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**Berlinale  
Edition 2021**





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

EUROPEAN FILM MARKET,  
BERLINALE



MARCHÉ DU FILM,  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



editorial



At the turn of the year, the editorial team of the Slovak monthly *Film.sk* usually brought an overview of the best and most interesting film events in Slovakia in the previous year and combined it with a rundown of upcoming films in the following year. The English edition of the magazine then served as a source of information that promoted Slovak cinema at festivals abroad, where our cinema is represented by the National Cinematographic Centre of the Slovak Film Institute. The Centre, in turn, used to prepare newsletter *What's Slovak in Berlin / Cannes / Karlovy Vary?*, that served to inform the audience and accredited professionals about the representation of Slovak filmmakers and screenings at each particular festival.

This year, for the first time, we have decided to join forces of the editorial team with the National Cinematographic Centre, and we gladly present you *Film.sk Berlinale Edition 2021*.

This special edition provides also the information previously contained mainly in the mentioned newsletters, together with the evaluation of last year's Slovak production, statistics of the success rate regarding distribution, as well as an overview of the most anticipated films this year. The filmmakers and their works are presented in several interviews, and it also draws attention to classic films from the archive which have been restored and released on DVD and Blu-ray by Slovak Film Institute.

The edition offers a lot more. Despite the pandemic situation, we had more than enough material to put together. That is why, in the summer, we may be looking forward to *Film.sk Cannes / Karlovy Vary Edition 2021*. For that: let's stay negative but optimistic! ◀

— Veronika Krejčová / executive editor —

## THE HISTORY AND PRESENT OF THE SLOVAK FILM INSTITUTE

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 operates 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. The film archive, which was established in 1958, also became part of the Institute. In 1970, the SFI was presented with a copy of the first Slovak feature film *Jánošík* (dir. Jaroslav Siakel, 1921) which was later restored and provided with a soundtrack.

By the end of 1976, the Film Club of the Central Office of Slovak Film was opened in Bratislava. The SFI resumed operation of the facility, naming it Kino Lumière in 2011.

In January 1991, the National Cinematographic Centre was established as an independent public contributory organisation managed by the Ministry of Culture. By delimitation, the SFI acquired producer rights to the archived Slovak films made before 1991. It exercises these rights in accordance with the Act on Audiovision, which defines the activity and position of the SFI.

Institute played a part in the preparation of the extensive publication entitled **History of Slovak Cinema** (Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie, 1997; updated issue 2016). In 2002, the SFI released its first DVD (first Blu-ray in 2015); since then, it has released dozens of other DVDs, which are now available with everything else related to films at the SFI's online shop Klapka.sk, opened in 2008. In 2002, the SFI started to implement the long-term integrated audiovisual information system project SK CINEMA. The databases are publicly available at [www.cinema.sk](http://www.cinema.sk), and it is the most important and relevant source on Slovak audiovisual content.

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 project.

In the years 2011 to 2015, the SFI, in cooperation with the Radio and Television Slovakia, implemented the national project Digital Audiovision. During the project, 61,650 cultural objects were digitised. The project is sustainable over a long period and continues to reach its goal – digitisation of the audiovisual heritage of the Slovak Republic. The SFI's digitisation workplace has become a permanent part of its professional workplaces.

**Film.sk**, the only printed film monthly in Slovakia, has been published by the SFI since 2000. During the 21 years of its existence, it has undergone other format and conceptual changes, but the goals remain to provide a wide range of information and opinions from the domestic audiovisual environment, capable of appealing to film experts 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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contributors

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**Barbora Námerová**

Scriptwriter and story editor. Her first feature film screenplay **Filthy** (Špina) premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam. Tereza Nvotová is currently completing the second film they wrote together, **The Nightsiren** (Svetlonoc).

**Miroslav Ulman**

Film publicist, researcher at the Slovak Film Institute, co-founder of the monthly **Film Fan** (1990 – 1995) and founder of the first Slovak website about cinema **Filmsite** (1997). Co-organizer of several festivals, co-author of the book **Sprievodca klubovým filmom** (A guide Through Club Film), dramaturge of the Music & Film cycle at the Cinema Lumière. Winner of the Slovak Film Critics Award.





# Climate Catastrophe and Tragedy of One Moment

**Shadow Country** (Krajina ve stínu, CZ/SK, 2020, dir. Bohdan Sláma) is one of the most ambitious Slovak minority films of the last year. The black and white chronicle traces the rise of Nazism and Communism, and it received 15 nominations for the Czech Lion Awards. In addition, the film will be screened at the European Film Market Berlinale on March 3 at 16:30 at Virtual Cinema 28. Slovak projects which are still at the preparation stage aim high as well. At the beginning of the year, the filmmakers presented them at industry forums of prestigious festivals.

“Mankind is unlikely to stop climate change, but it will have to adapt to the new, more difficult conditions,” director and producer Tomáš Krupa shares the main idea of his project *We Have to Survive* (Musíme přežít), which follows the process of adaptation where the climate catastrophe is already a prominent reality – Greenland, the USA, Australia, China or Japan. Krupa’s previous film *The Good Death* (Dobrá smrt, 2018), in which terminally ill Janette fights for the right to die with dignity, won at the National Film Awards Slnko v sieti in the Best Documentary category and received great acclaim at festivals around the world. The festival tour of the project *We Have to Survive* is also beginning promisingly. At the pitching forum within the industry programme of FIPADOC in Biarritz (January 18 – 22), *We Must Survive* won the WEMW-FIPADOC Window Award. This opened the door for the film at the co-production forum When East Meets West (WEMW, January 25 – 28), part of the Trieste Film Festival.

However, Krupa’s film was not the only Slovak representative at the WEMW. In the assembly of twenty-one upcoming projects from fourteen countries, Tereza Nvotová’s fiction film *The Father* (Otec) was presented as well. She is currently finishing another fiction film

*The Nightsiren* (Svetlonoc, read more on page 30). In her fiction debut *Filthy* (Špina, 2017), which premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, she addressed the topic of rape. *The Father* is based on a real-life tragedy of a man who forgot his two-year-old daughter in a hot car. According to Nvotová, the story requires a radical form, therefore, she wants to make a subjective film consisting of only a few long shots, so that the viewer can empathise with the main character. When asked what kind of film regarding this topic she would be willing to watch herself, Nvotová answered in an explanation for the Audiovisual Fund: “A film that shakes up my inner convictions, forces me to ask myself fundamental questions and teaches me to be more human.”

In the new consulting programme First Cut+ in Trieste, intended for films at the stage of post-production, *Censor* (working title Cenzorka, read more on page 33) by Peter Kerekes, one of the most prominent documentary filmmakers from the Slovak Generation 90, was presented. Award-winning director of *Cooking History* (Ako sa varia dejiny, 2009) and co-director of documentary comedy *Velvet Terrorists* (Zamatoví teroristi, 2013 Tagesspiegel Readers’ Jury Award – Berlinale 2014) also received the Sub-ti Award in Trieste. At the

festival, the Slovak minority film *Il Boemo* by Czech director Petr Václav about the declining career of opera composer Josef Mysliveček was also presented.

Musician who learns that happiness is a state of mind hidden in small things is one of the characters from the upcoming film *Applause* (Potlesk) by Juraj Lehotský. He participated with the film in the Industry Village (January 20 – 22) at the Les Arcs Film Festival. Lehotský also belongs to the mentioned Generation 90. After the successful documentary *Blind Loves* (Slepé lásky, 2008, CICA Award – Cannes 2008), he also started making fiction films: after *Miracle* (Zázrak, 2013) and *Nina* (2017), *Applause* is the third. Matúš, a handsome man in his thirties and a talented cellist, gives up a promising career when his adoptive mother falls ill. After her death, he lives with his stepbrother, who has a congenital growth defect, and seeks a way to realise his ambitions. Matúš is played by Polish actor Bartosz Bielenia. He became famous for his role as a fake priest in the film *Corpus Christi* (2019) by Jan Komasa, which was nominated for an Oscar. Other characters are portrayed by Vojtěch Zdražil, Judit Bárdos and German actor Sabin Tambrea. In Les Arcs, audiences were introduced to the Slovak minority film *The Bird Atlas* (Atlas vtákov) by Olmo Omerzu. It discusses strained family relationships and the world of modern communication technologies that can exploit our vulnerabilities.

At the festival in Clermont-Ferrand (January 29 – February 6), one of the most important of its kind, Slovak short films were presented at the online Short Film Market (February 1 – 5). The works were introduced under the heading of Central European Cinema, with the Slovak Film Institute joining the Czech Film Center and the Slovenian Film Centre. The animated project *Tourists* (Turisti, dir. Mária Kralovič) about finding mutual understanding after years of marriage was nominated by the Slovak Film Institute for the co-production forum Euro Connection. The project made it to the final line-up. At the festival, new films such as *Eco Terro* (dir. Matúš Vizár), *Liars, Tramps and Thieves* (Klamári, tuláci a zloději, dir. David Benedek), *Mercy* (Milost, dir. Ivana Laučíková), *Pattern 97* (Vzor 97, dir. Paula Reiselová), *Rheum* (Ospalky, dir. Kateřina Hroníková) and *Homeland of Silence* (Ticho na poli, dir. Štefánia Lovasová) were also presented.

In March, Slovak films are keeping up the pace. Peter Budinský’s project *Heart of a Tower* (Srdce veže), produced by the company BFILM, was selected for the presentation forum on animated feature films Cartoon Movie in Bordeaux, France (March 9 – 11). The adventure film for children takes place in “Yourland, a magical world where the ravens act like the men, the building cranes walk like robots and a metal machine wants to rule the world. Riki has to enter this world to find the truth and save Yourland – his own world.” The second Slovak project presented at the forum is *White Plastic Sky* (Műanyag égbolt, dir. Tibor Bánóczki, Sarolta Szabó). It takes place in the apocalyptic future without animals and plants, and the film is produced by Artichoke, regarding the Slovak side. ◀

**ScripTeast** is a project-based training programme organised by the Independent Film Foundation and designed for professional scriptwriters from Central and Eastern Europe. With the knowledge of the CEE market and many barriers that talented writers from the region face, ScripTeast takes participants to the Berlinale and the Festival in Cannes – so that with a little help from friends, they might overcome those barriers. ScripTeast will not teach them how to write a screenplay. Program is built specifically to help writers perfect their scripts and take them to the international market, while also helping them develop skills that allow for navigating that market more freely.



**Teodor Kuhn** is a director and scriptwriter. He graduated from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava where he was also briefly teaching during his PhD. His short films won several awards and his debut feature *By a Sharp Knife* (Ostrým nožom, 2019) was premiered at the Shanghai International Film Festival and won the award for Best Director at Cottbus. Apart from being a filmmaker, Teodor is involved in an environmental NGO and also leads an NGO that builds concrete skateparks. For fun, he does concrete construction work and shoots commercials.

**How can a programme like ScripTeast help a scriptwriter? What are your expectations?**

I signed up for ScripTeast thanks to Zuzana Liová, who rewrote her film *The House* (Dom) there. For a scriptwriter, the workshop represents an impartial dramaturge and an opportunity to get feedback from producers from around the world. I do not expect that co-producers in Berlin or Cannes will eagerly jump at the script, but rather I am interested in whether the story has potential and how I can increase it as much as possible.

**What have you been working on lately? Which of your ongoing projects do you consider the most appealing to non-domestic audiences?**

I have three film projects in progress. I had to suspend one, about the partisan Žingor, because I still cannot find a model in which such a high-cost and extensive story could be produced. As a result, I switched to two low-budget screenplays: a cheeky drama about a beautiful girl who becomes a money mule for a mafioso and a comedy from a homeless shelter. I am writing that script, inspired by the beautiful assistant of our former prime minister, at ScripTeast. Of course, it contains characters such as the Italian mafia member Antonino, so I think I have a better chance with western co-producers.



**Berlinale Talents** is a talent development programme that explores the how and why of movie making. Since 2003, it has grown to become a festival within the larger festival and a one-of-a-kind forum for film professionals and cinema lovers alike, featuring talks, workshops, networking events and screenings. While the Berlinale showcases films in all their facets, the Talents programme delves into how they are made and how to see the world through a different lens. Even in the middle of the pandemic, the Berlinale Talents creates a space for encounters, networks and exchanges. As the first part of this twofold Berlinale 2021, 200 chosen Talents as well as a host of guests and the public are invited into a virtual forum which will showcase the possibilities of film.



**Barbora Berezňáková** studied at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, the New York Film Academy and at the Bellas Artes in Valencia. Her films incorporate an experiment with the film form. She created the documentary and transmedia project *Ask Your Parents 68/89* (Spýtaj sa vašich 68/69, 2019). The key political events of the 20th century determining the further orientation of Czechoslovakia are presented through the memories of ordinary people and their family history. Her feature debut *Never Happened* (Skutok sa stal, 2019) premiered at the prestigious Warsaw International Film Festival. It reconstructs several fundamental political crimes and cases of post-revolutionary Slovakia in the 1990s while taking an interest in the experience of the individual against a background of political events.

#### Do you have specific expectations from participating in the Berlinale Talents programme?

I am really looking forward to the Berlinale Talents, I am curious about the programme, I think the whole Berlinale festival is of a very high standard.

#### What have you been working on lately?

I am currently working on my debut feature film called *The Dead Horse*. It is an absurd drama with elements of comedy, discussing a conservative backlash. I would like to consult the project, look for potential co-producers and film partners because the story is very topical and interesting for European and international audiences.



**Matúš Krajňák** is a director and creative producer. He graduated from the German TV and Film Academy Berlin. His *Sex Commercial* (2014) was shortlisted for Young Director Award in Cannes, his short drama *Monologues* (2014) premiered at the Warsaw Film Festival. The feature script *Gun Fun* was second-rounded for the Sundance Screenwriters Lab and placed among the top 15% of entrants to the Academy Nicholl competition. Currently, Krajňák is producing a romantic web-series about queer dating in London and developing a feature script with a similar subject.

#### Do you have specific expectations from participating in the Berlinale Talents programme?

After attending the virtual reality version of the Sundance Film Festival in February this year and meeting many inspiring artists online, I am really excited to connect with filmmakers from all around the world in a similar VR experience at the Berlin Film Festival in March. This is a great opportunity for everyone working on their first feature film or TV project, and I am proud to become a part of the Berlinale Talents family.

#### What have you been working on lately?

At the moment, I am working on several projects that are connected through one single topic – queerness. I wrote and produced a romantic comedy web series *SEXFLUENCING* (more info [www.matus-krajnak.com/](http://www.matus-krajnak.com/) episodic) which is currently in post-production. I hope that at the Berlinale Film Festival I can meet new creative partners in order to develop this episodic project as a TV series. I also collaborate on two feature film scripts that I would like to direct, aiming to normalise queerness in the eyes of a wider audience. Both feature projects are relationship comedy-dramas.



**Emerging Producers** is an industry flagship project of the Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival and the only one of its kind designed for documentary film producers in Europe. The Emerging Producers are being presented at major film events throughout the year. A fundamental part of the Emerging Producers programme consists of various informal meetings. The aim is to help the producers meet the key persons in the field of audio-visual industry present at the Ji.hlava Industry Programme and at the Berlin part of the training.

**Zora Jaurová** is a film producer, cultural and creative industries policy expert, and politician (vice-chairman of the party Progressive Slovakia). She has been involved in EU affairs and cultural policies for several years. The co-author and director of *Košice – European Capital of Culture 2013*, she is also the President of the Slovak Creative Industry Forum and member of Ateliers du Cinéma Européen. Jaurová works as a film producer and producing partner in Slovak film production company Mphilms.

#### Finished projects (as producer)

- **Slovakia 2.0** (Slovensko 2.0) – directed by Viera Čákanyová, Iveta Grófová, Juraj Herz, Miro Jelok, Peter Kerekes, Peter Krištúfek, Zuzana Liová, Ondrej Rudavský, Mišo Suchý and Martin Šulík, Slovakia, 2014. Twenty years of independent Slovakia in ten 10-min. films of different genres.
- **Ex-Prime Ministers** (Expremiéri) – directed by seven directors, 7x29 min, Slovakia, 2018. Documentary TV series.
- **Paradise on Earth** (Raj na zemi) – directed by Jaro Vojtek, Slovakia, 2019. Documentary.

#### Projects in progress

- **Power** (Moc) – directed by Mátyás Prikler, Slovakia/Hungary/Czech Republic, 2021, in post-production. Feature.
- **Nikola** – directed by Vladimír Morávek, Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2021, in post-production. Feature.
- **Wild Roots** (Külön falka) – directed by Hajni Kiss, Slovakia/Hungary, 2021, in post-production. Feature.
- **Marathon of Juan Zabala** (Maratón Juana Zabalú) – directed by Peter Kerekes, in development. Feature.

#### What are your expectations from participating in the Emerging Producers programme? What “competitive advantage” can a producer gain by participating in such a programme?

Since the relevant European film industry is based on co-productions and collaboration beyond the national borders nowadays, I find this kind of training programmes extremely helpful, and not only for “emerging” producers. Apart from know-how and inspiration, it is mainly the people from different countries and producing backgrounds you meet, become friends with and add them to your professional network, which is the highest added value of producers training programmes. I produce both – features and documentaries, and it is interesting to see how the documentary gang is different from people working in features – it is more relaxed and somehow less crushed down by the heaviness of the film industry...

#### Which of your ongoing projects is currently the biggest challenge for you, and do you consider it the most appealing to non-Slovak audiences as well?

We are finishing the shooting of political thriller *Power* (Moc, dir. Mátyás Prikler), and the pandemic is our worst enemy. Even if we were able to shoot most of it just before the virus hit Europe, now we are struggling with the last few days of shooting. This project was from the very beginning conceived as a truly international co-production, not only financially but also in terms of cast and crew – that is why the existing restrictions make it really complicated. However, this lightly dystopian drama asking questions about the limits and ethical borders of political power and seeming powerlessness of individuals in global society is supposed to be a film for a wide European audience.





— text: **Miro Ulman** / Audiovisual Information Centre at the Slovak Film Institute —  
photo: **CinemArt SK/Lukasz Wojciechowski** —

8 — 9 distribution in 2020

Year 2020:

# Scumbag Versus Pandemic

The year 2020 started very promisingly. As of 8 March, four weeks after its premiere, the thriller **Scumbag** (Sviňa, SK/CZ, 2020, dir. Mariana Čengel Solčanská, Rudolf Biermann) became the second best-attended domestic film in the era of independence, seen by 389,358 viewers. However, due to the increased spread of COVID-19 disease and subsequent protection of the health of visitors, for the first time, all cinemas in Slovakia were forced to close on 10 March.

Until their closure, Slovak films were seen by approximately 680,000 viewers. By the end of 2020, the number increased by merely 100,000. Nevertheless, it should be noted that cinemas in Slovakia had to be closed for 116 days last year, so for almost a third of the year! In addition, after their opening, the seating capacity had to be radically reduced, which is why the premieres of almost twenty domestic films were postponed to 2021.

Let's take a look at the distribution of Slovak films from the statistical point of view. The total attendance in Slovak cinemas fell by 63.78% year-on-year, to 2,364,814 spectators. This is the lowest number since Slovakia gained independence. In particular, the attendance of domestic films dropped by 27.86%.

Apart from such declines, the pandemic caused one sharp increase. As a result of the premieres of American blockbusters being postponed to 2021, the share of domestic films attendance increased throughout Europe. Slovakia was no exception. Considering the total attendance, the share of domestic films (including non-premiere titles and minority co-productions) was 4.21% in 2018, it increased to 16.47% in the following year and roughly doubled to 32.79% in 2020.

Two works enjoyed almost 74% of the total number of 775,487 viewers of domestic films: previously mentioned **Scumbag** (395,604 viewers) and **Far Too Personal** (Príliš osobná známosť, CZ/SK, 2020, dir. Marta Ferencová – 176,080 viewers). The latter became the most successful minority co-production. Together with **And A Happy New Year** (Šťastný nový rok, SK, 2019, dir. Jakub Kroner – 78,113 viewers), which premiered on 5 December 2019, exclusively domestic films were in the top three of best-attended films in Slovak cinemas for the first time in history.

While forty-three Slovak feature films and cycles were screened in 2019, only twenty new releases took place in 2020 (nine feature films – of which seven are minority co-productions; eleven documentaries – of which three are minority co-productions) and one renewed premiere. The Association of Slovak Film Clubs has released three short Slovak animated films that were screened prior to the main

films – **SH\_T HAPPENS** (CZ/SK/FR, 2019, dir. David Štumpf, Michaela Mihályi) prior to **Corpus Christi** (PL, 2019, dir. Jan Komasa), **Poetika Anima** (SK, 2018, dir. Kriss Sagan) prior to **Babyteeth** (AU, 2019, dir. Shannon Murphy) and **Overboard!** (Cez palubu!, CZ/SK, 2019, dir. Filip Pošivač, Barbora Valecká) prior to the animated film **Hungry Bear Tales** (Mlsné medvědí příběhy, CZ, 2020 dir. Alexandra Májová, Kateřina Karhánková).

Štefan Semjan's **On the Beautiful, Blue Danube** (Na krásnom modrom Dunaji, SK, 1994), digitally restored by the Slovak Film Institute, had its renewed premiere as well.

The results of premiered films do not include the numbers related to **The Auschwitz Report** (Správa, SK/CZ/DE, 2020, dir. Peter Bebjak), which was screened for one week in a cinema in Čadca in order to meet the conditions required for the National Film Awards Slnko v sieti registration and the Academy Award submission in the category of Best International Film, nor screenings of **Cook, F\*\*k, Kill** (Žaby bez jazyka, CZ/SK, 2019, dir. Mira Fornay) and **Shadow Country** (Krajina ve stínu, CZ/SK, 2020, dir. Bohdan Sláma), which were screened only at Prague International Film Festival – Febiofest. All three films are still waiting for their distribution premiere.

The best-attended domestic documentaries were **Caught in the Net** (V sieti, CZ/SK, 2020, dir. Vít Klusák, Barbora Chalupová – 23,518 viewers), a minority film focusing on child abuse on the Internet, and **Tempos** (SK, 2020, dir. Nazarij Klujev, Roman Kelemen, Maxim Klujev – 23,491 viewers), a majority documentary about Slovak rapper Rytmus.

Slovak films were released to cinemas by seven distribution companies, the most active of which was the Association of Slovak Film Clubs with seven domestic premieres.

It is gratifying that, despite the pandemic and restrictions, the average attendance per film screening of an exclusively Slovak film or majority co-production rose from 49.30 viewers in 2019 to 55.31 viewers in 2020. Considering feature films, **Scumbag** had the highest average attendance (93.24), and **Tempos** (28.79) came out on top among documentaries. ◀

## Distribution of Premiered Slovak and Co-production Films in Slovakia in 2020 /

### 100% Slovak films and Majority Co-Productions

	SLOVAK TITLE / ENGLISH TITLE	DIRECTOR	YEAR OF PRODUCTION	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	PREMIERE DATE	NUMBER OF SCREENINGS	VISITORS	GROSS BOX OFFICE (€)	DISTRIBUTOR FEATURE	AAPC*
1.	<b>Sviňa / Scumbag</b>	Mariana Čengel Solčanská, Rudolf Biermann	2020	SK/CZ	06-02-2021	4,243	395,604	2,527,862	CinemArt SK	F 93.24
2.	<b>Tempos</b>	Nazarij Klujev, Roman Kelemen, Maxim Klujev	2020	SK	27-02-2020	816	23,491	150,015	Continental Film	D 28.79
3.	<b>Meky</b>	Šimon Šafránek	2020	SK/CZ	16-07-2020	975	10,960	61,733	Magic Box Slovakia	D 11.24
4.	<b>Hokejový sen / Ice-Hockey Dream</b>	Marek Vaňous	2020	SK	09-07-2020	847	5,318	25,113	Bontonfilm	D 6.28
5.	<b>Letní rebeli / Summer Rebels</b>	Martina Saková	2020	SK/DE	13-08-2021	625	4,416	20,704	CinemArt SK	F 7.07
6.	<b>Salto je král / Salto Is the King</b>	Pavol Barabáš	2020	SK	13-08-2020	225	3,594	13,620	ASFK	D 15.97
7.	<b>Služobníci / Servants</b>	Ivan Ostrochovský	2020	SK/RO/CZ/IE	10-12-2020	143	1,442	5,087	Filmtopia	F 10.08
8.	<b>Raj na zemi / Paradise on Earth</b>	Jaro Vojtek	2019	SK	01-10-2020	78	742	2,249	ASFK	D 9.51
9.	<b>Zlatá zem</b>	Dominik Jursa	2020	SK	25-6-2020	36	364	999	Film Expanded	D 10.11
10.	<b>Milan Sládek</b>	Martin Šulík	2020	SK	8-10-2020	51	153	566	ASFK	D 3.00
11.	<b>Králi videa / Video Kings</b>	Lukáš Bulava	2020	SK/CZ	17-12-2020	27	66	284	Continetal Film	D 2.44
<b>SUBTOTAL 100% Slovak Films and Majority Co-Productions</b>						<b>8,066</b>	<b>446,150</b>	<b>2,808,232</b>		<b>55.31</b>

### Minority Co-Productions

1.	<b>Príliš osobná známosť / Far Too Personal</b>	Marta Ferencová	2020	CZ/SK	16-01-2020	2,987	176,080	1,077,006	Continental Film	F 58.95
2.	<b>Šarlatán / Charlatan</b>	Agnieszka Holland	2020	CZ/IE/PL/SK	20-08-2020	1,375	27,671	160,617	CinemArt SK	F 20.12
3.	<b>V sieti / Caught in the Net</b>	Vít Klusák, Barbora Chalupová	2020	CZ/SK	05-03-2020	1,457	23,518	138,342	Filmtopia	D 16.14
4.	<b>Bourák/The Banger</b>	Ondřej Trojan	2020	CZ/SK	02-07-2020	859	5,130	30,570	Forum Film	D 5.97
5.	<b>FREM</b>	Viera Čákanyová	2019	CZ/SK	17-9-2020	39	689	1,129	Film Expanded	D 17.67
6.	<b>Staříci / Old-Timers</b>	Martin Dušek, Ondřej Provazník	2019	CZ/SK	10-9-2020	99	646	1,814	Filmtopia	F 6.53
7.	<b>Milost / Pardon</b>	Jan Jakub Kolski	2018	PL/CZ/SK	16-1-2020	68	517	1,521	ASFK	F 7.60
8.	<b>Modelár / Droneman</b>	Petr Zelenka	2020	CZ/SK/SI	3-12-2020	55	241	922	ASFK	F 4.38
9.	<b>Alchymická pec / Alchemical Furnace</b>	Jan Daňhel, Adam Olša	2020	SK/CZ	15-10-2020	18	66	138	ASFK	D 3.67
<b>SUBTOTAL Minority Co-Productions</b>						<b>6,957</b>	<b>234,558</b>	<b>1,412,061</b>		<b>33.72</b>
<b>TOTAL All Slovak and Co-Produced Premiered Films</b>						<b>15,023</b>	<b>680,708</b>	<b>4,220,293</b>		<b>45.31</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>17,065</b>	<b>775,487</b>	<b>4,744,271</b>		<b>45.44</b>

\* AVERAGE ATTENDANCE PER SCREENING

source: Union of Film Distributors of the Slovak Republic  
note: Films are arranged by the number of viewers



# The Limits of Inhibition

Slovak cinema has diversified and grown over the last ten years. However, the pandemic situation not only hampered the production of many films but also affected film distribution and cinema releases. After all, the subject of this review are only three Slovak feature fiction films, which had their distribution premiere in 2020: the number corresponds to the period of the greatest crisis of domestic cinema in the 1990s. As then, the films are vastly different, so it is difficult to speak about trends and tendencies.

———— Mariana Čengel Solčanská and Rudolf Biermann's *Scumbag* (Sviňa) opened a month before the introduction of anti-pandemic measures. Even during that time, the film managed to attract a record-breaking number of 389,358 viewers, thus beating previously undefeated *The Fountain for Suzanne 2* (Fontána pre Zuzanu 2, dir. Dušan Rapoš, 1993) with its 343,206 viewers. It became the second most visited Slovak film in the era of independence, behind Juraj Jakubisko's *Bathory* (2008) with 432,300 spectators coming to cinemas. *Scumbag* was released not only shortly before the cinemas closed but also before the key parliamentary elections, after which the hegemony of the political party SMER-SD began to crumble. (Red. note: With the exception of the period from 2010 to 2012, SMER-SD ruled in Slovakia from 2006 to 2020. In the 2012 elections, the political party gained 44.41 percent of the vote, thus until 2016 ruled without the need of a coalition partner.)

## Rousing *Scumbag*

———— As in the case of the director's previous film *Kidnapping* (Únos), released in cinemas shortly before the parliamentary vote on the abolition of the so-called Mečiar's amnesties, even this time the distribution premiere supported the already existing public opinion, probably benefited from it as well. The film itself is based on several media affairs which interconnect with each other, but they are also transformed into even more demonic dimensions. Politician Bobo begins to be blackmailed and protected by businessman Wagner after one wild night in 1999. Drinking only coke, Bobo happens to win the parliamentary elections in 2012, carrying out a promise to Wagner: to form a party and take control of all state structures. Bobo finds himself a young mistress, strongly resembling Mária Trošková (Red. note: a former photo model and assistant to the previous Slovak prime minister; her past mafia contacts came to the surface after the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak), and he rents a luxury apartment with her. His minister, in turn, is strikingly reminiscent of Ján Richter (Red. note: former Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family; in the controversial case of the abuse of clients in Čistý deň, a resocialisation centre for drug-addicted youth, Richter has long defended Čistý deň and its administration). The film does not only imply the minister's abuse of the client of the resocialisation centre but even her brutal murder. Actions for which there is still no clear evidence are often hyperbolised in *Scumbag*, and the accusations of real people are suggested. The murder of a journalist, who took interest in Wagner's frauds, and his fiancée is accentuated as especially frightening since the young woman's pregnancy is suggested beforehand.

———— Although the film presents fictional stories and characters, they are too conspicuously inspired by the real ones: as evidenced by similar names, physiognomies or details that have become part of the domestic media space. Unlike *Kidnapping*, which was based on Christian symbolism and respect for the faith, in this film, Čengel Solčanská happens to integrate the influential businessmen's efforts to take control of the church. All cases are interconnected, which at the same time excessively complicates the storyline and leaves the impression that the forces of good and evil →



are, in fact, personified only by a handful of people – to the citizens' utter astonishment, the only thing left is to stand by and watch how their personal assumptions about the powerful being rotten to the core are confirmed. The final song, *Slovensko moje, otčina moja* (My Slovakia, my fatherland) comes across ironic but rousing at the same time – the film is intended for viewers who have already formed an opinion on the coalition (at the time of its release still in power).

#### Evil, Beautiful Images and Intergenerational Affinity

Ivan Ostrochovský played it relatively safe with his second feature fiction film *Servants* (Služobníci), albeit in a different sense. It depicts the functioning of State Security during the normalisation period. The form, adapted to the current trends of festival films, is also relatively

of members of the Catholic Church with the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. As a consequence, the members of the underground church become the victims. The film has several ambivalent characters, whose psychology is portrayed only through inconspicuous details: at the beginning of the film, the priest rejects alcohol due to stomach problems. After being gradually blackmailed, however, he begins to drink at home; a man in charge of monitoring the Faculty of Theology, played by Romanian actor Vlad Ivanov, suffers from a worsening skin disease for which he no longer has a cure. Hypnotic singing, noises and music evoke an atmosphere of tension and horror, underlining the demonic nature of the regime that eats its own children as well. Although the episodic characters are remarkable, the film paradoxically lacks a deeper psychological portrayal of main characters, two young men

ball fight against the background of a monumental socialist-realist monument signals the limits of playfulness.

#### No Cheap Exotics, Neither Real Adventure

Unlike the films *Scumbag* and *Servants*, the third film, which premiered last year, avoids politics. In the context of contemporary Slovak cinema, Martina Saková's *Summer Rebels* (Letní rebeli) is indeed a welcome film for children. After Iveta Grófová's *Little Harbour* (Piata loď), feature films with a child-hero set in the present day have again become an almost non-existent species. This time, Jonáš from Dresden, the protagonist of the film, decides to spend the summer with his beloved grandfather in Slovakia. Fortunately, the film avoids cheap exotics, but its co-production character is revealed in speech: Czech, Slovak and German are spoken, although it is "only" a Slo-

story of *Slovak Cinematography* from 1997, has meanwhile become a cult classic in certain circles, remaining one of the films that most convincingly depict the atmosphere of the "Wild 1990s". The trio of undisguised sexist friends roam the neglected Bratislava, appearing as postmodern players and flaneurs at the same time, in anticipation of a monetary reward for masking the tracks of a thief of Andy Warhol's painting. Calling themselves actors, they bear the names of the real actors who portray them. Their actions are often impulsive, the expression affected. Like the heroes of the early films of directors Juraj Jakubisko and Elo Havetta, the characters do not have a job and avoid stable partnerships. Instead, they indulge in their own feelings of madness and playfulness. The film expresses concern about the values of the lost generation of the thirty-somethings and emphasises the thin line



Summer Rebels —

safe. Nevertheless, it is rather exceptional, probably the best local fiction work last year. The film was made in a Slovak-Romanian-Czech-Irish co-production and, through some episodic characters played by well-known Slovak directors – Martin Šulík, Robert Kirchhoff or Marek Kuboš, brings forward the intergenerational affinity of Slovak filmmakers. Ostrochovský's black-and-white camera is inspired by 1960s cinema, although the story takes place more than a decade later, in the early 1980s. Not only the camera refers to the Polish black-and-white film *Ida* – the British scriptwriter Rebecca Lenkiewicz, in this case in collaboration with Slovak scriptwriter Marek Leščák and the film's director, co-wrote the screenplay of *Servants* as well as *Ida*.

— *Servants'* theme revolves around the collaboration

who are just beginning to study at theological faculty. We learn almost nothing about their past, motivations, opinions. In addition, many visual details are on the verge of a cliché: a recurring shot of unanimously raised hands during a session of *Pacem in terris* movement, which was collaborating with the regime, appears exaggerated, a recurring shot of washing muddy shoes after the murder of a secret church's priest has too clear connotations. The cards are clearly dealt in the film, and precise work with sound clearly draws the boundaries of evil as well. Nevertheless, the film retains a degree of mystery, and some of the shots are downright beautiful: for example, a shot of a tiny courtyard of the Faculty of Theology, where students, shot from a bird's eye view, play football or hang clothes, which emphasises the limits of freedom; the scene of a winter snow-



Scumbag —

vak-German co-production. In the town of Handlová, Jonáš meets the peculiar boyish Alex, and together they experience typical summer adventures and business games as well – for example, they try to sell flowers, however, as a result, the cultivated flowerbeds of Alex's mother are destroyed. Unlike *Little Harbour*, which had art ambitions and aspirations to appeal to children and their parents, as well as to disturb them, *Summer Rebels* is more of a summer family film without serious conflict. It lacks the pace and real adventure to be able to compete with successful foreign works.

— In 2020, the renewed premiere of Štefan Semjan's digitally restored debut *On the Beautiful, Blue Danube* (Na krásnom modrom Dunaji) also took place. The film, which is described as almost amateurish in the book *His-*

between artists and criminals. At the same time, however, it manages to portray the protagonists mainly as artists of life.

— From the perspective of majority cinema, the year 2020 is relatively inhibited. *The Auschwitz Report* (Správa) by Peter Bebjak, *Cook, F\*\*k, Kill* (Žaby bez jazyka) by Mira Fornay, *The Man with Hare Ears* (Muž so zajačími ušami) by Martin Šulík, *Perinbaba: Two Realms* (Perinbaba a dva svety) by Juraj Jakubisko and also Zuzana Marianková's debut *Perfect Strangers* (Známi neznámi), all scheduled for 2020, are still waiting for distribution premieres. We must hope that some of the positive values that the past year has brought, such as the room for silence and temporary slowdown, will be reflected in the future in new, perhaps different topics and ideas. ◀





Video Kings —

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photo: Blackout productions, PubRes, promovie, HITCHHIKER Cinema, K2 Studio —

# Portraits and Retro-spections

When considering the common denominator of last year's Slovak documentary production, or co-production with Slovak representation, portraits and (not only) related intriguing and diverse retrospections come to mind.

While the year 2018 was marked by several important anniversaries, to which, of course, the attention of documentary filmmakers was also drawn, the common denominator was more challenging to find the following year. Eventually, in various forms, it manifested itself in the subject of death. The year 2020 brought a total of 11 Slovak or co-produced documentaries, released in cinemas. However, it facilitated the coronavirus-induced crisis, which impacted production, distribution and is probably to affect the situation in 2021 as well. Nevertheless, the year 2020 offered a diverse mix of documentary production, as further seen by mentions of Bruce Lee or Arnold Schwarzenegger, referenced in the article. By no means a joke, it is, in fact, an allusion to *Video Kings* (Králi videa), probably the most original Slovak-Czech documentary of the past year when considering the theme.

## Portraits of “the Czechoslovak Golden Boys”

Portraits of well-known Slovak, Czech or rather Czechoslovak (translator's note: the term indicates cultural affinity, not citizenship of the former republic) personalities, played the first fiddle in the last year's production, and the figure of speech truly applies to the protagonists. Let's start with art – music, acting, directing and fine art. The Czech and Slovak (not only art) worlds are still significantly interconnected, and Miroslav Žbirka, Milan Sládek, Patrik Vrbovský or Jan Švankmajer are so well known on both sides of our short border that labelling them on the ground of nationality loses its meaning. Furthermore, no one frets whether the films were shot by a Slovak or a Czech. All four personalities are, so to speak, “our golden boys,” although certainly not to the same degree for everyone.

Let's start with the musicians. Šimon Šafránek's *Meky* is a relatively comprehensive portrait of Miroslav Žbirka, the Czechoslovak John Lennon, whose career path remains breathtaking to this day. The current young generation will gape at his incredible music sales in the 1980s and the circumstances in the society of that time as well, the older ones will marvel at the “declassified” information about Meky's creative and financial disagreements with his multi-talented colleague Laco Lučenič. However, the director keeps the confrontations at bay, the work does not bear anything controversial eventually, after



all, the music aspires to delight us and provide a distraction from reality for a moment, and not just from the totalitarian one.

—— Patrik “Rytmus” Vrbovský already has his “own” film. *RYTMUS: A Dream from the Block* (Rytmus: Sídlišťový sen, 2015) was a smash hit. *Tempos* did not cause such sensation, although the popularity of the hip-hop scene in the Czech Republic and Slovakia has not declined significantly since then. In fact, the film was released at an unfortunate time at the end of February, a week before the cinemas closed due to the anti-pandemic measures introduced in early March. In contrast to *A Dream from the Block*, *Tempos* focuses on the origin and history of hip-hop in Slovakia, in parallel with the career of Rytmus and his rap group Kontrafakt. Thus, dramaturgically speaking, *Tempos* is clearer and strictly follows the chronology, so ultimately it resembles more the biographical documentary *Meky* than the search for Patrick’s roots in *A Dream from the Block*. It will take

film *Alchemical Furnace* (Alchymická pec) documenting his work, philosophy and private life could not look interchangeable or bear an ordinary title. The term “alchemical furnace” is a metaphor for the film company Athanor that produced the master’s films.

—— Let’s finish with hockey. No more metaphors, Laco Nagy is a real golden boy, as he boasts a gold medal from the Ice Hockey World Championships. Nevertheless, a lot of time has passed since 2002, and the film *Ice-Hockey Dream* (Hokejový sen) inevitably documents the decline. The film was originally supposed to end during the “unfortunate” 2019 World Championship in Slovakia, regardless of the result, so Marek Vaňous worked with the material, so to speak, as he went along. Thus, the fact that *Ice-Hockey Dream* does not look like a swan song of Slovak hockey is perceived as rather commendable. Following the story of a young hockey talent, it also provides Slovakia’s (still?) the most popular sport with some hope for the future. Though less

several times and finally took place just before the December lockdown and another cinemas closure in Slovakia. Maybe even the future generation will not believe our present times, unless the film about it is to be directed by Lukáš Bulava, for example.

—— Seemingly, neither *Paradise on Earth* (Raj na zemi), a portrait of journalist and photographer Andrej Bán, directed by Jaroslav Vojtek, is set in the “Stone Age.” Unhappy images from areas such as Iraq, Georgia and the territory of the former Yugoslavia are marked by recent and current war conflicts, so even the Stone Age is a flattering remark in relation to the initiators of these colossal crimes. *Paradise on Earth* tries to be both: a portrait of a personality and an account of the gloomy times. The facts about horrible events, however, outweigh the information about Andrej Bán’s personality in the end, and the document implicitly raises the question of whether our mentality is still that of a caveman.

for foreign investors, however, it does not grant them the right to behave similarly. A few activists from three East Slovak villages are fighting the oil conglomerate, trying to prevent the economic colonisation of Slovakia. At the same time, in order to be impartial, the opposite side also gets a word in edgewise, and those who are not experts in ecology and industry (though commendable, activism is not an exact science and too self-absorbed) may have a hard time keeping up. Nevertheless, the arrogance of the powerful and the deliberate violation of the law can ultimately amount to digging one’s own grave.

—— Unaffected by slogans and labels, Pavol Barabáš presents his next expedition to beautiful nature. Together with Barabáš and his team, we will abseil some of the highest waterfalls in the world. *Salto is the King* (Salto je kráľ) features author’s contemplation of the problems of society again, metaphorically also as if they were from the Stone Age – the inhabitants of Venezuela, or its visitors, surely have stories to tell. If it was not



Meky —



Ice-Hockey Dream —



The Golden Land —



Salto Is the King —

some time to see if Rytmus is to become a legend like Meky, or how many documents will be made about the #1 Slovak rapper until then.

—— Let’s continue with the performing art and film. Martin Šulík’s documentary *Milan Sládek* offers a portrait of the world-famous Slovak mime. Viewers witness a cross-section of the acting genius’ work, from his beginnings to the present, which also paints a picture of the totalitarian period, a large part of which Sládek spent in exile. Rare archival footage alternates with “talking heads,” whether it is the protagonist or his publicly known friends or other famous personalities. In this case, however, the “talking heads” do not constitute a worn-out cliché but rather an inseparable convention of this genre. On the other hand, it is one of the reasons why *Milan Sládek* seems to be the most conventionally shot documentary work of the past year. In contrast, the experimental surrealist Jan Švankmajer deviated from the conventions throughout his work, so the unique

smooth in dramaturgical sense, in this case it is not a hindrance, moreover, several Slovak documentarians struggle with similar problems when sketching.

#### Portraits of “the Stone Age and the Wild East” in the Time of the Coronavirus

—— The creators of the documentary *Video Kings* did not embark to prehistory but only to the 1980s and 1990s. The crazy era of voiceover, recording American, Asian or Italian commercial films with actors such as Bruce Lee or Arnold Schwarzenegger on videotapes and subsequently dubbing them, even over the phone, sounds now like an alternative past from the universe in which you would not wish to live, probably. For those who have experienced it, however, this fan work provokes nostalgia that is rarely exposed and felt. When retold, few people who were born after the fall of the previous regime will believe the film’s content, so it is truly a great pity that the premiere date was moved

—— Whatever the answer to this question, potential discussions about human nature can also be sparked off by the confrontation of the viewer and film’s protagonists with online sexual predators in the staged documentary *Caught in the Net* (V sieti). In the Czech Republic, the film became the most visited documentary in modern history, seen by record-breaking 179,139 viewers during the first week of screening alone. Before the cinemas closed during the first wave of the pandemic, more than 300,000 viewers came to see the film. In Slovakia, during the first few days of the screening, not even a whole week before the cinemas closed, there were more than 6,500 spectators.

—— Dominik Jursa’s *The Golden Land* (Zlatá zem) comes across as a documentary remake of some older American western dealing with the colonisation of a new land and even humorously plays around with elements of this genre. Today, after the legendary Wild West long gone, Slovakia also constitutes a new, “golden” country

enough and you would fancy finding yourself in absolute isolation, separated from the civilisation’s dead weight, then for a little over an hour you can opt for Antarctica, ergo, the experimental documentary *FREM* by Viera Čákanyová.

—— It cannot be predicted with absolute certainty what the year 2021 will bring (if we do not count the postponed premieres), although the past turbulent year with a quasi-only global theme, affecting all areas of our lives, could be giving us a hint. ◀





# No Need for Homebodies to Remain Idle

It seems that the pandemic has not yet had a major impact on Slovak animated film, in contrast to other cultural sectors. Its production and distribution naturally tie to home spaces – small, closed studios or desktop computers at home for making the films; watching movies online when distributing them: both are ever-present in the case of animation. Perhaps perceived as a drawback in normal conditions, it has become an advantage during a pandemic, thus the work continues.

— In the second half of last year, the Association of Slovak Film Clubs (ASFK) distributed films, which have been discussed in previous reviews: *SH\_T HAPPENS* (2019), screened as a supporting film for the Polish *Corpus Christi* (dir. Jan Komasa, 2019), and *Poetika Anima* (dir. Kriss Sagan, 2018) screened prior to the main film *Babyteeth* (dir. Shannon Murphy, 2019). Both works were successful at various festivals. Filip Pošivač and Barbora Valecká's *Overboard!* (Cez palubu!, 2019), a pilot for the upcoming series, completed its festival journey as well. Screened prior to Czech animated film *Hungry Bear Tales* by Alexandra Májová and Kateřina Karhánková (Mlsné medvědí příběhy, 2020), it was also distributed to cinemas by the ASFK.

## As Seen at Anča

— Last year, *SH\_T HAPPENS* by Michaela Mihályi and David Štumpf won the Slovak Award at the Fest Anča International Animation Festival: a clear favourite by virtue of its humour, original storytelling, breaking the taboos and complex systems of meanings. In the competitive section, the festival, held in the city of Žilina, showcased even more films that received their premiere on the big screen. Though less striking compared to *SH\_T HAPPENS*, they offered looser interpretative frameworks.

— Screened at Fest Anča, *Fruit of the Days* (2020) by Peter Martinka, alias Szilard Kardiak, and his colleague Sebastian Kardiak is not only produced independently but also, as expected, independent of the easy-on-the-eye aesthetics, elaborate animation or audience-friendly narration. As ever, the Kardiak duo went “punk” and created an absurdly funny film, full of vaguely motivated intertextual references.



— Marián Vredík and Jana Vredík Hirnerová participated in the competition with non-narrative chalkboard animation – a music video for the song *Pudesse eu* (2019) by *Clube de esquiara*, a post-rock band from the city of Banská Bystrica. They demonstrated a greater sense of audiovisual rhythm than Livia Suchá, who was competing with a similar video for the song *Spiders* (2019) by a lo-fi indie band *Unstrung Harp*.

— Agáta Bolaňosová, from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, competed with her older film *Crossing* (2018). Regarding animation, composition of mise-en-scène and themes, she is greatly inspired by anime and Asian culture. Her previous works and the second film, in the non-competitive section, *Chestnut Boy* (Gaštanko, 2019) explore the themes of death and the afterlife by using horror-style devices, while *Chestnut Boy*'s fine cartoon animation appears quite chilling

The documentary focuses on institutional care for socially excluded children, an issue that is still overlooked in Slovakia but represents a necessary extension of the politically preferred topic of abortions.

#### Online and on TV

— While Fest Anča managed to be held in person in Žilina during the pandemic time, the Student Film Festival Áčko took place online. This year, an animated film about nuclear tests in America *Daylight* (2020) by Michaela Hýbelová, a student at the Visual Effects Department of the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, entered the competition. Unlike the Animation Department, the Visual Effects Department mainly produces realistically oriented mise-en-scène films created with 3D animation technique.

ent from Slovak animators to children, the emphasis was put on the educational aspect. Looking back, new animated bedtime stories or a *Mimi & Lisa* (Mimi a Líza) Christmas special *Christmas Lights Mystery* (Záhada vianočného svetla, dir. Ivana Šebestová and Katarína Kerekesová, 2018) were broadcasted on RTVS on Christmas. Last year, however, Veronika Kocourková took over with a *Ka-Boom!* Christmas special. At first glance, her film *Cate Strophe Saving Christmas* (Kata Strofová a tajomstvo snehových vločiek, 2020) appears as a regular seven-minute episode of the series. The portrayed events are, however, spread across the expanded running time of 20 minutes. Although the film loses the typical dynamics of a visual and information whirlwind, its action and clip aesthetics, it becomes more accessible and understandable. In a typical Christmas film, what prevails is the Christmas atmosphere, sentimentality and pathos.

film industry. With around 1,600 followers so far, Facebook page *Čo pozerať s deťmi* (What to Watch with Children) systematically educates not only children but also parents. In a very accessible manner and with regard to raising awareness, Ivana Laučíková selects mainly short films available online, thus cultivating the audiences' taste. Thematic, technological and national criteria, as displayed on her blog, are considered. The viewers' film horizons broaden (their focus is usually narrowed down to the 3D series aesthetics and the narration of family 3D films), but they are also provided with some options of how to interpret the works. After a large-scale and more professionally conceived project *Homo Felix*, a journal and online platform founded and headed by Laučíková, she came up with yet another substantial medium to educate (not only her) audiences.

— Compared to 2019, fewer projects premiered in



Chestnut Boy —



Cate Strophe Saving Christmas —



The Kite —



Forget Me Not —

when set in juxtaposition with the story.

— The competition also showcased films from last year's distribution: *Music Box* (dir. Joanna Kozuch, 2019), *Wild Beasts* (dir. Marta Prokopová and Michal Blaško, 2019) and *Trust Me* (dir. Zlata Golecová, 2019), screened at last year's Student Film Festival Áčko. Children's films were represented by already their favourites: *Rocket* (Raketa, 2018), an episode from *The Tots* series (Drobci), and *The Flood* (Povodeň, 2019), an episode from the *Ka-Boom!* series (Tresky plesky). The latter, by Veronika Kocourková, received the Anča Slovak Award: Special Mention in the domestic competition.

— Speaking of the non-competitive Slovak section, I was most captivated by the animated documentary *Forget Me Not* (Kdo se se mnou zatočí, 2019) by Adela Križovenská, a Slovak author studying at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.

— International festival Biennial of Animation Bratislava (BAB) has divided its programme, and films were screened online or broadcasted via public television service RTVS (Radio and Television Slovakia). The new management of the festival as well as the new form of distribution significantly increased the number of spectators. Thanks to dubbing, the films became even more accessible to children's audiences. The main prize was awarded to already acclaimed film *The Kite* (Šarkan, 2019) by Slovak director Martin Smatana.

— In addition to BAB, new episodes of an animated family-friendly series about good manners *The Inklings* (Chochmesovci, dir. Róbert Šveda, 2018–2019) and a puppet series combined with animations *The Heads* (Hlavule, dir. Gejza Dezorz, 2020), presenting notable figures from Slovak history, were broadcasted on television. Similarly, regarding the annual Christmas pres-

Here, education remains the main objective, manifesting the civil aspect at Christmas time.

#### New Situation, New Ideas

— From a new situation, new ideas are usually born, and the coronavirus crisis brought several of them. In its online archive, RTVS made available Slovak bedtime stories from the last ten years (animators were surely delighted by huge traffic). Czech and Slovak artists drew pictures and animated short videos about isolation within the *Domased* (Homebody) project. Staying-at-home director Martin Šulík also pursued animation – intended only for friends, however. Last but not least, director and producer Ivana Laučíková became an online curator of publicly available animated films for children. In particular, the latter inconspicuous idea ranks among the most important events of the year in the animated

2020, although such circumstances are not unusual in the animated film industry. The production of this type of work takes a long time, thus the number of completed projects is higher in some years than in others. At first glance, the year 2020 did not have a negative effect on Slovak animated film. The total number of projects applying for financial support from the Slovak audiovisual Fund (AVF) was also comparable to 2019. In 2020, Slovak animated films constituted a significant part of domestic screenings. Due to the longer production of films, however, the effect of the changes is delayed. A fundamental and problematic change in the coming years may be, particularly, a decrease in the funds that will be distributed by the AVF, as contributions from subjects doing business in the audiovisual sector will also drop. ◀



# It Is Not Just About Making a Profit, We Want to Bring the Quality We Enjoy

Peter Bebjak and Rastó Šesták founded DNA Production 20 years ago. Today, its portfolio consists of successful crime series for television and a number of feature films. Their latest feature film *The Auschwitz Report (Správa)*, directed by Bebjak, is receiving international acclaim, and it was submitted by the members of the Slovak Film and Television Academy as the Slovak entry for the Academy Award in the category of the Best International Feature Film. In the interview, producer Rastó Šesták outlines even more of their success stories.

**The year that was very challenging (not only) for filmmakers came to an end. How has the coronavirus crisis affected DNA Production projects?**

Of course, the coronavirus crisis has not spared us either. Some projects had to be moved to 2021, and some had a forced break – we halted production during the first, spring lockdown. When the filming resumed, strict security measures had to be put in place, and they are quite expensive. It is necessary to constantly change the schedule due to the imposed measures but also for the growing number of actors or crew members who have tested positive. However, the crisis had the most serious impact on the distribution and premiere of our film *The Auschwitz Report*. The festivals were changing and getting cancelled, and we also moved the premiere date of the film several times.

**Foreign countries have already shown interest in the film. Where has it been sold so far?**

At present, it is already sold to Portugal, Spain, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Ukraine, Ireland, Japan, France, the USA, the Benelux countries, Canada and the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

**DNA Production which you founded with Peter Bebjak will celebrate its 20th anniversary. How have you grown over the years?**

This might probably be best judged by viewers of our formats and films. We strive to do everything

honestly and in terms of the highest possible quality. In this regard, our attitude and approach have remained the same. I sense that our brand – DNA Production – has made a good impression on clients thanks to such an approach to work, and we are no longer obliged to convince them of what we want to do and in what manner, which is a positive change. At first, we met with the dramaturges who promised to look at our projects and get back to us... Today, stories are easier to present. It is also easier for us to reach out to co-workers, whether they are actors, scriptwriters, directors or crew members. They all have got to know us over the years and understand what kind of cooperation they should expect at this point.

**Is there anything you agreed on at the beginning, and you stick to it to this day?**

As I have already mentioned – to do things honestly and in terms of the highest possible quality, and especially so that we enjoy it instead of just insisting on making a profit at the expense of other aspects that are important to us.

**When talking to producers, I am always interested in which part of the process they enjoy the most.**

My main interest lies in the development phase: writing storylines, scripts, castings; and then working in the cutting room. Currently, I also really enjoy working on marketing and PR projects.



**„To sum it up – a good reputation tells others that you are capable of coming up with something good or interesting.“**



If we consider fiction films, the first feature of DNA Production was Róbert Šveda's low-budget film *Demons* (Démoni), and the latest is co-produced *The Auschwitz Report*. It was probably your most challenging project so far.

———— Indeed, we aim to advance further with each film, speaking of the financial-related difficulties of the project as well.

The first major success of DNA, the television series *The Greatest Criminal Cases of Slovakia* (Najväčšie kriminálne prípady Slovenska), is associated with the names of the directors mentioned above. Gradually, you produced television series at home and in the Czech Republic. The making of a crime series has revived. Do you regard the series *Behind the Glass* (Za sklom), which also overlapped with current socio-political events, as the high point for you, so to speak?

———— *The Greatest Criminal Cases of Slovakia* have opened the door to television for us. For DNA Production, it was a groundbreaking project. Afterwards, we started making crime films in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, which persists to this day. The series *Behind the Glass* constitutes a huge milestone because TV JOJ gave us a free hand, and it enabled us to capture the topics that moved our society. At the same time, we attempted to create a crime series that speaks modern television language.

**What criteria have you set for commercial projects?**

———— So that we are not embarrassed to walk in public [smile].

**Rewarding from both audiences' and a director's perspective, how do miniseries fit into your production portfolio? What is your relationship towards them?**

———— Undoubtedly, the series are full-fledged projects for us, not just a side job or a by-product, and it enables us to be creative in the same way as with films. In addition, some television stations already allow a series whose sole ambition is not to make a high profit but to be a high-quality television work as well, providing a high-quality viewer experience in terms of topics addressed and creative approaches.

**After years of practice and experience with television, whether it is a public or private station, can you tell which projects will be turned down? What is worth bringing forward or, on the other hand, what would constitute a futile effort?**

———— Absolutely. I can recognise their specific wants and needs and tell if it makes sense to present a certain story or not.

**What about the creator's good reputation when raising funds? Do you find it of great importance?**

Certainly, success helps and paves the way. However, it does not always guarantee the financial resources you need. Acquiring exactly the right amount of money seems to be a constant struggle. To sum it up – a good reputation tells others that you are capable of coming up with something good or interesting.

**In your company, does one project make a profit for another, for instance a commercial project for one with an artistic ambition?**

———— Yes, it works this way. In DNA, we came to a decision that it makes sense to profit from something so we can invest in another project that requires our financial support.

**We said that DNA Production is a 20-year success story. What's next?**

———— Big things, I hope. We would like to start working on transnational projects that could go global. ◀



— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —  
photo: DNA Production —

# Reminding Us of the Time of Mankind's Greatest Failures

**Last year, the Slovak Film and Television Academy selected *The Auschwitz Report (Správa)* by director Peter Bebjak as the Slovak candidate for the Academy Award in the category of Best International Film. It tells the story of two Slovak Jews escaping from the Auschwitz concentration camp. By reporting on the atrocities that took place in the camp, they helped to save thousands of lives.**

Alfréd Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba (born Walter Rosenberg) were one of the few who managed to escape from the strictly guarded concentration camp in Auschwitz. In April 1944, they embarked on a long dangerous journey and walked 170 kilometres on foot to bring an important testimony that saved the lives of other Jews. The report of the genocide they wrote reached US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and affected the further development of World War II. Vrba and Wetzler planned their escape with the assistance of their fellow prisoners, and they were also helped by chance encounters they met on the difficult journey, although all of them were risking their lives. “*Rabbi Karol Sidon said: ‘What would a life be worth if one was not willing to die for it.’ And Fredy Wetzler was willing to die for the lives of thousands. I met him nine years ago on the pages of his autobiographical book. But it was only the first step. This was followed by reading, watching documentaries, visiting Auschwitz and searching for Wetzler himself,*” said scriptwriter Jozef Paštéka about the beginnings of his work on the film. The screenplay was written together with Tomáš Bombík and director Peter Bebjak.

The idea for the film *The Auschwitz Report* was born a few years ago, when the actor Ivan Šándor brought Peter Bebjak the book *What Dante Did Not See*. Alfréd Wetzler wrote it under the alias Jozef Lánik. “*The linear plot is absent, but it has the power of authentic observations, which can be written down only by a person who has gone through hell,*” Bebjak told *Film.sk*. Even in view of the growing threat of extremism and intolerance, he con-

siders it important that films such as *The Auschwitz Report* are made. “*They remind us of the time when mankind failed and allowed fanatics to come into power: who denied basic human rights, denied the right to freedom of religion, sexual orientation, freedom of thought. And I think that, unfortunately, we live in a time when similar tendencies and ideas come back into the vernacular of political parties and leaders,*” says the director. The creators realised that many films on a similar topic were made, but Wetzler’s fascinating story in the form of a feature fiction film has not yet appeared on the big screen.

Alfréd Wetzler, played by Noël Czuczor, entered the concentration camp at the age of twenty-four, and when he escaped, he was twenty-six; Rudolf Vrba, played by Peter Ondrejčka, was not even twenty at the time. British actor John Hannah will also appear in the film. Since the director wanted the characters of different nationalities to be played by actors from the respective countries, several well-known actors from the Czech Republic, Poland and Germany were cast. To name a few Slovak filmmakers who took part in the making of the film: director of photography Martin Žiaran, editor Marek Kráľovský and costume designer Katarína Štrbová Bieliková as well. The film is produced by Rastó Šesták from the company DNA Production and the co-producers are the Czech company Evolution Films, the German Ostlicht Filmproduktion, the Radio and Television Slovakia (RTVS) and the Czech Television. ♦

**The Auschwitz Report** ( SK/CZ/DE, 2020, dir. Peter Bebjak )

**TOTAL BUDGET** EUR 2,687,980 (EUR 1,125,000 – financial support from the Audiovisual Fund, EUR 370,000 including in-kind benefits – RTVS, EUR 50,000 – Creative Europe)

— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —  
photo: TITANIC —

# With One's Own (Hare) Ears

**Martin Šulík’s new film *The Man with Hare Ears (Muž so zajačími ušami)* world premiered at the Warsaw Film Festival, where it also won the award for Best Director and the Ecumenical Jury Award.**

The creators describe the story as a lyrical comedy, and it revolves around an aging writer. His young girlfriend tells him that he will become a father again, after several years. At the same time, following a suicide attempt, his best friend is placed in a mental hospital. Something changes inside him, and the man senses a chance for a new beginning, but first he must come to terms with the past and set the relationships with his ex-wife and grown-up children right. In addition, the man starts to hear not only what people are saying but also their thoughts, and his self-image begins to crumble. “*For a man from my generation, it is indeed an eye-opening film, a listing or a summary of our lifelong efforts. When a person thinks that they already know everything and cannot be surprised anymore, life takes a drastic turn. Other values or options that have been previously overlooked are discovered*” says Czech actor Miroslav Krobot who plays the lead.

“*We wanted to write a screenplay about a man who, at one point, realises that he has deluded himself about his own life. The protagonist is an artist, a successful but self-absorbed writer. Oblivious to the world around him, he is only interested in what directly affects him: in short, a narcissist,*” explains director Martin Šulík for *Film.sk*. He wrote the screenplay with Marek Leščák. “*Egoism is the diagnosis of our society. We are wrapped up in ourselves, caring solely about our own benefit. We do not see how we hurt our loved ones, we behave like immature children, constantly asking for something but unable to do anything by ourselves,*” the director clarifies in the author’s explication for the Audiovisual Fund. According to him, the story of a writer, a man with hare ears, is also a reflection on the meaning of contemporary art.

The film discusses serious topics, however, the creators tried to address them with humour. “*Speaking of the composition, the real life of the main character and the fantasy short story he wrote intertwine. At a festival in Poland,*

a journalist told me that it was a surreal film, and I had never thought of it before. I regard it as a comedy, but who knows how the audience will see it,” says Šulík. “*Comedy allows us to look at the life of the protagonist from a distance, without distorting it into a simplified scheme. We do not wish to judge him nor moralise in any way. Humour should not spring exclusively from funny remarks and anecdotes but also from an awareness of the interrelationships that the viewer will discover,*” the director explains. “*In the realistic storyline of the film, bizarre germs of a fantasy play emerge, while the dreamlike images of the second storyline are supposed to reflect the inner world of the main character and metaphorically communicate the central themes of the story,*” explains Martin Šulík. “*The game became the basic creative principle. The fantasy storyline gave us a free hand, so we could play with the image as well as with the sound,*” he elaborates.

In addition to actors, such as Miroslav Krobot, Oldřich Kaiser, Alexandra Borbély, Zuzana Kronerová, Táňa Pauhofová, Zuzana Mauréry, several Slovak filmmakers were cast in smaller roles.

Martin Šulík produced the film with Rudolf Biermann, who collaborated on most of Šulík’s feature films, such as *Tenderness* (Neha, 1991), *Everything I Like* (Všetko, čo mám rád, 1992), *The Garden* (Záhrada, 1995) or most recently *The Interpreter* (Tlmočník, 2018) starring Peter Simonischek and Jiří Menzel. “*In every film I make with Martin, our attitude towards life is reflected, it could be a recent relationship or social context. Martin’s screenplays always respond to what he connects with in real life, what interests or concerns him. That usually concerns me as well. Specifically, in The Man with Hare Ears, it is the story of a mature man,*” the producer concludes. ♦

**The Man with Hare Ears** ( SK/CZ, 2020, dir. Martin Šulík )

**TOTAL BUDGET** EUR 1,127,863 (EUR 450,000 – financial support from the Audiovisual Fund, EUR 166,667 – financial support – RTVS, EUR 17,963 – in-kind benefits – RTVS)



— text: Mária Ferencuhová —  
photo: Mayo Hirc/Arina —

# Slovak Lyricised Prose on the Big Screen

**One of the most anticipated Slovak fiction films of 2021 is the adaptation of *Piargy*: a novella by František Švantner, author of lyricised prose. Eponymous historical film is based on specific poetics, and the subjective view of one of the characters provides the realistic story with a spellbinding, fantastic or even magical atmosphere.**

— The novella *Piargy* depicts the tragedy of a settlement in a mountain valley, which gets destroyed by an avalanche, shortly before the outbreak of World War II. Natural catastrophe is preceded by emotional dramas and flare-ups that mark the interrelations of the inhabitants. Only two of them survive the disaster, young Johanka and her husband Klement. The author shares a narrative role with them, creating a complex narrative structure.

— Director Ivo Trajkov and scriptwriter Jana Skořepová chose one of three perspectives from which the literary story is told – the perspective of the survivor Johanka. By doing so, the overall narrative is lifted to a more ambiguous and magical plane. “It is a very subjective view of someone who is in a great shock and could not witness everything that was going on. Therefore, fantasy relatively complements some actualities,” director Ivo Trajkov addresses the adaptation. To some extent, the novella almost calls for genre adaptation – whether due to the unique style and language of Švantner, horror elements, love and even animalistic motifs or due to the description of a natural disaster. Nevertheless, the creators adapted the story primarily in accordance with the Slovak film tradition. “I don’t see *Piargy* as a multi-genre film. Even if certain non-traditional artistic or mythical elements occur in the film, the director adhered very clearly and firmly to Švantner’s story, which is pure in its genre. It is certainly not an art film, a horror film or a mystification of the past. The story is set in a Slovak village surrounded by mountains, and it features clear actions of the characters and the logical outcome of the story,” explains film producer Erik Panák from the company Arina. According to him, the international and Slovak audiences will experience primarily “Slovak lyricised prose, which is converted into a more ‘digest-

ible’ film form but still exceptional thanks to the unique rendition of the story linked to Slovak traditions.”

— The film adaptation corresponds to a wave of rediscovering folklore, manifested simultaneously in visual arts, design, music and literature in Slovakia for several years now. “Our folklore is a precious heritage that must be maintained for generations to come. It contains pleasure, beauty, traditions and enables identification. We chose this path, however, because it is precisely what I miss in the films. Ivo Trajkov is a Czech filmmaker, a native of North Macedonia. His inner energy and sense of visual aspect, along with Peter Bencsik’s camera, certainly did not overshadow the folklore elements of the film, quite the opposite. The magical moments are emphasised, yet the story itself does not become suppressed.” Erik Panák considers the central motif of love triangle and human passions to be universal and topical even today, although the creators adapted it in a historicising way. At the same time, the film carries a powerful message: “From my point of view, it is an appeal to the viewers about the importance of one of the most difficult internal choices or abilities of man – to live in truth, in relation to other people but especially oneself.”

— Švantner’s novella is built upon the contrast of pure and sinful, orderly and impulsive. The filmmakers conveyed the opposites also through a distinctly black and white visual.

— The preparation took two years, the same time was required by production and post-production. Attila Mokos, Lucia Klein Svoboda, Judit Bárdos, Daniel Fischer, Jana Geišbergová Olhová and Jana Kvantiková will star in the Slovak-Czech-North Macedonian co-production. ◀

***Piargy* ( SK/CZ, 2021, dir. Ivo Trajkov )**

**ESTIMATED TOTAL BUDGET** EUR 1,800,000 (EUR 1,097,510 – financial support from the Audiovisual Fund since the beginning of development in 2012)

— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —  
photo: Toxpro —

# The Old Man and the Harbour

**The hero of the feature debut *The Sailor* by documentary filmmaker Lucia Kašová is British sailor Paul Johnson.**

**His ship is stranded on an island where old sailors meet. Unlikely to set out on another journey, he dreads such thought more than the end of life drawing closer.**

— “I am a sailor myself. The community and its lifestyle attract me by their sheer nature. A sailor is a symbol of freedom, the sea is the personification of nature and its cycle from which no one escapes. The small Caribbean island, where everything stays the same, is like a film background for the image of a man who spent his whole life at sea battling the elements, and he is now coming to terms with the end,” director Lucia Kašová tells *Film.sk*, having an experience of sailing across the Atlantic Ocean and life on board herself. In the film, however, she does not set out to sea, but to the soul of a sailor, who will probably never leave his port again. Thus, it brings up topics such as old age, loneliness and dying, which are contrasted with freedom and unrestricted life at sea.

— Adventurer and sailor Paul Johnson lived his whole life at sea, and he was born on a ship. When he was drawn to the mainland for various reasons, he spent time building ships. Johnson did not feel the need to settle down with any woman who came into his life, not even after having children. Freedom was his greatest value in life, and now that he is stuck on a ship which is in the same condition as him – unfit to sail, he feels that he is losing his freedom. Consequently, the man finds solace in memories and alcohol.

— “For me, Johnson is an image of the old world of sailors from the 60’s. He carries the principles of ‘free love generation,’ and as his end is approaching, this specific generation is leaving with him,” explains the director of several short films, who also took part in several documentary series for television. Since 2017, she has been working more intensively on *The Sailor*. “It was important to ask the right question, which perhaps more people are dealing with: Where is the line of freedom or ego?” Kašová explains. According to her, the film is also about the choices we make every day when we ask ourselves if it makes sense to follow our dreams, even if it means being selfish, hurt others or remain alone.

— “In the project, I was fascinated by the topic of freedom, as well as its universality and actuality, and the fact that it can appeal to viewers of all generations. As a young person, I often wonder if I should devote more of my time to duties and career or rather to live life to the fullest and not think too much about the future. For me, the film constitutes part of searching for an answer to a question of what the price of freedom is,” film producer Nazarij Klujev, from the production company Toxpro, tells *Film.sk*. The director invited him to collaborate when she found out that the project had outgrown the originally planned student film.

— Following the story, the crew travelled to the southeastern Caribbean, to the island of Carriacou, where Johnson’s ship docked. “It was a huge challenge for me to shoot in absolutely unknown conditions, and the timing of the project was challenging as well. It required a very dynamic pace of preparation and production itself. Due to the advanced age of the protagonist, time was not on our side,” describes Klujev, adding that the shooting itself and the days spent with Johnson delighted him the most during working on the project. “It is a pleasure for me to think back to the intensive phase of project development. In almost three years, we went with it to Beldocs in Belgrade, DocsBarcelona, Meeting Point Vilnius, the Cannes Film Festival, IDFA in Amsterdam, and the participation in the dok.incubator editing workshop was very beneficial as well,” producer lists workshops and festivals.

— “Filming was very demanding both logistically and humanly. We were on the other side of the world, so it was not an option to shoot anything afterwards. At certain moments, we all reached our limits,” says Lucia Kašová retrospectively. DoPs Martin Jurčí and Maxim Klujev, sound engineers Tomáš Bauer and Igor Jedinák, editor Roman Kelemen, composer Martin Turčan and Czech dramaturge Jan Gogola Jr. were involved in making the film. ◀

***The Sailor* ( SK, 2021, dir. Lucia Kašová )**

**TOTAL BUDGET** EUR 87,425 (EUR 30,000 – financial support from the Audiovisual Fund)



— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —  
photo: BFILM —

# Story of Slovak Countryside Where Witches Still Exist

**Tereza Nvotová's second feature film *The Nightsiren* (Svetlonoc) is set in a small village surrounded by mountains.**

**The dramatic story draws on Slovak realities, myths and legends, but it also discusses generally comprehensible topics: fear of the unknown, prejudice and various forms of discrimination. Formal elements of magic realism and the horror genre are employed in the film as well.**

“The Nightsiren constitutes a film about the fear of otherness – whether one’s own or somebody else’s, which is the source of major problems in the present-day world. In our “traditional” society, difference is enough of a criteria to ostracize people, whether it is based on ethnicity, beliefs or unconventional lifestyles... Fear can always be found at the root, leading people to find solace in a common enemy,” director Tereza Nvotová says for Film.sk. According to her, *The Nightsiren* is also about searching for inner freedom and acceptance of oneself, despite being rejected by society.

“I was motivated by the experience of living in a female body and constantly encountering various social norms which indirectly imposed a role on me, one in which I naturally did not want to be. Only after I confronted these stereotypes, I was able to realise what I really wanted or not. In consequence, I was drawn to the topics of motherhood, sexuality and freedom also within the film story,” clarifies Nvotová. Her new film deals with a certain need to return to nature as well. “It is essential to understand that I am not only an independent unit but also part of a large whole and without being in harmony with it as such, I cannot be in harmony with myself. That is the reason why the story is set in the Slovak mountains,” says the director of the film, who works with elements of magic realism and draws on Slovak folklore, pagan customs, superstitions and myths.

“The main character is a thirty-year-old Charlotte, a nurse, who returns to the place from which she escaped as a child under mysterious circumstances. She is confronted not only with her childhood trauma but also with the villagers, in whom she immediately arouses suspicion,” Nvotová explains. In the story, the village community sort of constitutes a collective antagonist. Charlotte befriends Mira, an eccentric herbalist, that tries to mend Charlotte’s broken

soul, but as they try to uncover the long-buried truth, dark legends seem to come to life, leading the local villagers to accuse them of witchcraft.

In the introductory phase, scriptwriter Barbora Námerová was inspired by the anthropological study that examines the witchcraft phenomenon in Slovak villages. She was surprised that it was still current. In the film, women described as witches are in reality far from being the broom riding, children eating hags of the story-books, but are open-minded women who embrace nature and love men, sex, and themselves. Regarding the script, the creators attended the ScripTeast workshop, where they consulted with experts, such as scriptwriter Wiebke von Carolsfeld or producer Meinolf Zurhorst. The project was also successfully presented at the Crossroads Co-Production Forum in Thessaloniki, at the Frontières Finance & Packaging Forum in Karlskrona, Sweden, and at the MIA|Film Co-Production Market in Rome, where it won the Eurimages Award for best project in development. The film is produced by Peter Badač from the company BFILM and coproduced by moloko film (Czech Republic) and Silvera Productions (France).

“Most of the film takes place in mountain exteriors and half of the story at night. To some extent, such difficult conditions suited me, I am convinced that a certain degree of discomfort and overcoming oneself is important for making a good film. Certainly, I’ve learned a lot about special effects, or non-conventional visual approaches as we shot almost the entire film using a hand-held camera,” director concludes. On the film, she collaborated with American DoP Federico Cesca, and Slovak actresses Natália Germáni and Eva Mores play the lead roles. ◀

**The Nightsiren** ( SK/CZ/FR, 2021, dir. Tereza Nvotová )

**TOTAL BUDGET** EUR 1,610,000 (EUR 450,000 – financial support from the Audiovisual Fund, EUR 260,000 – Eurimages)

— text: Mária Ferenčuhová —  
photo: Guča —

# Antarctica Now Through Human Eyes

**In the spring of 2020, Viera Čákanyová's feature debut *FREM* was to open in Slovak cinemas. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the experimental documentary essay reached Slovak audiences in September. In October, the news came from the Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival: another feature documentary by this original director had won an award in one of the main competition sections – Opus bonum.**

As was the case with *FREM*, Viera Čákanyová's new documentary *White on White* (Biela na bielej) was filmed in Antarctica, where the director travelled with a group of Polish researchers. While *FREM* simulates artificial intelligence's view on the South Pole in the time of climate change, the author conceives *White on White* as her own subjective film diary from a stay in an inhospitable but beautiful environment.

“I didn't know in advance that *White on White* would happen, and for a long time I resisted the idea that I am actually making a film with myself as the main character. I prefer to stand behind the camera,” Čákanyová says about the genesis of her second feature film. The filming of the debut *FREM* was described as extremely demanding, marked by cold and bad weather, as well as cramped conditions at the base, where she resided with a cameraman and researchers. Initially perceived as a form of mental hygiene, *White on White* started to emerge during walks with a backup equipment – a camera. “Most of the film was made at the Polish base or around it at a time when *FREM* could not be shot. I was surrounded by a beautiful landscape, moreover, as a person, I experienced feelings that had no place in *FREM*. These experiences were so intense and somehow healing that I needed to record them. The spontaneous and unrestrained method of filming itself provided relief – there was no complicated concept behind it,” the director explains to Film.sk, noting that she tried not to “think like a filmmaker” while going for walks with the camera. “Basically, I needed to talk to myself, I did not make a decision that

I am going to shoot a diary. Sometimes I used the camera only as a voice recorder, the content of the statements was diverse. Although it sounds pathetic, in that white, immaculate country, one is confronted with the self, and the noise of civilisation disappears, gradually so the mental noise in one's own head too, as a result, a kind of inescapable ‘essence’ is tuned.”

In *White on White*, a human with a complex inner life replaces the cold perspective of artificial intelligence. However, Čákanyová's film is not only about individual, subjective perception. The question of the function of art and its “energy value” was incorporated into the film as well, yet the director does not provide a personal judgement, but she confronts it with artificial intelligence.

*White on White* was created in a Slovak-Czech co-production. The crew consisted of a line-up similar to *FREM*: Tomáš Klein was behind the camera next to Čákanyová again, but archival footage from China, shot by Dominik Jursa, also appears as a contrast to the ubiquitous Antarctic white emptiness. Once again, the author edited the film with Marek Šulík and co-produced the film with Nina Numankadić. It was produced under the umbrella of Slovak production company Guča and Czech company Marina Films. Like *FREM*, *White on White* will be released in cinemas by Film Expanded, which focuses on alternative forms of distribution. ◀

**White on White** ( SK/CZ, 2020, dir. Viera Čákanyová )

**TOTAL BUDGET** EUR 41,000 (EUR 21,000 – financial support from the Audiovisual Fund)



— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —  
photo: BFILM —

# Only Sea of Sand and Tears Remain

**Director, visual artist and animator Joanna Kożuch made a short animated documentary *Once There Was a Sea...* (*Bolo raz jedno more...*). It offers the author's view of one of the world's greatest ecological catastrophes – the drying up of the Aral Sea. The film was created in a Polish and Slovak co-production.**

Joanna Kożuch made her debut in 2014 with *Fongopolis*, the film won the category of Best Animated Film at the National Film Awards Slnko v sieti. As her other works, it is a proof that the author can combine different animation techniques, but she also bears the message in mind. Her new film *Once There Was a Sea...* is a collage of cartoon animation and actual photographed and filmed material, being both visual and sound.

“The idea for the film *Once There Was a Sea...* occurred to me during my train trips to the Central Asian region, as I first stopped in the wonderful, surreal city of Muynak – a port without the sea,” says director Joanna Kożuch in the author's explication for the Audiovisual Fund. “I was standing on a high cliff and watching the dead, desert terrain and the wrecks of huge ships in the sand, imagining a busy port that was situated at the same spot just a few years ago,” Kożuch adds, and she would like to evoke the feeling of responsibility that we have for the world we are living in and contribute to the social debate about the harmfulness of man's artificial interventions in nature and the importance of wise ecological measures as well.

The Aral Sea, being more of a lake, was once the fourth largest in the world. After cotton plantations with a system of irrigation canals were built in close proximity, the surrounding rivers, which flow into it, gradually began to lose strength. The lake began to dry up. And it is still drying out. Only the graveyard of ships at its bottom and the memories of the elderly inhabitants, whose lives were marked by this tragedy, refer to the once busy port. The film brings a mosaic of stories of real people from the Uzbek city, a former port, with whom the director spent a lot of time – conducting interviews, photographing, filming, making sketches, getting to know them while writing a diary as well. “I want to believe that

their stories will help us make better decisions in the future,” she clarifies.

“All the characters that appear in the film were created based on the authentic people I met. However, I changed their names and appearance (I drew them new, different faces). For the purposes of the script, I also changed some events from the lives of my protagonists and the circumstances of our meetings, I combined the situations that happened during my first and second visit to Muynak several times. In this manner, I want to protect the privacy of the people I have spoken to. Therefore, I decided that all the characters in the film will be drawn,” director elaborates in the explication and adds that “the animation will also help to depict a world that no longer really exists, only in the dreams, memories and desires of the people of Muynak.”

Scriptwriter Katarína Moláková and dramaturges Phil Parker and Barbora Budinská also collaborated on the film, at a later stage, editor Marek Šulík, master musician Dušan Kozák and composer Martin Hasák put their shoulder to the wheel. The Slovak producer of the film is Peter Badač from the company BFILM, and he already collaborated with the director on her film *39 Weeks, 6 Days*. Other co-producers of *Once There Was a Sea...* are the Slovak company plackartnyj, Radio and Television Slovakia, the Polish company Anima-Pol and the Polish Public Television. The filmmakers consulted and presented the project on forums, such as Pitching du Réel in Nyon, Cartoon 360 in Lille or Euro Connection in Clermont-Ferrand.

An interactive educational project is also being created to support the film and its topic, and its outcomes will be added to [oncetherewasasea.com](http://oncetherewasasea.com). ◀

**Once There Was a Sea...** ( SK/PL, 2021, dir. Joanna Kożuch )

**TOTAL BUDGET** EUR 210,000 (EUR 82,000 – financial support from the Audiovisual Fund, EUR 10,000 – RTVS)

— text: Mária Ferenčuhová —  
photo: Punkchart films —

# Fiction Documentary About Imprisoned Mothers

**After co-produced feature documentary *BATastories* (2019), several television films and episodes of documentary series, director Peter Kerekes came up with a new project for cinemas – *Censor* (*Cenzorka*). The spectators are introduced to a women's prison in Odessa, Ukraine, where the female prisoners take care of their children who were born during their sentence.**

Originally, the filmmakers did not intend to focus on imprisoned mothers. At the beginning of the project, the topic was set to be censorship, however, not necessarily prison censorship. “When in transit, DoP Martin Kollar once spent about five hours at Abu Dhabi Airport,” director Peter Kerekes addresses the genesis of his film. “He was sitting in a café, waiting and browsing through fashion magazines, just like all men when they are on their own at the airport. It might have been Elle or Marie Claire. And he noticed that someone had blacked out the models' décolletages, exposed legs and shoulders with a marker. All magazines were likewise manually censored. He showed it to Ivan Ostrochovský and me. We immediately realised that it would make a great film. About censors, whose job is to scribble on exposed women's breasts eight hours a day. They take children to school and kindergarten, grab a thousand issues of fashion magazines and blacken them.”

It has been a long way from the idea to take a closer look at censors, broadly speaking, to the film about imprisoned mothers. The creators first considered censors in Nigeria's Nollywood or officials giving consent to musicians to perform in the Paris Métro. “Then Ivan thought of censors of letters in prison. We started with extensive inspections in Ukraine since it is closest to us, and filming in their prisons is not preceded by such complex bureaucracy as in the EU,” explains Peter Kerekes for *Film.sk*. The creators visited more than ten prisons, both men's and women's. “The inspections were very thorough. We talked to censors, guards, convicts, released. Finally, in Odessa, we met Irina Alexandrovna, one of the main protagonists of our film. A woman who reads love letters on a daily basis while being single. The documentary turned into a fiction film. One short story remained out of four. And letters and their censorship eventually

gave way to the subject of motherhood. In fact, Irina works in a prison where mothers with children are placed. After the age of three, children have to leave the prison,” says Kerekes.

Speaking of the shooting technique and film narration, *Censor* is a hybrid film, and it creatively uses the potential of documentary and fictional narration. It was the label “fiction film” that allowed the creators to dive deeper and paint the subject in vivid colours: “When we researched for the film regarded as ‘a documentary,’ the prisoners and staff were careful with their statements. As soon as we started making a fiction film, they became very open and shared absurd stories from prison life,” says the director. Despite its hybrid form, *Censor* tries to show the prison world and its inhabitants as authentically as possible. “The script was based on the story of a woman who caught her husband cheating and killed his mistress. She went to prison while pregnant, gave birth and took care of her child, which was later placed in an orphanage. Originally, she was supposed to play herself, but we changed it at the last minute. She happened to be a great consultant for us, guarding the authenticity of every manifestation of prison life. Almost all the characters in the film play themselves, there are only few professional actors,” explains the director.

Peter Kerekes wrote the screenplay for the film together with Ivan Ostrochovský, who is not only the producer of the film but also the author of the story. Kerekes and Ostrochovský's long-term colleague Martin Kollar was behind the camera, and dramaturge Marek Leščák also joined the ranks of authors. The film was created in a Slovak-Czech-Ukrainian co-production. ◀

**Censor** ( SK/CZ/UA, 2021, dir. Peter Kerekes )

**TOTAL BUDGET** EUR 954,000 (EUR 300,000 – financial support from the Audiovisual Fund, EUR 150,569 – RTVS, EUR 140,000 – Eurimages)





# What are they up to?

## Marina Andree Škop

[ director, producer ]

I have the privilege to work on several inspiring projects for kids of which I would single out two that I am currently working on intensively. As a director, I am working on a short animated film for kids **Blue Bear** (Modrý maco), which is supported by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre and the Slovak Audiovisual Fund. It is a story that teaches kids that even their parents can make mistakes. With Slovak director Vanda Raýmanová, I am co-directing a feature film for kids **The Spacehead** (Hlavička). The project development is supported by the Audiovisual Fund, the MEDIA sub-programme and the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, and we are planning to shoot it in 2022. This adventure comedy is written by Slovak author Juraj Raýman, and it reveals a topic of autism to the young audience in a very original way.

## Peter Badač

[ producer ]

We are currently finishing **The Nightsiren** (Svetlonoc), a new film by Tereza Nvotová, which we managed to shoot last year during a break between two waves of the pan-

demic. At the same time, we are getting ready to release two minority co-productions – Michaela Pavlátová’s first animated feature **My Sunny Maad** (Moje slnko Maad) and Petr Oukropec’s new family film **Martin and the Forest Secret** (Martin a tajomstvo lesa), which will have its world premiere at the BUFF festival in Malmö. We remain loyal to animated films, a new short film by Joanna Kožuch **Once There Was a Sea...** (Bolo raz jedno more...) about the Aral Sea will be released in 2021. For us, this year will be very fruitful. Hopefully, cinemas will open soon so that viewers can see the results of our work.

## Michal Blaško

[ director, scriptwriter ]

By the time this issue of **Film.sk** is published, the shooting of my debut feature film **Victim** (Obet’) should be in full swing. Now, at the beginning of February, the last preparatory work, rehearsals and recce are under way. In addition, with editor Anna Ryndová, we are finishing the editing of a three-part miniseries, which was shot for Czech Television and based on a screenplay by Štěpán Hulík. Czech Television should broadcast the miniseries in the autumn. Meanwhile, if I have time, I am working on a screenplay for my upcoming feature film with the working title **Wave** (Vlna).

## Tomáš Krupa

[ director, scriptwriter, producer ]

I am working on the new feature documentary **We Have to Survive** (Musíme prežiť) because I consider the issue of climate change to be urgent. The coronavirus crisis is just a lighter version of the climate crisis. Heat, drought, desertification and floods are the four dominant signs of global climate change, the world has four cardinal directions, so we decided to present four stories in the film, pointing to each symptom and direction. We follow personal stories of people whose process of adapting to new, much more difficult conditions is at the heart of the film’s narration. We are currently putting together an international co-production, supported by the MEDIA sub-programme and the Audiovisual Fund regarding the development. We are looking forward to Radio and Television Slovakia being the first TV partner.

## Juraj Lehotský

[ director, scriptwriter, producer ]

We finished shooting **Applause** (Potlesk), and what a joy it was in strange and difficult times. Devoted to the finalisation of the film these days, I am looking forward to recording music in Prague with the orchestra and film composer Aleš Březina. Recently, I attended the screening of our film at the Les Arcs Film Festival, this time online, and I have been going for walks along the Danube with my family. I am also looking forward to more distant trips, hopefully soon, ones more casual and without the necessary documentation.

## Katarína Krnáčová

[ producer ]

In the midst of this sci-fi world we live in, I am tirelessly looking for ways to move forward and do the impossible. Last summer, we released a Slovak-German co-production **Summer Rebels** (Letní rebeli) intended for the children audience. Under strict safety measures, in autumn, we shot a new children 4-side-co-production **How I Learned to Fly** (Ako som sa naučila lietať) in Croatia, currently working on visual effects in Slovakia. I am in postproduction of a road movie **Stand Up** and Václav Kadrnka’s **Saving One Who Was Dead** (Správa o záchrane mŕtveho). We are also prepping for **Flood** (Potopa), a debut film of Martin Gonda whose graduation film premiered at the Cinéfondation. Moreover, as a huge fan of high-end drama, I am thrilled to be developing a TV series with the Radio and Television Slovakia.

## Michaela Mihályi (M) and David Štumpf (D)

[ directors, animators ]

D is currently finishing with the post-production of Diana Cam Van Nguyen’s short animated film with the working title **What We Wrote** after working on it for the past few months. At the same time, he is starting to work on animation for the new Marvel series, which is still secret, so it will be fun in the coming months! M is trying to complete her animated documentary **Torn** about adolescence, breasts and Britney Spears. In the coming months, she will begin to work on a new animated documentary about menstruation, and she is looking forward to it! M & D also have a new joint project – Berta, a dog that is being taught tricks!

## Martin Smatana

[ director, animator ]

Since last year, I have been working as director of the Slovak part of the co-production full-length puppet film **Of Unwanted Things and People** (O nepotrebných veciach a ľuďoch), which we are starting to shoot in the spring. I recently finished a development lab Animation Sans Frontières, where I was developing my new animated film for children **Hello Summer** (Ahoj Leto). These days, I am preparing a collaboration with the Animation Workshop in Denmark, where production will be held, thanks to the award from the MIFA pitch at the Annecy festival 2020. Sometimes, I attend online film festivals with my graduation puppet film **The Kite** (Šarkan). I also like to do online animation workshops for children these days.

## Ivan Ostrochovský

[ director, producer ]

Peter Kerekes and I are finishing a film shot in a women’s prison in Ukraine. Having a great sales agent Film Boutique on our side, we hope for a successful festival tour. Alongside Marek Leščák, I am preparing for work on **Prameň**. The film deals with the functioning of abortion committees, and they are perhaps the saddest example of the communist regime’s intervention in women’s privacy in Czechoslovakia. Simultaneously, I am shooting a documentary about Igor Luther, the DoP of the Oscar-winning **Tin Drum** and Andrzej Wajda’s **Danton**, and another one about Alain Robbe-Grillet is under way. I am also writing a spy fiction film with Martin Šmok, and it is based on an event from 1973: Syrian terrorists hijacking a train with Jewish refugees from Bratislava to Austria. ◀



— text: Matúš Kvasnička —

photo: archive of the SFI/Václav Polák, Miro Nôta —

# A Promise of Eastern Exotica Is Not Enough

Martin Hollý's *Night Riders* (Noční jazdci, 1981) has become already the fourth Slovak classic film that world premiered at one of the most prestigious classic film festivals – Lumière Lyon. Every year since 2017, the festival has selected one of the recently digitally restored Slovak films. The selection by such a film festival is a recognition of excellent work done by Digital Audiovision Department of Slovak Film Institute, which is represented at international fora by Rastislav Steranka, director of the National Cinematographic Centre of the Slovak Film Institute.

**In 2021, Martin Hollý would be 90 years old. Was it one of the reasons why you decided to have *Night Riders* digitally restored and submitted to Lumière Lyon?**

I did not propose *Night Riders* primarily because of the anniversary. The most crucial factor when picking a film is the film itself. Martin Hollý was a great storyteller, and via small stories of common people he could tell universal stories. If it were up to me, I would submit all his films to Lyon. *Night Riders* was my first pick and, at the same time, it was a kind of litmus test of how the festival selection committee and then, if selected, the festival audience will react to a film which bears traces of western, was made in socialist Czechoslovakia in the 1980s and does not star Gojko Mitić – so not your typical eastern. The film was selected and screened within a programme section named *Treasures and Curiosities*. That is the only section where an institution, such as the Slovak Film Institute, can submit its films. In 2019, the festival introduced the Lumière Classics label with an intention to support a selection of restored films. The Lumière Classics label is composed of *French and International films*, *Treasures and Curiosities* and a very narrow selection of films in other programme sections. It is a good feeling to know that Martin Hollý's *Night Riders* bears the same label as masterpieces of world cinema such as *The Brood* by David Cronenberg.

**What are the criteria when selecting directors and their films for Lumière Lyon?**

We do our best to select directors and films that are not known abroad, yet we are convinced that they deserve attention. In the past, classic Slovak cinema was known internationally almost for the films by two great Slovak filmmakers: Dušan Hanák and Juraj Jakubisko. Directors like Paľo Bielik, Štefan Uher, Peter Solan, Elo Havetta, Stanislav Barabáš or Viktor Kubal were still virtually unknown. However, their films do have potential to be rediscovered, to attract international audiences. Some of them have already proven that. Viktor Kubal's digitally restored *The Bloody Lady* (Krvavá pani, 1980) travelled from Lyon to the Sitges Film Festival, one of the most prestigious fantasy film festivals in the world. Peter Solan's *The Barnabáš Kos Case* (Prípád Barnabáš Kos, 1964) had an amazing world tour – Lumière Lyon, Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, CineFan Hongkong, Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. When the world stopped due to the pandemic in the beginning of 2020, the travels of comrade Kos stopped as well – already arranged and scheduled screenings at the Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley or Budapest Classics Film Marathon were thus postponed indefinitely. In fact, as we speak, the DCP of the film is still being stored in the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley.

**Are there any limitations when selecting films for Lyon?**

Almost all the films which I would submit to Lyon instantly, Slovak Film Institute already digitally

restored a couple of years ago, thus they do not meet the condition of being a recent restoration. It is also more difficult to pick a “new” film for restoration, a film which still has potential to cross boundaries, to be selected and attract audiences abroad. It always has to be a “distinct” film. Western audiences perceive classic Slovak cinema as some kind of eastern exotica, which is, for the time being, (still) fresh: it can attract attention and entertain. However, in a long run, a promise of eastern exotica is not enough. Ideally, we would like to offer various kinds of films, present various genres in order to keep international audiences interested. The films have to be of certain artistic value and deal with universal topics which cross cultural boundaries. They should not be soaked in the political ideology of the times when they were made. Peter Solan's *The Barnabáš Kos Case* is a perfect example. When I saw the film with the audience in Lyon, their reactions were very positive. Although the audience did not laugh at scenes which would make Slovak audience laugh, their reactions were spontaneous. Festival audience in Lyon is very demanding, in the positive sense of the word, spoiled by world-famous film classics usually presented there. However, it can appreciate small films which were virtually non-existent for them before they had a chance to see them at the festival. And then, their reactions are sincere – direct satisfaction for excellent work carried out by colleagues in the Digital Audiovision Department led by Peter Csordás.

**The whole process (ideally) ends with a world premiere in Lyon, but where does it start?**

The process of selection and preparation of a film for its digital restoration here in the Slovak Film Institute starts more than a year before the deadline for film submission, which is usually in the beginning of June. One of the conditions for submitting the film is the deadline for the DCP delivery of a submitted film, which is usually in the middle of September. That is the basic timeline we have to stick to. Digital restoration itself is always preceded by a meeting with Marián Hausner, director of the National Film Archive of the Slovak Film Institute. There we discuss proposed film which we could possibly digitally restore “for Lyon.” Another condition for submitting film is, as I have mentioned before, a recent restoration. That is why we always pick one “crucial” film to digitally restore, with the deadline for submission in mind. However, it does not automatically mean that the film will be selected. It is up to the selection committee of the festival. The head of the selection committee and the festival itself is Thierry Frémaux, who founded the festival in 2012. If our film is selected, it is always a great pleasure and even greater honour. We began submitting our digitally restored films to Lyon in 2017, and it seems that, together with Marián Hausner, we have chosen the films well since all of them have so far been world premiered in Lyon.



**Concerning the festival atmosphere, is there any difference between Lumière Lyon and “regular” film festivals?**

Classic film festivals have a different atmosphere compared to festivals of contemporary cinema. They are not so business-oriented, not so hectic. Everything takes place in a relaxed atmosphere. The heart of the festival in Lyon is the Institut Lumière, situated in the Lumière Villa. However, the festival is spread around the city – in single-screen cinemas, miniplexes and multiplexes. Based on my own experience, the festival cinemas are always full. The same goes for the Comédie Odéon theatre in the city centre, which hosts masterclasses open for the festival audience. If I mention that Frances McDormand, Jane Fonda, the Dardenne brothers, Viggo Mortensen, Francis Ford Coppola, Bong Joon-ho, Alfonso Cuarón, Wong Kar-wai, William Friedkin or Guillermo del Toro were the festival guests in the past, you can picture the scope of the festival yourself, and how attractive it is not only for film professionals.

**„Classic film festivals have a different atmosphere compared to festivals of contemporary cinema.”**

**In your opinion, which Slovak film had the best response in Lyon?**

I had an amazing feeling after each and every screening, whether it was *The Bloody Lady*, *The Barnabáš Kos Case* or *Wild Lilies*. It is essential that the festival demands every screening to be introduced by the film representative who “tunes its audience in” – briefly explains the cultural, social and historical context of the presented film. I did not travel to Lyon with *Night Riders* in 2020, so I don’t know reactions of the audience to the film. But what is extraordinary when speaking about Lumière Lyon is the fact that it does not differentiate between big and small films. My first visit to Lyon was in 2017 with *The Bloody Lady*. I was surprised when, right after I introduced the film, I was asked to do a short interview. And then, when you see Slovak Film Institute being presented with Anna Karina or William Friedkin in the same gallery on the festival website, it is a strange but pleasant feeling that our work is being acknowledged at such prestigious classic film fora, and that its results are in a very, very good company. ◀



— text: Barbra Námerová / scriptwriter —  
foto: archive of the SFI/Vladimír Vavrek —

# The Illusion of Coincidence Has to Be Well Thought Out

**Czech scriptwriter Meir Lubor Dohnal worked together with Slovak director Elo Havetta since they were students. Their collaboration culminated with Havetta’s debut *Celebration in the Botanical Garden (Slávnosť v botanickej záhrade, 1969)*. The SFI released the film on a double DVD together with Havetta’s second film *Wild Lilies (Ľalie poľné, 1972)*. In addition, they were released as the Elo Havetta Collection on Blu-ray, including special bonus materials.**

**Do you see any connection between the films you made at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and *Celebration in the Botanical Garden*?**

With their poetics and relation to reality, they do not really differ very much from *Celebration in the Botanical Garden*. We wanted to tell the story in a way that it is not restricted by chronology, so that it does not slavishly stick to causality. The film can be put together from fragments that tell the story but are not immi- nently bound as regards of cause and effect. We applied a method that Havetta and I called “from the suitcase.” You sit in the editing room, you don’t know exactly which shot is going to follow, so you reach into the suitcase, you pull something out and edit it into the film. At least that is the impression it’s intended to make. But it has to be well thought out, and there have to be internal links so that the gradation possesses the right dynamics.

**The feeling of spontaneity which impresses viewers in *Celebration in the Botanical Garden* creates the illusion that the entire film was improvised. As the script- writer, can you elaborate on that?**

That sense of improvisation or working with it is justified. Havetta often worked with non-actors, and you can never quite prescribe dialogues to them, but thanks to their minimalism, we used almost all of my dialogues. Non-actor has certain limitations but also certain talents, something emanating naturally from them. You need to have a sense of it on the set and to give it a chance. As regards what happened on the set, Havetta’s films certainly contain improvisation, but it never goes as far as to affect the way the film is com- posed. If you want to work with the illusion of coinci- dence, it has to be really well thought out. Moreover, those films are, so to speak, choreographies. They almost

incorporate a dance rhythm, which is not a result of editing, though, since it was already in the script.

**Throughout the 1980s, when you emigrated, you met several significant filmmakers. What was this period of filmmaking like for you?**

I have dual citizenship and even two different names. My name is Meir Lubor Dohnal on my German ID card, and only Lubor Dohnal on the Czech one, while in the opening and closing credits of German films I am named only as Meir Dohnal. This does lead to a certain confusion in my filmography. I was lucky to obtain my first screenwriting contract almost as soon as I arrived in Germany. It was *Do Not Be Afraid, Jacob!* (Fürchte dich nicht, Jakob!) by director Radu Gabrea.

**A documentary about Marlene Dietrich was another important collaboration of yours.**

*Marlene*. It was a strange sort of collaboration with Maximilian Schell. I wrote the script, but it could never have been realised in that form. By that time, Marlene was already in a wheelchair and she did not want to spoil her image as a diva. But Schell managed to record an amazing interview with her that she re- fused to give to other very famous filmmakers. He had a terrific charisma as an actor, and he was able to capti- vate her with it, so on Marlene’s side there was also some sort of peculiar provocative interest. It ended with me putting the film together again in the editing room. It was actually a retroactive creation of the script. We built the film from archive materials based on this inter- view in order to make it as spectacular as the portrait of this enigmatic character. It was an extraordinary job, but Maximilian Schell was extraordinary himself. ◀



— text: Matúš Kvasnička —  
photo: archive of the SFI/Vladimír Vavrek (2) —

# Elo Havetta — Destined for the Miracle of Cinematography

**“Elo was one of our first real film poets, and we do not have too many of them. He was one of the first poets who were not allowed to evolve in the Slovak film environment,” writer Vincent Šikula said about Elo Havetta years ago. One of the most distinctive Slovak filmmakers also cast Šikula in his debut *Celebration in the Botanical Garden* (Slávnosť v botanickej záhrade, 1969) and shot his second film *Wild Lilies* (Ľalie poľné, 1972) based on Šikula’s screenplay.**

Both films were released on DVD by the Slovak Film Institute. In addition, they were released as the *Elo Havetta Collection* on Blu-ray, including special bonus materials. The collection offers director’s feature films in a version that is the result of a thorough process of restoration and colour corrections. DoP Dodo Šimončík was overseeing that they stay true to the original. In 1989, in the magazine *Film a doba*, film historian Václav Macek likened the significance of Havetta’s work to the work of Ludovít Fulla and Mikuláš Galanda and what they meant for Slovak fine art and its contact with the outside world in the 1930s. According to Macek, Havetta and his peers in the late 1960s overcame the regionality of Slovak film and brought it closer to the trends of world cinema of that time.

“Author’s progress and bold interpretation of reality broached the previously circumvented (taboo, undesirable) topics related to sexuality,” writes film historian Eva Filová in the book *Eros, sexus, gender v slovenskom filme* (Eros, Sexus, Gender in Slovak Film). Filová also argues against some of the previous views on Havetta’s debut. The author sees the weakness in their mechanical and pragmatic interpretation of irrational events and motifs in the

film. “Do we have to seek the ‘incontrovertible’ logic behind everything? What if the essence hides behind chance, what if it is embedded in the manifestations of the subconsciousness?” Filová asks. Meir Lubor Dohnal, who wrote the screenplay for *Celebration in the Botanical Garden*, spoke to *Film.sk* about how the film was made. Allegedly, he and Havetta did not want chronology and causality to limit the latitude of their film story. For them, what was more important than the cause and effect were the intense moments – the core of the individual sequences. “The author does not waste time explaining and clarifying the connections or context, breaking his back so that everything fits perfectly,” Dohnal told *Film.sk*.

*Celebration in the Botanical Garden* is a colourful mosaic of stories that display the need for a miracle in human life. In *Celebration of a Lonely Palm* (Slávnosť osamelej palmy, 2005), a documentary about Havetta that is included as a special bonus material in the collection, Meir Lubor Dohnal says: “That is also a part of Havetta – a man who sees miracles in things but cannot admit it because no one understands him. In fact, he is destined for the miracle of Cinematography, just to show them: You idiots, it is a miracle, what a beauty!”

According to director Eduard Grečner, whose text about Havetta can be found in the booklet of the Blu-ray collection, with some exaggeration, it can be argued that *Celebration in the Botanical Garden* “is a crazy reflection of its time, an emotional protest, an explosion of spontaneous merriment in a time constricted by prohibitions and derailed by orders.” Havetta’s work and destiny were also significantly influenced in this manner. Elo Havetta died at the age of 36 – of normalisation, as dramaturge Albert Marenčin used to say.

Apart from *Celebration in the Botanical Garden*, he could make only another feature film, *Wild Lilies*. His protagonists, war retirees, are looking for a home and their place in society. They equally long to settle down and to roam freely like nomads. In Peter Mihálik’s text in the daily *Práca*, at the time of the premiere, Havetta stated that there are many films about the horrors of war. Therefore, *Wild Lilies* was intended to provide a different perspective and show the psychological consequences of war, which, according to him, are worse than the physical ones. Supposedly, the film is based on the principle of multi-voice composition, it develops individual motifs so that in the end they merge into

a symphony. Havetta was convinced that “the screenplay realised in a finished film will have a wide audience reach. Therefore, I strive for an audience-oriented film, in the best sense of the word.” However, during his lifetime, he did not manage to achieve what he was describing. Just like *Celebration in the Botanical Garden*, the film *Wild Lilies* ended up being banned. ◀





— text: Matúš Kvasnička —  
photo: archive of the SFI/Dušan Dukát —

# The World Discovers a Hidden Gem — Šulík's *Tenderness*

**“Month after month, you can always rely on the team at Second Run to unearth a little-seen gem from corners of the globe underrepresented on the home video market,” so begins a brief review of the current Blu-ray release of Martin Šulík's *Tenderness* (Neha, 1991) on the website of the British Film Institute – BFI.org. After years, Šulík's film reaches foreign audiences digitally restored.**

— “It's a striking debut; formally and structurally rigorous, and elliptically designed to keep its central trio at arm's length, foregrounding their alienation and rendering the film's title cruelly ironic,” writes film critic Matthew Thrift, describing Šulík's film as psychosexual drama with several features of the early works of Roman Polanski. An expert in Slovak and Czech cinema,

British film critic and historian Peter Hames also mentions Polanski in an extensive text in a 20-page booklet of the British Blu-ray edition. According to him, however, the analysis of intimate male-female relationships conducted by the screenwriting duo Martin Šulík and Ondrej Šulaj resembles more Ingmar Bergman's films, especially *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), despite having

certain commonalities with Polanski *Knife in the Water* (1962) or Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997). According to Hames, the parallel is emphasised by the performances of György Cserhalmi and Maria Pakulnis, portraying Viktor and Mária. Twenty-year-old Simon (Gejza Benkő) becomes drawn into their relationship. After a conflict with his father, he leaves his parents' house, becomes part of a peculiar ménage à trois and only gradually reveals the secrets of the older couple.

— Mark Cunliffe in his review at thegeekshow.co.uk titled *Tenderness: The Past is a Foreign Country* in Martin Šulík's (1991) *Debut* states that the film “deploys” a relatively standard, universal film genre of a coming-of-age

of *Tenderness* offers the aforementioned booklet, Šulík's short film *Hooray* (1989) and the new documentary *On Tenderness* (2020) directed by Michal Michalovič. Produced by the Slovak Film Institute, it sheds light on the historical context. *Sight & Sound* magazine highlights the importance of the context as well. “Without any context, it's easy to interpret Martin Šulík's feature debut merely as a Pinteresque psychodrama existing in its own circumscribed universe.” The review elaborates that when released, the film was greeted with bafflement because of the lack of any temporal anchor points. However, it was a reaction to the literalism in Slovak films: to reveal everything about the protagonists, and as soon as possible. *Sight & Sound*



story as a metaphor for Slovakia waking up to see the light after a period of communist oppression. “Using the backdrop of regime change and the anxiety of an uncertain future, the film analyses the basic values, sense of morality and the complexity of human relationships at the dawn of a new age that is still intrinsically affected by the corruption of what has gone before,” writes Cunliffe.

— The commentary at dvdbeaver.com praises, in addition to the film itself, the quality of the digital restoration under the supervision of the Slovak Film Institute, which was also approved by the director, and special bonus materials. Besides the film, the Blu-ray release

concludes that the disc confirms the good reputation of the Slovak Film Institute regarding film restoration.

— “Already established for bringing key films from the wealth of Czechoslovak cinema to a much wider range of viewers, Second Run throws a bit of a curve ball with *Tenderness*, originally entitled *Neha*,” claims mondo-digital.com. “The title might imply a touching family drama or romance, but that's definitely not what you get here.” The author of the text describes the film as an elusive and fascinating allegory, as well as a notable feature debut of a director who makes important Slovak films on a regular basis. ◀



— text: Matúš Kvasnička —  
photo: Národní filmový archiv Praha —

# The Tragedy of Millions Through Two Fates

When the prominent British theatre critic Kenneth Tynan visited socialist Prague in the 1960s, he also showed interest in new films. **The Shop on Main Street (Obchod na korze, 1965)** by the Slovak-Czech directing duo **Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos** was recommended to him. Later, in a review for **The New Yorker**, he deemed the film unique. However, it was Tynan's extensive review for the **British Observer**, written earlier, that indirectly opened the door to the world for **The Shop on Main Street**.

The story is mentioned by Elmar Klos Jr. in one of the bonus interviews prepared by the Slovak Film Institute for the new edition of *The Shop on Main Street* released on DVD and Blu-ray. “It was a coincidence that *The Shop on Main Street* competed for an Oscar,” elaborates dubbing director Klos. “In the spring of 1966, a Czechoslovak film festival was to take place in London. The selection of films was in the hands of a certain Mr. Baker, editor-in-chief of *Films and Filming* magazine. He selected various films, but *The Shop on Main Street* was not among them,” recalls film historian Václav Macek in his monograph on Ján Kadár. The film, which later won the first Oscar for Czechoslovakia, could go completely unacknowledged without Tynan and his article. Fortunately, Baker was convinced by an emotive review of “the most moving film about anti-Semitism ever made,” one to make you shed tears even after leaving the cinema. *The Shop on Main Street* was added to the selection in London, which was the gateway to the West. Only afterwards Czechoslovakia submitted the film in Cannes, where the performances of Jozef Kroner and Ida Kamińska were recognised.

In fact, before and after the filming, *The Shop on Main Street* was not entirely welcomed at home. A note returned from when the script was being approved, and it read: *Who would think this could be a film?* In the bonus interview, the philosopher Egon Gál explains that neither the collaborators nor the Jews wanted to think back to the period in which the film takes place. “The people who went through it wanted to forget,” says Gál. “It was a taboo that Slovaks collaborated.”

“In 1962, eighteen years after Kadár escaped from the camp and lost almost his entire family, he was able to write a screenplay, alongside his kindred spirits, where the desire for revenge did not come first. Forty-year-old Kadár no longer had the vigour of youth to hope that one can turn

the film world upside down. What mattered to him much more was to use the film as a tool that would allow him to comprehend his experience, what he had been through, what other people had been through. In *The Shop on Main Street*, he also wished to understand why his parents had to die,” Václav Macek writes in his book.

In the text for *The New York Herald Tribune* in 1966, Kadár explains that in his most personal film, he did not think of the fate of all the six million tortured Jews but of the fate of his father and his friends' parents. He searched to understand what had happened through specific life stories, not through numbers that tell nothing. According to him, even the most perfect reconstruction of a situation cannot outdo a picture of fascism concentrated in the tragedy of a single human being. Kadár says that the audiences will find it rather difficult to forget the white-haired, hard of hearing and bewildered old lady with such an innocent face. “She is the most powerful reminder of fascism and its victims I know.”

Kadár's text was published in January 1966, when *The Shop on Main Street* was already a success at the New York festival, won the New York Film Critics Award and received a very favourable review in *The New York Times*, written by the influential critic Bosley Crowther. A few months later, Crowther decided to go and see with his own eyes where such film miracles were born. Then, at the end of 1966, compiling a list of the 10 best films in American distribution, he included the films *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Mike Nichols, *Blow-Up* by Michelangelo Antonioni, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* by Pier Paolo Pasolini, along with Forman's *Loves of a Blonde*, and *The Shop on Main Street*. In the review, he described it as “one of the most arresting and devastating pictures I've seen from Europe or anywhere else.” ◀

— text: Matúš Kvasnička —

# Greetings to the New Wave

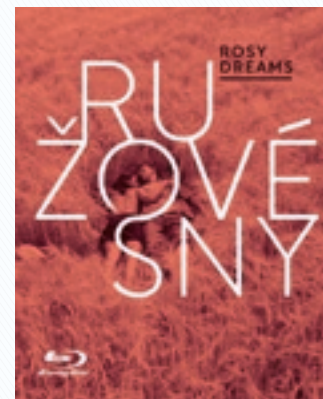
Dušan Hanák's poetic comedy *Rosy Dreams (Ružové sny, 1977)* was a hit, but the tragicomedy *I Love, You Love (Ja milujem, ty miluješ, 1980)* was banned by censors. Later, it received a Silver Bear Award for Best Director and a special FIPRESCI Award at the Berlinale in 1989. The Slovak Film Institute (SFI) released all Hanák's feature films on DVD, and two have now been released on Blu-ray.

“There is humour in both films, and the characters have a soul, I think that is why the films have stood the test of time,” Hanák says. The internationally acclaimed filmmaker and photographer is one of the most popular Slovak filmmakers of his generation. He graduated from the Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in the 1960s, when the Czechoslovak New Wave entered the scene. Hanák had a breakthrough with both fiction and documentary films – *Pictures of the Old World (Obrazy starého sveta, 1972)*, *Paper Heads (Papierové hlavy, 1995)*. According to film historian Václav Macek, it is “the presence of the fiction in the authenticity and the authenticity in the fiction” that determines the quality of Hanák's works.

For the writer Dušan Dušek, who made his scriptwriting debut with *Rosy Dreams*, the films are also a documentary about the time in which they were made. “The older they are, the more significant is their documentary value. If they are good, they tell the truth about the past. They help us to search for it and, if we are lucky, to find it.” Dušek says. He wrote the script together with Hanák. The character of the postman was inspired by his friend, and Hanák shaped the character of Jolanka. “During the period of normalisation, he perceived Roma cultural milieu as an oasis of freedom and authentic life,” Dušek explains.

*Rosy Dreams* is the only Slovak film that managed to penetrate the foreign market in the 1970s. The poetic story of the first big but forbidden love, in which Jakub (Juraj Nvota), a kind-hearted white postman, falls in love with Jolanka (Iva Bittová), a Roma girl, was seen by spectators at many festivals. Abroad, Hanák's sense of poetry, authenticity but also his sensitivity and humour, which is not malicious, were appreciated. “It seemed important to us to voice that a good person still exists. At the same time, we wanted every inch of the film to be honest and authentic. The film communicates the search for humanity, the search for life's colours and taste” Hanák elaborates on the film, which had its renewed premiere in France two years ago.

Hanák and Dušek wrote together also the screenplay for the film *I Love, You Love*. Its protagonist is Pišta,



who drinks because women turn him down, and women turn him down because he drinks. He is played by Polish actor Roman Kłosowski and convincing performances are also given by Serbian actor Milan Jelić, Pišta's friend Vinco, and by Czech actress Iva Janžurová, Vinco's girlfriend, for whom Pišta is longing. His mother is played by Milada Ježková, a non-actress who was catapulted into the world of film on the threshold of retirement by a chance encounter and the role of a mother in Miloš Forman's *Loves of a Blonde (Lásky jedné plavovlásky, 1965)*. The convincing portrayal of the outcasts outraged the communists. In the film, they saw “fabricated and intentionally ugly visuals.” When the film was released for distribution in the late 1980s, almost a decade later, contemporary critics, on the other hand, welcomed its authenticity.

“I wanted my films to be a greeting to the Czechoslovak New Wave and the 1960s, when authentic and high-quality films were made also in our country,” Dušan Hanák comments on *Rosy Dreams* and *I Love, You Love*. ◀



# Bielik Must Be Presented Differently, He Is Unjustly Considered Archaic

**Director, scriptwriter and actor Paľo Bielik was one of the most prominent figures in Slovak cinema. December 2020 marked the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. Film historian Petra Hanáková, the author of Bielik's monograph, discusses more than just Jánošík – the Slovak equivalent of Robin Hood, whose shadow distorts to some extent the perception of one of the first Slovak film professionals.**

**Bielik famously stated that his only god is the audience. Where does the focus on viewers derive from?**

Some directors are audience-oriented, but they lack a theme. Bielik, although focused on viewers, and from the perspective of the auteur films of the 1960s it might not have seemed so, had his inner themes, which he was intrinsically interested in. For instance, the defiance and manliness of the protagonists resonate in several of his films. Bielik's cultural background was determined by “common sense.” Things worked if they served their purpose. In that sense, a film is considered a major investment, so it should make enough money. “Audience-ness” was a certain moral obligation for Bielik. Simply put, things should work, and the film works if it has “appreciated in value” by audiences. Thus, he also had a rather negative attitude towards art productions into which money was “poured,” but which, later on, had only been seen by a handful of intellectuals. It was probably tied to his pragmatic mindset. Aesthetically, he was somewhere else – generation-wise, the sixties were already a different culture for Bielik.

**Did he get into disputes with filmmakers who made a name for themselves in the 1960s?**

At the time of writing the monograph, the archive of the Koliba Film Studios was not yet accessible. However, I spoke to contemporaries such as dramaturge Albert Marenčin or historian Richard Blech. While Blech emphasised that Bielik was hostile to some of the creators of the New Wave, although he did not elaborate. In the mid-1960s, Bielik found himself among young filmmakers in the same creative group headed by Albert Marenčin. Perhaps he was also there to “balance” the budget deficit. So, the aesthetics stood rather distinctly beside one another.

**Did Bielik have international ambitions?**

Bielik was perceived “as currency,” and his colour films were made in this manner, so to speak – with the view of being sold worldwide. Not like the “art” films of the New Wave, that the festival audiences were after, but for usual commercial distributions. I am not exactly sure where specific films were sold to. Frič's *Jánošík* (1935) screened, I suppose, everywhere: in China, Japan, the USA... But even Bielik's colour film *Jánošík* (1962 – 1963) was on the road quite a lot, screened mainly in “people's democratic” countries. That alone would merit a special research. *Jánošík* also reached Canada. According to the article Bielik wrote at that time, he was frustrated because only one of the two parts arrived in Canada, in fact, without any translation, even though the screenings were intended primarily for compatriots. Though, Bielik strongly disapproved of a sloppy job. He was no man of compromise.

**After the first Slovak feature film *Jánošík* (1921) by Jaroslav Siakel' and the 1935 film by Czech director Martin Frič, in which Bielik played the lead, what determined his long-term ambition to shoot his own *Jánošík* (1962–1963)?**

It was related to his film beginnings with Frič. The *Jánošík* narrative of a man of the people who rebelled against the nobles was eventually “established” for Bielik. Besides, he was actively creating it for himself. This subliminal motif is also present in various forms in films such as *Captain Dabač* (Kapitán Dabač, 1959) and *Forty-Four Mutineers* (Štyridsaťštyri, 1957). Bielik made use of it as a representative of socialist cinema as well. On the other hand, he himself somehow mirrored “Jánošík”: at times disobedient and resisting, not always willing to film whatever the leadership of socialist cinema would have wanted.

**His last film happened to be *Three Witnesses* (Traja svedkovia, 1968). However, he also made plans for the first Slovak horror film *The Čachtice Nightmare* (Čachtická mora). Why has it never been made?**

I don't really have an answer for that. Perhaps out of spite, or there was no political will. Moreover, such large-scale commercial productions were “put out” in the 1970s, and Bielik was not in the best of health at that time. It is likely that he was crushed down by critics as well: his last films, in particular *Master Executioner* (Majster Kat, 1966), received very bad reviews.

**What was his forte as a fiction filmmaker?**

For instance, he was great with actors and able to cast them impressively against their established types. František Dibarbora was basically an entertainer, a caba-

biggest. On the one hand, he made the story of the highwayman's life more dynamic, on the other hand, he must have been rather tired of it all. Bielik was constantly “jánošíkfied,” which somewhat overshadowed the fact that he had been doing very decent films his whole life. Not just fiction films. His early non-fiction works, filmed in the company Nástup, is also intriguing, for instance the documentary *On the Island of Cormorants* (Na ostrove kormoránov, 1944/1946). It is both a film about cormorants and a “film about film,” with lovely lighting too. They shoot early in the morning or in the evening, wandering through the picturesque Danube landscape in sweatpants. Such a nice boy movie. It would be a great idea to re-release Bielik's stuff from Nástup. As for his personality, constantly being labelled as Jánošík seems a bit unjust today.



ret artist, but Bielik cast him in the role of the SS man Thiele. Interesting is to observe how Bielik “uses” the same actor in different films. Hermann Thiele from *Wolves' Lairs* (Vlčie diery, 1948) is truly a perfidious Sudeten SS man. In *Jánošík*, however, Dibarbora is already playing the role of a marcelled-haired buffoon, robbed by highwaymen. Or let's “trace” the casting of Ctibor Filčík: in *Forty-Four Mutineers* – a captain of the Austro-Hungarian army, in *Captain Dabač* – a Hlinka guardsman Slanec, a rather strong character but, compared to “heroic” Dabač, a coward. In *Jánošík*, he embodies the highwayman Hrajnoha, in some scenes, if I remember correctly, even shirtless.

**Are there any myths about Bielik?**

The myth regarding Jánošík is probably the

**Put on a pedestal as the mythical hero of Slovak cinema, do you think that it eventually hurt him?**

Today, who among the young people cares about the national hero Jánošík? They are perhaps interested in Dabač and the topic of the Uprising, which is once again popular. Bielik must be presented differently, he is unjustly considered archaic. The “bronze paint” of the national artist, or “of the dead man,” as he used to say, that ended up sticking to him, does not suit him. Now I even get the impression that Bielik is a bit of a tragic character. Although without consideration decorated with awards and patted on the shoulder during the anniversaries, I am not entirely sure whether the surroundings ever really understood him. I feel that, in a more profound sense, he was solitary. ◀



— text: Matúš Kvasnička —  
photo: Miro Nôta —

# Letters, Entries, Themes and Forgotten Films

**Siakel' brothers' *Jánošík* (1921), the first milestone of Slovak cinema, will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Therefore, Filmotéka, the archive cinema of the Slovak Film Institute and a part of the Cinema Lumière, has planned several programme cycles for 2021 under the heading of 100 years of Slovak film. One of them is *Abecedár slovenského filmu (1921 – 2021)* (Dictionary of Slovak Film). Contributing entries from A to Z, eighteen authors will examine Slovak cinema from an original point of view. The series of screenings will be introduced by a lecturer and they are set to culminate in 2021 with the publication of an anthology in Slovak and English.**

“The impulse came from the Filmotéka’s dramaturges of the Cinema Lumière. In the next programme cycles comprised for the anniversary, a more traditional introduction of the breakthrough periods, filmmakers and films will be presented. Therefore, we outlined *Abecedár* deliberately in a more open and bold manner. We tried to avoid the ideological layout of previously published *History of Slovak Cinematography* (*Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie*), its structure or assessment,” says film theorist Martin Kaňuch, one of the project’s authors. “The selection of themes and ‘encoding’ them into letters and entries was primary. In some cases, we arrived at entries that seem hermetic or surprising at first glance, such as *the Sphinx* or *Xanthippe*,” adds Kaňuch. According to him, *Abecedár* reveals unnoticed connections, phenomena or visual motifs that have been pushed aside or forgotten, and it considers their function in both well-known and overlooked Slovak films from the original point of view of domestic and foreign filmologists.

Film historian Jelena Paštéková, who wrote *History of Slovak Cinematography* with Václav Macek, is also co-author of *Abecedár*. According to her, it revives the history that is not limited to a single interpretation. “Unlike the great syntagmatic narrative of *History of Slovak Cinematography*, we focused on new overviews from its repertoire, related to wider cultural contexts. Sometimes a sudden spark helped, but I would characterise the approach, in general, as an intention to uncover the lively places of Slovak culture through changes in rhetoric – the variety of metaphors, metonymies, synecdoches or irony is layered.” Kaňuch and Paštéková prepared annotations for 25 entries and con-

tacted individual authors. Subsequently, the approach towards assigned entries was largely up to them, including the selection of films through which they would present specific concepts. In doing so, they often opted for works that are not familiar to most viewers. “In addition to a subjective view of history, *Abecedár* can also enrich knowledge: it dares to offer the viewer an opportunity to experience hidden treasures from the archive, ones that have not been examined sufficiently and give them a new chance,” says Jelena Paštéková.

Certain foreign projects were among the impulses that prompted the making of *Abecedár*. “We were inspired by research projects within the frame of a current shift towards ‘the history of cinema without names’ (University of Udine), in this context, for example by *Visual Motifs of Cinema*, a Spanish and French project of ‘encyclopaedia’ by Jordi Balló and Alain Bergala. The focus is on liveliness and vitality of the visual motif or phenomenon. Its selected aspect ties to remarkable films where it was implemented, leading to famous and unknown directors and their works being placed next to each other. A previously recognised line between the accepted and the rejected is not relevant. The aim is to find the hidden lively places, images, motifs in films without hierarchical ‘preunderstanding,’” explains Martin Kaňuch. According to Jelena Paštéková, the list of entries in the *Abecedár* is not carved in stone once and for all. “The mosaic of *Abecedár*’s composition comes as an advantage because it can be updated,” she adds. Kaňuch concludes that it is a playful experiment, allowing an open thinking process that can be further cultivated and deepened. ◀

— text: Editorial team —

# Ten years of Kino Lumière

**The cinema offers a selection from around the world, new European films but also classics. Its four digitised screening rooms have 35mm film projectors, however, popcorn is forbidden. Kino Lumière – the cinema of the Slovak Film Institute (SFI), situated in the Bratislava city centre, is the only multiple-screen Film Club in the Slovak Republic and one of the most important domestic art house cinemas. It will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday in September.**

“It is one of the last cinemas in the world that screens 35mm films on (almost) daily basis, most often in its FIAF screen called ‘Filmotéka’” says Zita Hosszúová, the manager of the cinema. The screenings were halted due to the pandemic outbreak, and Slovak cinemas were closed for a third of the year. Last year, Kino Lumière was opened for only 243 days, mostly with the reduced seating capacity and strict hygiene measures. “Kino Lumière, the cinema of the Slovak Film Institute, was successful in 2020, despite the pandemic and the fact that the four rooms were screening only 68 days. At the beginning of the last year, the attendance appeared to be heading towards a new record, more than 32,000 spectators attended the screenings of Slovak and European films by March 9,” says Peter Dubecký, the general director of the Slovak Film Institute. He praises the total attendance of 65,668 viewers, including online screenings, while taking into account that “the cinemas actually ceased to exist in 2020, and they were replaced by a streaming culture on a large scale.” According to Dubecký, even after getting back to normal life, it will be necessary to react to the changes that the pandemic brought about.

Regarding the attendance of the cinema, profiled as a “repertoire arthouse” with 70 screenings per week, the domestic film *Scumbag* (Sviňa, dir. Mariana Čengel Solčanská, Rudolf Biermann) came second right behind the South Korean *Parasite* (dir. Bong Joon-ho). Three more Slovak co-productions ended up in the top ten. Last year, one of the highlights was the screening of the digitally restored *Sátántangó* (dir. Béla Tarr, 1994). The cinema regularly screens digitally restored works not only from the SFI archive but also from world archives. They are programmed mainly by the already mentioned Filmotéka, whose curators do not omit short films. The cycles Film Cabinet and Film Cabinet for Children are flagships of systematic work on film education in Lumière. The initiatives Baby Cinema, Senior Cinema or Inclusive Cinema, for children with ADHD, reveal that Kino Lumière keeps different audiences in mind. In addition, the cycle Music & Film is popular with spectators as well.

Kino Lumière continues the tradition of the Film Club, a film events centre which operated in the same place since 1976. The premises had been rented since 1991. When the SFI started managing the cinema in 2011, it focused on contemporary Slovak and European cinema, the presentation of classic works and film education. Kino Lumière is part of the Europa Cinemas network. It supports more than 1,200 cinemas, which designate a significant part of their screenings to non-national European films and carry out activities for young audiences. In 2014, Kino Lumière won the Europa Cinemas Award for Best Programming.

In 2017, the number of visitors exceeded 100,000 for the first time and reached a new record of 120,000 spectators in 2019. Kino Lumière responded to the pandemic in mid-April with the *Kino doma* (Cinema at home) project. In 107 days, it offered 149 online screenings, streamed in real time. “Hardly a perfect way, but it is the best solution available for substituting the cinema virtually,” Zita Hosszúová explains. Other cinemas have joined the project as well, and spectators will choose which ones to support by purchasing tickets. “However, it is not a project that can live off the tickets, at the moment, we are able to maintain it mainly because of the financial support from the Audiovisual Fund,” she adds.

With the support from the Audiovisual Fund, four screening rooms with 195, 79, 44 and 36 seats have recently undergone a complete modernisation process. During the year, the rooms are designated for more than 15 festivals and showcases. The International Film Festival Febiofest Bratislava, One World, Be2Can, the Slovak Queer Film Festival and MittelCinemaFes as well as the Slovak Film Week and showcases of foreign cinema and retrospectives of important filmmakers take place. “We try to make a room for diversity, for all those films, activities and events that do not have any other space,” Hosszúová elaborates. In mid-February, it is still closed, and several events were moved to the online platform *Kino doma*. ▶



— text: Marián Hanko /  
House of Culture's cinema, Čadca —

# Waiting for a Miracle

**Before the first wave of the pandemic closed the cinemas, the last films we were showing were an animated fantasy adventure *Onward* and extremely successful Slovak film *Scumbag (Sviňa)*.**

**Screened over the weekend of 7 – 8 March, it was a bit of luck because we had some money left in our account – thanks to their above-average attendance.**

— We were closed for 75 days until 23 May, then we tried to lure visitors with an animated film *Paw Patrol 2* and an amazingly cast costume romance *Little Women*. Seven visitors came to the very first screening after the forced break. The Magnificent Seven. TV news and shows about the COVID-19 disease scared people enough, so they did not come rushing in for the films considered appealing to audiences.

— The joy of reopening, fireworks and dancing were replaced by our preoccupation with the programme compilation. Distributors have not offered anything new yet – and how are you supposed to entice viewers with reruns? When something new came up in the catalogue, after a while it was removed, and the premiere date set to 2021. A real asset in promoting the cinema turned out to be my Facebook with five thousand friends. At least I hope they all are friends. Every day I was feeding my profile with new articles about films and convincing people that if someone compiled a list of the most sterile cinemas in the world, we would make it to the very top, no sweat. I also launched an appeal to compassion: adopting the slogans for saving culture, I tried to persuade potential viewers to visit us. Some really did show up, proclaiming they had arrived to save us. It was touching. At the entrance, with a facemask and white gloves, I greeted each visitor with a Japanese bow, I made sure that they used the hand sanitiser, and I also measured their temperature.

— Nevertheless, we did not reach the before-the-pandemic attendance levels. Compared to the same period in 2019, attendance plummeted by two thirds. And then, cinemas closed again. Symbolically, the last film we screened happened to be *Fatima*, a story about a miracle that took place at the pilgrimage site. After all, we are also in need of a miracle to end this catastrophic period.

— The Slovak Audiovisual Fund responded to the situation and offered cinemas financial support, which our cinema also applied for. The financial aid should be transferred to the account anytime soon. At the same time, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic published the form necessary to map the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for workers in the cultural and creative industries. Based on the form, the Ministry aims to obtain real data on financial losses in individual areas of culture as well as on the total number of people working in culture and the creative industry. The information will be important for determining the volume of special subsidies from the subsidy system of the Min-

istry of Culture. We must believe that the financial support will be sufficient, and this period does not lead to destruction not only of the cinema industry but of culture in Slovakia in general.

— During the first wave of the pandemic, cultural institutions had to close all over Slovakia, even though there were not that many cases. We lacked the experience with the virus, however, and no one could predict the rapidity of its spread. In the second wave, the authorities finally took into account the fact that we should prevent the economy from being destroyed by strict measures. Adhering to social distancing and hygiene measures, cinemas could screen until the number of the cases began to rise rapidly.

— In my view, cinemas will start running very slowly in the coming period. So slowly that it will take the whole year of 2021. Many films that were supposed to be released in cinemas have already appeared on the Internet, so we cannot count on them as becoming frequently visited. In addition, when a vaccine against the virus will finally be available, people might still have a subconscious fear of attending mass events. They had to spend a lot of time at home, and I think they took to various companies and began watching films via satellite or online streaming services. In this manner, some studios had already made available compelling films originally intended for cinemas, such as the war drama *Greyhound* starring Tom Hanks. Viewers can choose from a rich variety of films right at the comfort of their home, with no need to go out to seek culture. If so, they will probably opt for a theatre or a concert.

— To many, especially small towns, it will seem irrational to subsidise an unprofitable cinema after its reopening. First and foremost, finances will be necessary for the administration of the municipality. The cinema will close, temporarily, as they say, but we all know that reopening is problematic afterwards. People with experience in this field, including projectionists, will find other jobs over time, and then not everyone will be able or willing to return.

— The pandemic delivered a blow to cinemas in the golden era of rising annual attendance and threw them back, figuratively speaking, to the Middle Ages. I wish to be wrong, but since 1968\* I have been a realist. ◀

\*Note: In August 1968, the Soviet Union led the Warsaw Pact troops in an invasion of Czechoslovakia to brutally suppress the reformist trends. The occupation lasted more than 20 years.

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