicted, but nevertheless really more or less in the same way (repeated compositions, gloom, lack of sun, candles in the interiors, decaying teeth in the stubby faces of the living and the stiff smirks of the dead, extreme long shots logically follow medium shots...). By the end this results in a certain monotony, an accumulation of motif structures drearily heading towards the end which will arrive at once tired and grumpy, and in no way will it be merry.

Even though there is a great deal of hope in it... But that relies on the viewer's interpretation. The authors of the film consistently avoid foisting meanings or other clichés on the audience, they leave the field of interpretation open and that is in its favour.

— The little protagonist discovers in the first episode that he ceases to be part of the world of the causality of relations and the things that are familiar to him. He finds himself in a world of chaos, horror and terror, in a world that he can neither predict nor change. However, before the end he tries to achieve a change but by making use of the very method that terrified him so much previously. But he cannot know any other way.

— After the film's première at the Venice IFF, some film critics reproached the film for its naturalism and the tendency to depict only negative phenomena. Sure, that is understandable. But it would do no harm to read Applebaum's *Iron Curtain*, Snyder's *Bloodlands* or *Savage Continent* by Keith Lowe. Good things simply didn't happen in the specific reference space and time which *The Painted Bird* moves in and refers to with a variety of detail. ▶

**The Painted Bird ( Nabarvené ptáče, Czech Republic/Slovakia/Ukraine, 2019 )** SCRIPT AND DIRECTED BY Václav Marhoul  
DOP Vladimír Smutný EDITED BY Luděk Hudec CAST Petr Kotlár, Udo Kier, Zdeněk Pecha, Jitka Čvančarová,  
Stellan Skarsgård, Harvey Keitel, Julian Sands, Júlia Valentová LENGTH 169 min.





— text: Matúš Kvasnička —

photo: Miro Nôta —

# Even the Seemingly Unattainable Can Be Achieved

In November 1989, Zuzana Mistríková was one of the student leaders of the Velvet Revolution. Thirty years later she is a successful Slovak film producer. Nevertheless, she was taken unawares by everything that had to be done after Václav Marhoul's Czech-Slovak-Ukrainian film *The Painted Bird* (*Pomaľované vtáča*), which she co-produced, was accepted last year into the main competition of the Venice Film Festival.

The last Slovak film that was in the competition in Venice was Juraj Jakubisko's *Sitting on a Branch, Enjoying Myself* (*Sedím na konári a je mi dobre*) in 1989. What kind of feeling is it to sit in Venice at the première of one's own competition film?

— It was astonishing that the real odyssey that Václav Marhoul went through with this film culminated in this way. Also the reception of *The Painted Bird* was astounding. One could feel from the full cinema how the viewers were going along with the film. There were no "terrified viewers fleeing the screening" as the media wrote in the Czech Republic even before the film's release. To this day I have no idea whether the journalist wrote this to bring a scandal or to hurt the film. In any case, it was not true. Moreover – those viewers were claimed to have fled from a screening for journalists. I think that journalists should have an inkling as to the film they are to view. In addition, nowadays they are used to all sorts of things. I find the idea of a terrified journalist pretty amusing... Even *Joker* contains incomparably more violence, i.e. explicit violence, than Václav's film. But Václav's film is not a fairy tale, which is why it hurts. However, the première itself was fantastic. As *The Painted Bird* is divided into chapters that were

filmed chronologically, no one, except the main protagonist, the cinematographer and director, encountered all of the actors. And even those did not meet until the première. Stellan Skarsgård, Barry Pepper, Aleksey Kravchenko, Udo Kier, Jitka Čvančarová, Júlia Valentová... It was magical how moved they were by the film and how they congratulated each other. And among them, little Petr Kotlár, who was in his element as he had some kind of relationship with all of them. It was a very powerful experience.

Did the above names and the name of Harvey Keitel, who could not attend the première as he was shooting another film, help to fund the film?

— When you are making a film in Czech-Slovak-Ukrainian co-production, names like those are the icing on the cake, but they don't help you much to fund the film. Marhoul wanted to make the film as a European one and make it in the quality he made it. He really tried to gain partners in other countries right from the start and he talked for a very long time with potential French, German and Israeli co-producers. I think that the big producer names in those countries, in essence, were waiting up to 90 percent for Václav to fail so that they

could compete for the rights to film the book. Not one of them ever thought they should fund Václav Marhoul's film, but they were interested in *The Painted Bird* as such. Václav, so to speak, carried the whole film on his back. He visited producers relentlessly, but the moment they started to tell him that they would fund the film but they would be the main producer or someone else was going to direct the film or that it was going to look differently, Václav said: "Thank you, bye." So famous names didn't really work in this context.

**But they probably helped *The Painted Bird* on its journey to the world.**

— One of Václav's strategies was that if he managed to make the film this way and with these people, maybe a few more viewers would see it after all, than if he didn't have big names in it. It was not pure marketing caginess but, as he had been preparing this film for ten years because he considered it to be important, it was part of his honest approach to the material and part of his ambition. It is definitely easier for the sales agent to work with a film with such a cast than without it.

**Also, thanks to the cast, you probably had a better starting position when you applied for participation in the Venice Film Festival.**

— Every piece of the mosaic is important in order for the film to at least theoretically be successful in the world. Recently, I attended a documentary filmmaking workshop in Malmö. It is even more crazy in documentary than in feature film. They showed us that every year about 30 thousand documentaries are made worldwide. Then you manage to get, for instance, to the IDFA festival in Amsterdam, one of the most important of its kind. Then they showed us another slide with 250 tiny film posters. They were the films at IDFA. Your film is one lost among them. An awful lot of work precedes at least having a theoretical chance of selection for such a festival. But I would never have thought how much work has to be done afterwards, in order to do everything correctly if you are already selected for the festival. In order not to stay as that one little square among all the others that takes part in the festival but leaves no trace.

**What is everything that has to be done?**

— Theoretically it is better in Venice, there aren't 300 films there, but you are nevertheless among many big names. Of course, you need a press kit. But a press kit made in London. And you go on. You need at least one title page in the special daily version of *Variety*. You have to do everything to render the film visible. You need a PR agent who is one of the best and knows exactly how to appeal to which journalists. We were terrified when we found out what you need for that. Because you need money for everything. And when you finish a film for 7 million Euro, not only do you not have any money, but you are deep in the red. However, you know that you have to invest yet more money, otherwise everything would be futile. But I must say that everyone realised how important it was to present a film in Venice after so many years. Our company PubRes as a smaller producer immediately started to relieve Václav of everything that was possible. That is because, in this process, he had to master not only the producer's role but also the author's role, and first he had to prepare all the PR materials. We communicated with the Czech and Slovak funds, we sought out ways to make the film visible in Venice and the competition loaded with big directors' names. We were preparing grants, budgets, basic documents for the funds which adopted a very open stance on the whole matter. As this was not about doing Václav Marhoul a favour, but about maximally taking advantage of an exceptional occasion for Czech-Slovak film. The success of every film at such a level opens the doors to the world to other colleagues. When we mastered everything, Václav learned that the Czech Republic was submitting the film into the selection for the Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Film, and everything started all over again...



**„When you finish a film for 7 million Euro, not only do you not have any money, but you are deep in the red. However, you know that you have to invest yet more money, otherwise everything would be futile.“**

Václav Marhoul probably wasn't the only one interested in the rights to film the book *The Painted Bird*. In your view, how did he convince the owners of the rights to grant them to him?

— Václav and Petr Ostrouchov first inquired as to the whereabouts of the rights. When they found out, they wrote that they were interested in acquiring these rights. To their surprise, they received an answer with dates for Václav to arrive in New York to present his vision. When he arrived there, several people in suits were sitting in the room waiting to hear what he came up with. Václav told them why he wanted to film *The Painted Bird*, how he wanted to do it and why he thought it was important. And he was granted the rights. In my view, Václav convinced them with his motivation as to why he wanted to make the film, and his vision as to how he wanted to do it. There was nothing else to it. And that, in my view, is good news. Even big things that seem to be unattainable don't have to be like that. Because, for people who have similar rights, it is usually much more essential that someone knows why and how, than arriving and offering a lot of money.

**Last year, the Slovak Parliament amended the Audiovisual Act which increased the refund of invested funds for film projects made in Slovakia from 20 percent to the current 33 percent of invested resources. How will that help the audiovisual environment?**

— A great deal. Our Association of Independent Producers was present at the discussions about the amendment and we also opened the question of how other public sources such as grants are to be perceived with regard to the rebate. Eventually, this matter was regulated in the Act in a more unambiguous manner – if you have a co-production partner, for instance from the public sector, let us say RTVS (Radio and Television Slovakia), these are funds that you can get a return on. In this moment this, almost for the first time, affords the chance to use the rebates as a financial instrument that you reckon with in the plan when making a Slovak film. In this moment, the system makes sense and thanks to it Slovak producers can become more essential partners in international collaboration, including Czecho-Slovak co-productions. The Czech "incentives" gave their producers greater room for manoeuvre. We always lack some funds in the case of domestic films. Always. So, you are looking for all conceivable ways of covering them. If the instrument they have for it in the Czech Republic is more stable and more usable than the instrument in Slovakia, that means that you will, of course, do the things that you are required to do in Slovakia within the co-production, but you will do the other ones where you can find the money. Now the seesaw has tipped over to our side. Of course, we will fight for a while – even now we've had periods when so many films were made in Slovakia that some-

times it was a problem to put a crew together. However, that helps to stabilise the film professions and to give them room for growth. At this moment, the incentive in the Czech Republic is 20 percent, and in Slovakia it will be 33 percent, so it will be very interesting to see where it will lead to.

**1989 caught you studying theatre dramaturgy for the third year at the Academy of Performing Arts. Allegedly, you did not get to this school originally.**

— I was not admitted to the school twice. It was not dramaturgy the first time, but film and theatre science which, however, has many points in common with dramaturgy – which was not opened. The next year I tried dramaturgy at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU) and I was admitted only a year later when dramaturgy was opened at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. It is true that, if I had been admitted the first time, I would no longer have been at the school in 1989. Everything bad is good for something in life.

**When you think about the Velvet Revolution, what are the most intensive feelings or memories linked with it?**

— The most intensive feeling – and I am convinced that all who experienced the Revolution as adults have it – was the moment when people suddenly found out that they were not alone in what they thought. That there were many people like that, they just had no way of finding one another in the grey normalised society which punished any deviation from the crowd. Suddenly you find yourself in a crowd of 50 thousand. Like at a rock concert. But that is not just for two hours, but for the whole life. People opened up and really wanted to help. As the end of the year was getting near, events in Romania took off. Unlike in Czechoslovakia, people were shot at in Romania. It was really serious and that is when the request for help came from the Red Cross. As a students' movement, we announced a collection and the assistance could be brought to the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the Slovak Technical University on present-day Námestie Slobody in Bratislava. When my colleagues who announced the collection returned from the radio building, there was already a crowd of people with the first things standing in front of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering which is only 500 metres away. We collected over one million crowns within 24 hours. I'm saying this because the charge within society was really very positive. People gained the experience that they were an important part of the course of events. That it makes sense to come somewhere. That things really can be changed. ▶

— photo: archive of the SFT

slovak classics 2019

## A Year Around The World With Slovak Classics

**2019 marked a successful year for international presentation of Slovak audiovisual heritage. Slovak classics left the safety of the archive to set off on a journey around the world visiting numerous prestigious film festivals, cinematheques, and cultural institutions.**

— International Short Film Festival Oberhausen in 2018 showed *Traces of Experiment in Slovak Short Films*, a programme of experimental shorts made in 1960s and 1970s curated by a film historian Martin Kaňuch. In 2019 Kino Tuškanac in Zagreb (Croatia) presented its audience with slightly altered shorts programme supported by Dušan Hanák's feature-length *Pictures of the Old World* (1972). The shorts then travelled to Ljubljana as a part of Days of Czechoslovak Cinema at Slovenska kinoteka (Slovenia).

— An orchestra director formerly known as a mundane trianglist, Barnabás Kos, enjoyed his fair share of travels in 2019. As a part of *The Central European Cinema of the Absurd, 1958-1990* travelling programme curated by a film historian Gabriel Paletz, kafkaesque *The Barnabás Kos Case* by Peter Solan (1964) flexed its absurdist muscles at HKIFF Cine Fan Progam (Hongkong) and National Gallery of Art in Washington D. C. (USA). The film was also selected for Karlovy Vary IFF (Czech Republic) and Cinefest Hamburg (Germany). BluRay release of the film was shortlisted among the finalists of Il Cinema ritrovato DVD Awards 2019 and was given a special mention by one of the jury members, Shivendra Singh Dungapur.

Well done, comrade Kos!

— Bibliothèque publique d'information au Centre Pompidou in Paris ran *Faster, Higher, Stronger*, a programme dedicated to sports documentaries. Slovak Film Institute was represented by *World Ski Championships*, a medium-length documentary by Milan Černák (1970). For a third year in a row, a prestigious festival dedicated to film classics, Lumière Festival, Lyon (France) became a place of a world première of recently digitally restored film, an expression of liberated and spontaneous rhythm inspired by folk poetry, surrealism and naive artists, *Wild Lilies* by Elo Havetta (1972).

— Austrian Film Museum in Vienna together with Viennale held *O PARTIGIANO! Pan-European Partisan Film retrospective*. We held our positions having deployed heavy artillery: a western-like, personal revenge story set on the backdrop of the Slovak National Uprising *Captain Dabač* by Palo Bielik (1958) and an existential, primordial struggle for survival in snowbound mountains *The Bells Toll for the Barefooted* by Stanislav Barabáš (1965).

— International Film Festival Kolkata (India) honoured the work of scriptwriter and director Dušan Hanák, holding his retrospective. *Pictures of the Old World; Rosy Dreams* (1976); *I Love, You Love* (1980); *Paper Heads* (1995) and his début feature *322* (1969) were screened within the official festival programme.

— End of the year is time of various polls reflecting the best of the past year. In one such poll, published by Indiewire, Peter Strickland (*Berberian Sound Studio*, *The Duke of Burgundy* and *In Fabric*) listed our very own comrade Kos, his rise and fall, as one of his personal cinematic highlights of 2019: "A stunning restoration of a '60s Slovak film [*The Barnabás Kos Case*] that clearly riled the authorities at the time. The trusted political appointee who is often unqualified, clueless and capricious with newly realized power is hilariously embodied in the film. Amidst the political satire, you get generous lashings of unintentional avant-garde music since a triangle player has full control of his orchestra and if that wasn't enough, the film also features some of the most beautiful concert halls in Europe." ▶

Rastislav Steranka

— Director / National Cinematographic Centre  
Slovak Film Institute





— text: Slovak Film Commission —  
photo from *Dracula* (2020): BBC/NETFLIX —

# Slovak Film Commission

The Slovak Film Commission was established in June last year and Zuzana Bieliková was appointed as its manager. It works as an organisational unit of the Slovak Audiovisual Fund and it aims to contribute to making Slovakia a more attractive partner for foreign film productions and domestic investors.

Adjustments to the Audiovisual Industry Support Programme of the Slovak Audiovisual Fund have led to the establishment of the Slovak Film Commission (SFC) as a new organisational unit of the Fund. With this, Slovakia has taken a further step to becoming a more attractive and accessible partner for foreign film productions or domestic investors. In addition, Slovakia's film and TV cash rebate will rise from 20% to 33% from 1 January 2020, under amendments to the country's audiovisual law, by which Slovakia will enter the club of EU countries most attractive for shooting.

#### The SFC's main tasks include:

- intensive promotion and marketing of Slovakia as a competitive film country with appropriate conditions for audiovisual production,
- presentation and mediation of creative business opportunities for Slovak audiovisual professionals with an emphasis on all stages of film production,
- presentation of related services and individual regions of Slovakia in order to increase the employment of professionals and the general populace in the audiovisual field,
- enhancing demand for film production services (technology rentals, production and post-production services, animation, catering, etc.).

The SFC's primary focus is to attract the producers of feature, documentary and animated audiovisual works to Slovakia and its regions and to progressively streamline the benefits of audiovisual production in Slovak regions for both foreign and domestic producers and investors. The secondary objective is to support tourism in individual regions.

The SFC has created and regularly updates a public database on film infrastructure in the Slovak Republic; it has launched a website as well as printed materials with information on the Slovak audiovisual environment; it pro-actively searches for prospective clients interested in shooting films in Slovakia; it administers the provision of expert advice and maintains active cooperation with foreign film commissions and professional audiovisual organisations.

The SFC is a member of the European Film Commissions Network (EUFCN) and Association of Film Commissioners International (AFCI).

On 1 June 2018, Zuzana Bieliková was appointed manager of the SFC.

Connecting professionals and providing expert guidance, the Slovak Film Commission acts for anyone seeking to create audiovisual content in Slovakia, whether it be a feature, documentary, animation, TV series or a commercial.

#### The SFC can assist with:

- finding a production partner and putting you in touch with local, Slovak film professionals and service providers,
- obtaining important information about shooting possibilities in the Slovak Republic,
- consultation on the cash rebate system,
- seeking out locations and negotiating film permits,
- handling formalities,
- organising leisure activities for film crews.

**Good idea!  
in Slovakia!**

Shooting a vampire movie? Discover Slovak forests and castles!  
Shooting in the Alps? Slovak mountains are just as stunning!  
Shooting in the Sahara? Slovakia has its own desert!  
Shooting Nordic Noir? Go for Slovak city suburbs!

**We have it all!**

**33%**  
CASH REBATE

No budget limit on eligible costs, including royalties and fees paid to cast and crew registered to pay taxes in Slovakia.

Get a 33% cash rebate on expenses spent on film or TV production in the Slovak Republic. Minimum spending of 300,000 EUR for TV features (or series), slates of films (max. 3 films per slate) or 150,000 EUR for individual feature films, documentary films and animated films.

— text: Matúš Kvasnička — photo: archive of the SFI/Václav Polák,  
archive of the SFI/Vladimír Vavrek —

# Slovak Classics on DVD and Blu-ray

The Publications Department of the Slovak Film Institute (SFI) issues several titles every year which may be of interest for viewers and readers in Slovakia, and also abroad.

Director Elo Havetta passed away at the young age of 36 years. The talented filmmaker fell into disfavour with the normalisation nomenclature in the last years of his life, so just two full-length films are all that remain from him. Thirteen years after the first DVD edition, the SFI issued them on a double DVD, this time

cond is available. In addition to stills from films, each film is characterised by a short text and quotations from the press; there are also factual data. In the second part of the book the reader will find profiles of the twenty directors who made those films. The reputable British film critic and historian, Peter Hames, who specialises

of Slovak Comedy. They contain films made by directors such as Ján Kadár, Juraj Herz and Štefan Uher.

Helena Slavíková-Rabarová joins Slovak folk songs, nursery rhymes and proverbs with original folk-art products into an artistically impressive whole in the series inspired by the seasons of the year, *Pictures – Folksongs* (*Maľovanky – Spievinky*). This DVD, like all the other titles mentioned above and many others, are available in the e-shop, [www.klapka.sk](http://www.klapka.sk).

"Harmless, good people who are passive in their attitude toward violence always constitute the basis of all violence. Perhaps these people cease to be passive later on, but it is usually too late. This holds true everywhere. There would be no violence without these good people as the carriers of a coercive ideology," said director Ján Kadár in 1965. Together with Elmar Klos they made the first Czechoslovak film to win the Academy Award, *The Shop on Main Street* (*Obchod na korze*, 1965). The protagonist of the film, the carpenter Tónó Brtko (Jozef Kroner), is just such a good

"It is a film about the search for humanity as there was not much of it at the time the film was made and there could be more of it even today," said Hanák, forty years after the film was made. He also made *Pictures of the Old World* (*Obrazy starého sveta*, 1972) and the banned *I Love, You Love* (*Ja milujem, ty miluješ*, 1980) which won the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlinale in 1989 once it was released from the safe. However, according to film historian Jelena Paštéková, *Rosy Dreams* is Hanák's most popular film with audiences and, at the same time, the only Slovak film from the 1970s which managed to get into the foreign market.

*The Barnabáš Kos Case* (*Prípad Barnabáš Kos*, 1964) is one of the classical Slovak films. Its digitally restored version is among the latest additions to SFI's DVD and Blu-ray collection. The story of the triangle-player who is promoted to the position of orchestra director, even though he is not competent for this position, speaks not just for its period – it also fits the image of today. Kos is



Rosy Dreams —



Celebration in the Botanical Garden —

digitally restored, and this year they will also be issued on Blu-ray. Havetta's début film *Celebration in the Botanical Garden* (*Slávnosť v botanickej záhrade*, 1969) is a colorful mosaic of stories about the need for a miracle in human life and also "an emotional protest, an eruption of spontaneous merriment in a period blocked by bans and derailed by commands." War veterans looking for a home and a place in society are the protagonists of Havetta's second film *Wild Lilies* (*Lalie polné*, 1972). They want to settle down, but they also yearn for the free life of tramps. Havetta sought for beauty and humanity where others couldn't see them. In director Eduard Grečner's view, by doing so he stood up against "the wall of celebratory communist tirades about the positive hero". The films are available on DVD with English subtitles.

Both films are part of the representative pictorial publication *Best of Slovak Film 1921 – 1991* issued in the English language. In total, it contains about 35 Slovak full-length films. The first issue is sold out, the se-

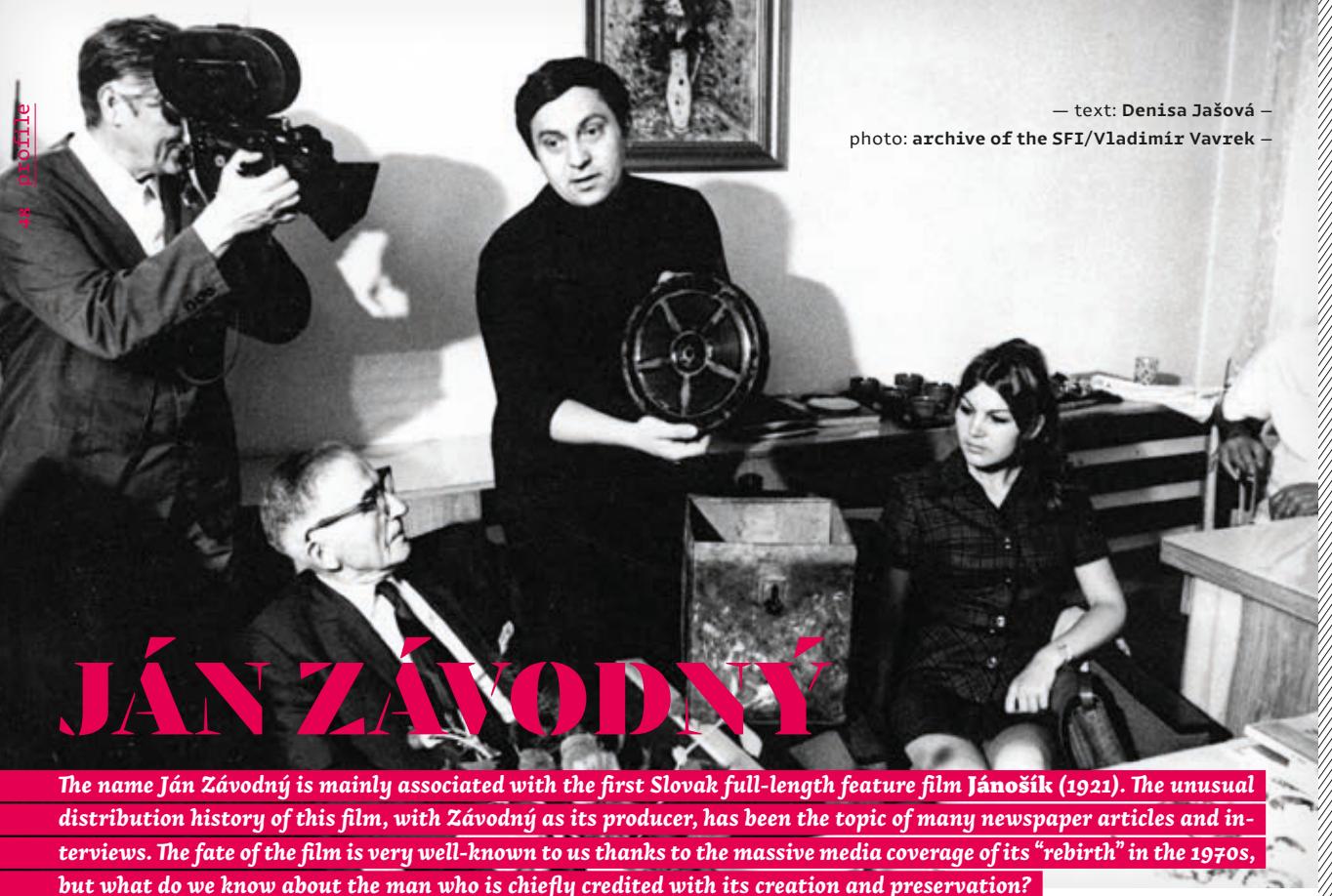
in Eastern European and Czecho-Slovak cinema, is the author of the texts. "Many titles will be familiar but many more await their discovery by international audiences," said Hames about the book, which has 201 pages.

One of the ambitions of those who put together the double DVD *Slovak Documentary Film 60* (*Slovenský dokumentárny film 60*), issued last year by the SFI, was to bring Slovak documentary production of the 1960s out of obscurity in its various shades. Rudolf Urc and Pavel Branko are behind the programming of the collection. "The first collection was intended to be a representative selection of films that were not talked about too much. The second one an overview of prohibited films that were selected not by us but the censor. It is a collection of rare stuff, even though some of them are reasonably well-known," said Rudolf Urc. Directors such as Martin Slivka, Dušan Hanák, Dušan Trančík and many others are represented in the collection. The films are available with English subtitles, just like the three DVD collections *The Golden Fund*

man; he succumbs to pressure from his wife and brother-in-law and accepts an aryanisation decree for the shop of the very old Jewish widow Lautman (Ida Kamińska). He tries to help her, but he is unable to prevent a tragedy. The SFI will issue the film this year as a 2DVD and Blu-ray. Amongst the bonus materials, viewers will find interviews with film historians Václav Macek and Stanislava Prádná, philosopher Egon Gál and the son of one of the directors – Elmar Klos Jr. And also short post-war films made by Ján Kadár about fascist criminals who sat in the government in Slovakia during World War 2.

*Rosy Dreams* (*Ružové sny*, 1976) made by Dušan Hanák, one of the most distinct representatives of Slovak cinema, is another classical film that will be issued this year on Blu-ray. *Rosy Dreams* (1976) tells the poetic story of the young village postman Jakub who falls in love with the gypsy girl, Jolanka, but their naïve ideas about cohabitation have ultimately to be abandoned.

an eternal reality, either as a man used by the system, or the one who uses the system. Director Peter Solan's (*The Boxer and Death /Boxer a smrt*) satire was and is an uncompromisingly pointed finger and "a case study about the invincibility of absurdity". The film is based on Peter Karvaš's story and it took a whole decade before production of the film started. It commenced only after the third adaptation of the story which was more focused on the orchestra and music, and this determined the visual concept of the film. Naturally, the film reacts to the current situation in art and speaks a contemporary language. ▲



— text: Denisa Jašová —  
photo: archive of the SFI/Vladimír Vavrek —

# JÁN ZÁVODNÝ

The name Ján Závodný is mainly associated with the first Slovak full-length feature film *Jánošík* (1921). The unusual distribution history of this film, with Závodný as its producer, has been the topic of many newspaper articles and interviews. The fate of the film is very well-known to us thanks to the massive media coverage of its "rebirth" in the 1970s, but what do we know about the man who is chiefly credited with its creation and preservation?

— Ján Závodný was born in 1890 in Brezová pod Bradlom, the eldest of nine children. He trained as a carpenter and in 1908 left to seek work in the US. In Chicago, a city in the American Midwest known for being home to one of the largest communities of Czechoslovak emigrants, he found a footing as a skilful craftsman but, thanks to his interest in art, he was also involved in local cultural events. He was an actor in the Slovak National Theatre in Chicago which played for fellow-countrymen societies all over the United States, and in 1914 he became a shareholder in the theatre. That year he also became owner of the Casimir Cinema in Jefferson Park where he used to work as an usher. "Film and theatre were actually permanent, albeit subordinate jobs for me," said Závodný.

— The idea of making a film about Jánošík arose from the warm reception of theatre performances about Jánošík in which he collaborated. Next, an another native of Brezová pod Bradlom, Samuel Tvarožek, initiated the establishment of Tatra Film Corporation, a production company to which the Siakel' brothers also contributed. So, the basis of a film crew was formed, along with František Horlivý whose role it was to train amateur actors for the film. Horlivý travelled from the USA in 1921 and filmed at various locations in the Turiec Region. However, the filming proved to be very expensive so Ján Závodný, as a producer, invested in the film not only his own money received from the sale of the cinema in Chicago, but also money borrowed from his relatives. Ján's younger sister Anna also remembers these troubles: "When the crew arrived from America to make the film, they had only half the amount needed, and the costs were huge. They travelled to Europe through Paris, where they had to wait for a week for the film stock, which came by cargo ship. All that was in-

cluded in the costs of the film. As were all the subsistence costs for four hundred actors and the film crew. Some of them were not willing to eat the village food, so they drove them to a hotel in Martin. My brother Štefan, who studied in Prešov, helped recruit the cast. The film was shot in several locations in Slovakia and also in film studios in Prague. They had no income, they ran into debt, they took out a loan and pledged our parents' house in Brezová as collateral."

— Jánošík had its première in Vrútky and was well received by audiences, and Ján Závodný also funded its screening in several American cities. After the production company went out of business for financial reasons, and also due to the advent of sound in film, he returned to his carpentry work, paid off all his debts and stored the original in his garage. The film only got to Slovakia in 1970 at the request of the Slovak Film Institute: Závodný himself brought it in his luggage from the US when he arrived on a tour with fellow countrymen. The restored film was then screened in Bratislava in 1975. In the meantime, Ján Závodný managed to make the ethnographic documentary *Slovakia Through the Eyes of a Native* (*Slovensko očami rodáka*) over the course of one of his visits; this film, however, has not been preserved.

— On 18 February forty years will have passed from the death of this skilled craftsman, an ardent fellow-countryman in the USA enthusiastic about Slovak culture, and the producer of the first Slovak film. Even though he spent most of his life in the USA, where he raised five children, he tried to promote Slovak culture in the place where he lived; he regarded it as important to foster good Czechoslovak-American relations, which he was keen to promote. ▶



SLOVAK AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCERS' ASSOCIATION

## SAPA

represents producers and administrators of Slovak film producers' rights, owners and administrators of copyright of almost 90 % of all the theatrical films produced in Slovakia - from 1921 until today.

## SAPA

- carries out collective administration of authors' rights for Slovak and foreign producers and their copyrights in Slovakia,
- cooperates with European organizations and institutions such as AGICOA, EUROCOPYA, FIAPF, EPAA – European Producers Association Alliance and other international organizations with same or related goals,
- initiates and implements activities connected with support and development of film and audiovisual industry in Slovakia,
- cooperates with professional organizations and artists associations in the audiovisual industry, with universities and other scientific and expertise institutions, analyzes and provides information on the current state of Slovak cinema.

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