In the previous Berlinale Edition 2021, the first special festival edition of Film.sk, we committed to the Cannes and Karlovy Vary editions. However, their production process was constantly complicated by new anti-pandemic measures and date changes of festivals. As a result, we decided to put together a combined summer festival version of **Film.sk – Cannes & Karlovy Vary Edition 2021**, published on two occasions.

The first, **Cannes Edition 2021** showcases new Slovak films presented in Cannes exclusively in an electronic version. Which Slovak filmmakers will represent us? What Slovak films are about to be screened at the prestigious festivals? You will find out right on the first pages! Moreover, we managed to boost the issue with more interviews, in which the respondents share personal insights into many aspects of production. In the poll, a number of filmmakers will reveal their current projects as well as their future plans. In addition to introducing new films, we will also provide an overview of new releases (DVD and Blu-ray) which were successfully restored by the SFI. Lastly, we summarise how Slovak cinema and distribution did in the rough year 2020.

At the end of July, the Karlovy Vary section will be added to the issue, highlighting the Slovak representation at the festival in Karlovy Vary. In August, you can hopefully look forward to the printed version of the complete overview of the two largest summer festivals Cannes & Karlovy Vary Edition 2021. ◀

— Veronika Krejčová / executive editor —
Czech director Zuzana Kirchnerová won in the Cinéfondation section at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival with her graduation drama Bába (2008), which tells the story of a granddaughter and her dying grandmother. She is now returning to Cannes after being selected for the L’Atelier programme to present her upcoming film Caravan (Karavan). At Marché du Film, another Slovak minority film will be presented – Saving One Who Was Dead (Zpráva o záchraně mrtvého) by director Václav Kadrnka. A bit earlier, in June, the festival in Annecy world-premiered two Czech animated films, both also co-produced by Slovakia.

Breaking Taboos

In Caravan, the mother and her son set out on a journey across Italy. The road movie is to be shot in authentic locations, and the filmmakers will be aided by an Italian co-producer that has previously worked, for example, on the successful film Happy as Lazzaro. Jakub Viktorín from nutprodukcia is producing the film on the Slovak side.

The film also reflects certain negative emotions, almost disgust at times, which the son with a disability arouses in his mother, despite her love. The filmmakers are inclined to cast an intellectually disabled non-actor for the role. “What caught my attention was mainly how Zuzana Kirchnerová was dealing with the notorious subject of motherhood. On the one hand, she breaks a certain social taboo, at the same time, however, she shares a profound personal experience, which for many years has affected her life, both private as well as professional,” said producer Jakub Viktorín. “I am convinced that Zuzana’s talent and her strong director’s vision, combined with a unique story and screenplay, will lead to an exceptional and original work that has the potential to contribute to important social change,” added Viktorín.

He recently completed the shooting of Michal Blaško’s feature debut Victim (Oběť). Two years ago, Blaško attended the L’Atelier programme in Cannes, just like Kirchnerová now. The programme supports promising projects and aims to connect less experienced creators with more experienced ones. The current 17th edition has selected fifteen projects. Caravan is only the third Slovak (co-)produced project to take part. In fact, the first was Out (dir. György Kristóf) in 2015.

On the Slovak side, in addition to Jakub Viktorín, actress Juliána Brutovská and DoP Denisa Buranová (Little Harbour (Pláta lodě)) participate in the film. Not Enough to Be Just Good

In Saving One Who Was Dead, director and screenwriter Václav Kadrnka used the personal experience with his father who suffered a stroke. Being emotionally involved has pros and cons. “Václav was aware of the risk of not being able to distance himself. As a result, he approached writer and screenwriter Marek Šindelka who assisted with the screenplay,” Slovak producer Katarína Krnáčová from the company Silverart tells Film.sk. “Václav’s films are distinct auteur works, and he has developed a signature style which allows him to handle the topic by setting it into perspective,” she adds.

Kadrnka’s film was awarded at the Hong Kong Asia Film Financing Forum (March 15 – 17). The HAF Goes to Cannes Award enables the participation in one of the most prestigious film markets in Cannes (July 6 – 15). Saving One Who Was Dead was awarded at the Asian Forum also in 2018, when it was in the development phase. It received the main HAF Award for the best international project, combined with a financial bonus of approximately 16,000 euros. According to Krnáčová, the bonus significantly helped developing the project, not only financially. “Every selection, grant or cash award indicates having faith in the project, increasing its potential to be successful,” says Krnáčová. “Some people say that it is enough for a film to be just good, in consequence, it will surely find its way to partners or viewers. Today, as a matter of fact, such idea is akin to utopia.”
Annecy: Competing After Thirty Years

Feature animated film by award-winning director Michaela Pavlatová My Sunny Maad (Moje slunce Mad) tells the story of Helena alias Herra, a Czech woman, who falls in love with a Nazi, an Afghan, following him to Afghanistan without knowing his family or having any idea of what life awaits her. "My Sunny Maad is the first feature film by a female director awarded the Cristal for a Short Film in 2012. It is a touching story full of nuances and subtlety about a Western woman's experience of living in Afghanistan. Without doubt, one of the most eagerly awaited films of the year!" the Annecy festival’s Artistic Director Marcel Jean commented at the end of May when announcing the selection of the film for the main competition. The Czech Republic makes a comeback after almost thirty years, the last feature competed in Annecy in 1993 when the festival presented The Flying Sneaker (Motýľ čas) by director Břetislav Pojar. For Pavlatová, My Sunny Maad constitutes a feature debut, with regard to animation exclusively. The story discusses the topics such as feminism and cultural differences, and it was based on famous Czech journalist Petra Procházková’s novel Frízta, which takes place in Afghanistan. Peter Badač from the company BFILM became the Slovak co-producer of the film, which was made in a Czech-French-Slovak co-production and won Jury Award at Annecy.

Another film with Slovak participation, created in even bigger international collaboration, world-premiered in Annecy, although not competing. Vladimír Hlošák and the Czech company Fresh Films joined forces with Alexandre Charlet from Les Films du Cygne in France as the main producers of Even Mice Belong in Heaven (Myší patří do nebe). Next co-producers came to be Czech, French and Polish partners, Slovak is represented by Mazák Juraj and Tomáš Janíček from CinemaArt SK. The film is an adaptation of Iva Procházková’s bestseller of the same name. "In terms of form, the story of Mice looks like an uncomplicated story for children. What we, personally, enjoy about it is how charged it is with seemingly insurmountable conflict and difficult and truly fundamental themes, like death or the loss of loved ones," said Derisa Grinmová and Jan Bubeníček who directed the film together. Both were pupils of already renowned directors. While preparing the documentary, prisoners elaborated on the story in which the mouse and the fox, the protagonists and arch enemies, meet in heaven after an unfortunate incident. Furthermore, two upcoming animated features The Websters (Websterovci) by Katarína Kerekesová and Heart of a Tower (Srdce Veže) by Peter Budinský took part in the competition. "I have been following the Producers on the Move programme for several years now, and I appreciate how the organisers connect producers with each other or with the international audiovisual world while promoting the particular country and projects on which the selected producers work," Katarína Tomková tells Film.sk. "I was looking forward to being able to meet the upcoming generation of successful professionals and share with them experiences and ideas or discuss the situation in our respective countries," Tomková adds. After working in film journalism, production and international film promotion since 2004, Katarína Tomková launched her own production company kaleidoscope in 2015. She has since (co-)produced a number of acclaimed documentaries as well as Ivan Ostrochovský’s drama Servants, which premiered in Annecy in 2020 Berlinale. Katarína is currently in post-production on her feature 107 Mothers (Cenaarka) and Juraj Lehotský's third feature film Applause (Poleská).

"Both Applause and 107 Mothers are in post-production, which is a challenge itself in the pandemic time. In addition, the films faced their own challenges, which I think both teams managed to overcome successfully," Tomková elaborates when asked what challenges she had encountered during production of said works. "With 107 Mothers, we were dealing with the transformation of the project into a hybrid and the concept that relied on shooting in prison and non-actresses – which also influenced how director Peter Krebes and DoP Martin Kolář worked," she describes the transformation of 107 Mothers from a documentary-fiction narrative. The filmmakers visited dozens of prisons in Ukraine during the run-up to the shooting. While preparing the documentary, prisoners and staff did not appear inclined to make conversation. For the fiction film, however, they were keen to contribute absurd stories from prison.

Juraj Lehotský gradually moved from documentary to fiction as well. Director of the successful documentary Blind Loves (Slepé lásky, 2008, C.I.C.A.E. Award – Cannes FF) made his fiction film debut with Miracle (Zázrak, 2013), followed by Nina (2017), on which Katarína Tomková already collaborated. Applause is Lehotský’s third fiction film. "The challenge of Applause definitely involved a complicated shoot with an international cast, taking place at the time of the pandemic restrictions which forced both director Juraj Lehotský and producer Michaela Jelínek to take further action," Tomková describes the filming, in which the Polish actor Bartosz Bielenia plays the lead role. The cast involves German actor Sahin Tumbrea, Slovak actress Judit Bárdos and non-actor Vojtěch Zdražil.

The Producers on the Move initiative was established in 2001, and almost 450 producers from all over Europe have since participated in the programme which aims to publicise the producers, expand their professional network and present their projects. Slovakia was represented by, for example, Marko Škop, Silvia Panáková, Michal Kollár, Katarína Krnáčová, Marek Urban and Peter Badač. The programme, sponsored by the international organisation European Film Promotion, is connected with the Cannes festival as well as the film market Marché du Film. As a matter of fact, it was held online for the second year. "It worked very well last year, and it was important for us to give the participants a clear sense of planning that would not be dependent on how the pandemic situation develops," the shift to an online initiative is addressed by Sonja Zelená, European Film Promotion Managing Director.

This year, twenty promising film producers from different European countries have been brought together by the Producers on the Move initiative once again. They completed the challenging programme from 17 to 21 May online. In the prestigious selection, Slovakia was represented by Katarína Tomková, who produced successful films such as Hotel Sunrise (Hotel Štúrov, dir. Mária Rumanová, 2016) or Servants (Služobníci, dir. Ivan Ostrochovský, 2020).
said the director. According to the director explained in the explication "Triumph of Will"—photo: Matúš Kvasnička, Lucky Man Films—text: Kristína Aschenbrennerová

Perhaps the most famous Czech sporting couple Dana and Emil Zátopek’s memories and experiences were published in 2016. Dana Zátopková followed up with a book in 2016. She also describes their lives during normalisation period and provides diary entries of the late Emil Zátopek. Director David Ondříček was one of the first readers of the memoirs. He read the manuscript at the sportswoman’s house, wearing borrowed slippers from her husband. Emil Zátopek passed away in 2000, his wife Dana last March. She was consulted about the film, which was also made with her consent.

Gaining her trust was not as easy as it might seem from the previous lines. And that was just the beginning. The expensive period film, in which about 750 historically accurate costumes were used, received support from the Czech Film Fund only on the third attempt. Besides, the filmmakers could not shoot at the original stadiums in London and Helsinki, which witnessed Zátopek’s Olympic successes. After adjustments by architect Jan Vlásák, they were fully replaced by Za Lužánkami stadium in Brno in front of Štěpán Kučera’s camera. Period realities, costumes, architectural adjustments or complex, not only physical, training of actors for their roles significantly impacted the budget. At the beginning of the preparation, it was estimated at more than 90 million Czech crowns (approximately 5.6 million euros), and Zátopková became one of the most expensive Czech films. Javelin thrower Dana Zátopková is played by Martha Issová, while Václav Neužil was cast for the role of Emil Zátopek. "How far I can throw is not as important as making the throwing technique believable," Issová said about the preparation for the role. Neužil lost 7 kilograms in six months, and he had to master Zátopek’s signature movements as well as speech.

The long-distance runner was the first in the world to break the 29-minute barrier in 10,000 metres. Even before that, he astonished the world by a performance at the Olympics in London and four years later in Helsinki. However, his story is not just a sports drama, it also brings political and family themes. The 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki are a natural dramatic climax. Zátopek almost missed it because he stood up for a colleague whose dossier was negative at a time when harsh political processes were raging in communist Czechoslovakia. Finally, both travelled to Helsinki – Zátopek, a defending champion from London. He won three more gold medals, and his wife Dana won an Olympic gold too.

It is necessary to bring a new perspective on Zátopek and its time. Political issues cannot be avoided. Politics played a significant role in Zátopek’s life. Living in an incredibly difficult time, he was not always able to navigate it. We tried to convey it accordingly," the director explained in the explication for the Slovak Audiovisual Fund, which also supported the film. The Slovak co-producers of Zátopek are AZYL Production and Radio and Television Slovakia. Part of the post-production took place in Slovakia, and several Slovak actors were cast – Milan Mikulčík, Peter Nádasdi and Peter Kočiš.

Ondříček began working on the film about six years ago, but the idea was born much earlier. Musician Jan P. Muchow came up with it in 2007. As a composer, he collaborated with Ondříček on all five cinema features – on the cult generational statement films with the screenwriting participation of Petr Zelenka [Whisper (Sepet), 1996], Lomers (Samotáři, 2020) as well as on the film noir detective In the Shadow (Ve stínu, 2012) which received nine Czech Lions. In the sixth film, Muchow additionally took up the role of Ondříček’s co-writer. In the end, Alice Nellis lent a hand and highlighted the role of Dana in the story. "Zátopek is the story of an outsider, a boy with a squeaky voice who was often mistaken for a girl and, basically, not much of an athletic talent. At the same time, it is the story of a man with great will and ambition to win, stubborn and unbroke in spirits, one who became a legend. A lonely, thoughtful runner, however, at the same time, a cheerful chestnut who longs to be admired. Zátopek was an athlete with a huge desire to defeat his rivals and then lovingly dedicate them a gold medal," summed up David Ondříček.

Five New Slovak Films Compete in Karlovy Vary

From 20 to 28 August, the 55th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival programme will offer several Slovak co-production films. Four of them are shown in the main competition. For the first time, the main competition section of the festival will also open to documentaries.

Selected documentaries include At Full Throttle (Láska pod kapotou), the latest film by director Miro Remo, who is also one of the co-producers. In the past, Remo’s documentary on rehabilitation of prisoners Comeback (2014) and a portrait of a prominent Slovak musician Richard Müller This Is Not Me (Richard Müller: Nespoznaný, 2016) were in the official selection. From the beginning, the intention was to shoot a genre documentary from a racing environment. "We were looking for a life of putting up a good fight, and we found a good fight for one’s very own life," Remo says on his website in an interview with Czech producer Vít Janeček. Slovak and Czech public televisions and both national film funds took part. The protagonist of the film is an ex-miner Jaroslav, who set up a business after the revolution in 1989. Later, he found himself up to his neck in debt, and his marriage and relationships with children fell apart. Today, he lives with his girlfriend Jitka. At the same time, they form a duo of a racer and a coach / car mechanic. "We were looking for a character with a compelling internal conflict, and his life was full of unsolvable situations which are hard to come by for most people," said the director. According to him, Jaroslav’s story represents many similar ones in which the loss of illusions did not lead to surrender.

Kids Made for Success

While Slovak director Remo shot in the Czech Republic, Czech director Erika Hníková found the protagonists of Every Single Minute (Každá minuta života) in Slovakia. She was inspired by the story of a successful and well-drafted 18-year-old hockey player by the NHL team, coming as a result of his parents’ detailed and planned effort. At that time, Hníková was exploring the question of the extent to which parents should plan their children’s lives in advance. She was looking for answers in the city of Žilina in the Hanuliak family. The young couple adjuts everything to raising a top athlete out of their son Miško. "The Hanuliaks are interesting not only for extreme upbringing of their son and their just as extreme sacrifice for him but also for their relationship, family background and..."
vals which they share,” said the director whose documentaries The Beauty Exchange (Zeny pro mény, 2005) and I Guess We’ll Meet at the Eurocamp (Sejdeme se v Eurocamp, 2006) were awarded at the Jiří Javela festival and Matchmaking Mayor (Nevabadov, 2010) at the Berlinale.

Winners Return

Slovak co-producer of Every Single Minute is Punkchart films, producing also Olmo Ozervič’s new feature The Bird Atlas (Atlas ptáků). His previous film Winter Flies (Vliechone bude, 2018) won the Best Director Award in the main competition in Karlovy Vary. After three films with protagonists who have not yet crossed the threshold of adulthood, Ozervič enters the adult world and provides a confrontation of an aging successful business owner and a company’s accountant with (virtual) reality. According to him, The Bird Atlas, starring Miroslav Donutil and Alena Mihulová, tries to capture the present time and its metamorphoses, generation gaps but also globalisation. It depicts the world of modern communi- cation technology as well as its weak points, while com- plicated family relationships contribute the element of suspense to the story. The tension and anxiety keep building up, yet it is unclear who stands against whom. “We believe that our new joint project, thanks to the topical issue and tension, will be a direct continuation of the success of previous films,” said co-producer Ivan Ostrochovský (Křižáček) won the main award for Best Feature Film at the Karlovy Vary IFF in 2017.

Feral Ones

Furthermore, Slovakia is to be represented in the second competition section of the festival East of the West, for which twelve films were selected. The section provides an opportunity for debuts and second features from Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the for- mer Soviet Union, the Middle East and North Africa. Co-produced by Mátyás Prikler and Zora Jaurová from the company MPhilms on Slovak side, the film Wild Roots (Kúlen farka) directed by Hajný Kius was selected for the Slovak Promises in the Eastern Promises.

The industry section of the Karlovy Vary IFF is no exception to the strong presence of the Slovak production in this year edition. Composed of several programmes dedicated to different aims, the selections include two Slovak feature film projects in the post- production stage.

This year, Works in Progress accommodate films from fiction to documentary spectre, as the organisers, in as above mentioned sections, concluded them “despite their differences, to possess the same artistic value”. Conse- quently, they indiscriminately vie for the same awards. The presentation of the projects in the Works in Project line-up will be taking place online. From the applications, the industry team selected Victim (Obef), a feature debut of Michal Blaško. The film further plays with the ideas introduced in the short March (Pochod, 2018), also writ- ten by Jakub Medvecký. A young Ukrainian boy Igor

claims that he was assaulted by three young Roma. His mother Irina demands justice and is met with great soli- darity by her new society. The mother is ready to stand by her son no matter what. Until the moment she real- ises that his narrative is full of loopholes.

The co-operation of the festival with First Cut Lab and First Cut+, two interconnected programmes founded and directed by Matthieu Darras is dedicated to film editing (First Cut Lab) and further boost through pro- motion and distribution strategies (First Cut+). Also thanks to its participation in the special First Cut Lab Slovakia, Power (Moc) by Mátyás Prikler continues in postproduction also with the First Cut+. This might be the first-time experience for Mátyás Prikler to take part in the role of director – as the producer, he took part in the programme last year with Wild Roots.

Unseen Occupation of Czechoslovakia and Prospects for the Future

More Slovak works will be showcased in the Special Screenings section of the festival in which Jan

Sík’s documentary Reconstruction of the Occupation (Rekonstrukce okupace) will have its world premiere. The director happens to be a long-time collector of am- ateur family films, and the film presents hitherto unpub- lished footage from almost a four-hour-long recording of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the occupation forces in 1968, discovered thanks to his hobby. The Slo- vak co-producers are Publics and Radio and Television Slovakia. The Special Screenings section is to present Michalina Pavlatová’s Aly Sunny Mad (Moje slunce Mad). On Slovak side, the film is co-produced by Petr Badaš’s production company BFILM, and it world premiered in June at the festival in Annecy. The story of a Czech woman who falls in love and leaves for the unknown country of Afghanistan won the Jury Prize in Annecy and thus expanded the large collection of awards for Pavlatová’s films.

Traditionally, filmmakers who are presented
When a film is screened at a festival, it feels like a bonus that can be advertised on a poster. How about other reasons why festivals are essential?

Festival life is very important, some Slovak films may tour up to 50 festivals, often reaching more viewers than in domestic cinema distribution. Therefore, festivals are not a negligible complement, they often represent the main distribution. Selling a film for cinema distribution abroad has constituted a large difficulty before, and it is going to be even worse after the pandemic. Cinemas all over the world will want to make up for the financial losses by screening blockbusters as well as supporting and saving their domestic production. The position of festivals is still about to be very firm, they will continue to be a valuable space for personal get-togethers of filmmakers and viewers from around the world.

You are producing Martin Gonda’s Flood, whose short Pura Vida premiered in Cannes. Does the festival success help fund the next film?

Cannes is probably the strongest brand in this respect and can only be compared to a few similarly important and large festivals. When a film competes with thousands and makes it into the Cannes programme, it happens to be a great honour for Slovakia as well as an appraisal for the author and their team. With their next film, the starting position is going to be definitely more advantageous compared to the others. This is often perceived as such by fund commissions, although the support designated for another project is not automatic, the project must always prove to be of high quality. A number of other criteria are taken into account in terms of the success of previous works. The filmmaker will also score points for the reception at several smaller festivals, for various awards or the success of their previous film.

Becoming a hit with cinema audiences will probably be a challenge after the pandemic. I assume that the spectators will not return to the cinemas in as great numbers as before. In order to attend, they will have to be further motivated. Many people are about to be satisfied with the online space, and a group of spectators remaining loyal to cinemas will choose films more carefully. In fact, it may be film art that could provide a completely different experience of the big screen than what our home space offers. On the other hand, there will be no shortage of significantly commercial blockbusters crammed with effects, taking full advantage of modern cinema technologies. I believe the viewer will come specifically for a particular film, avoiding a random selection. Moreover, speaking of more demanding art films, they are often made to be screened at cinemas. The filmmakers oppose releasing their work online where, in addition to questionable internet security, they have no idea who is watching and on what kind of screen. For example, on mobile phones.

Luckily, I never crossed this line. However, there is a generation for which it became a standard. You released Summer Rebels (Letní rebeli) last year, now you are a co-producer of the bigger international collaboration How I Learned to Fly (Ako som sa naučila lietať). Will viewers show up for domestic family films?

Either We or the Internet and YouTube Will Educate the Viewer

Katarína Krnáčová produced Little Harbour (Piata lód, 2017) by Iveta Grófová which won in its respective category at the International Film Festival Berlin. Thanks to the HAF Goes to Cannes award, her latest project, the Czech-Slovak feature Saving One Who Was Dead (Zpráva o záchraně mrtvého) by director Václav Kadrnka is heading to the film market in Cannes. Krnáčová also produces Martin Gonda’s feature debut Flood (Potopa), whose student film Pura Vida (2019) was screened in Cannes within the Cinéfondation section.
The Last Baroness

Do you already have someone in mind to play the Baroness?

The series based on the book by Silvester Lavrík will capture the period of six or seven decades, so the role may be divided between two actresses. I think that the main character will be from Slovakia, but foreign co-productions can also engage in the selection, so I do not exclude European names either. Whether the material is interesting and understandable abroad is now being examined, for example, at the workshop intended for television series MIDPOINT TV Launch. A preliminary interest and an acceptance letter from Betafilm equates with stepping out in the open, so to speak. They are one of the largest TV distributors in Europe, fond of the material, so we are in touch.

The Last Baroness

Stand up -

The Last Baroness is at the beginning of the journey at the end of which is Stand up, a film waiting to be completed. It happened to be the first intentionally green filming in Slovakia. How did the crew react?

If there seems to be little talk about green filming today, the truth is that it was not discussed at all in our country two years ago. From the beginning, therefore, I did not underestimate the communication with the crew so that the ecological changes were not perceived as obstacles to be dodged but rather understood in the broader context. It was exclusively our production, and I could organise the shooting in compliance with my own wishes. I wrote down ten items that related to various parts of production – drinking water, travel, lighting... However, it was clear to me that if someone is not willing, I cannot force them, so I avoided giving orders and imposing bans. The "Green Ten", for example, did not demand that you should not drink from plastic bottles, but it submitted that we would all receive our own reusable water bottles. We tried to make obeying the Green Ten to be more attractive through various challenges, and I added ecological trivia to my daily dispositions, such as how big an impact on the environment can have a small change in behaviour, for instance, proper waste sorting. When you say "green filming" out loud, people panic because they cannot imagine it, but these are really small steps that will not burden anyone.

When you say ‘green filming’ out loud, people panic because they cannot imagine it, but these are really small steps that will not burden anyone.
Slovak cinema was experiencing a difficult time in the 1990s. After the year 2000, director Peter Kerekes significantly contributed to its revival with his feature-length documentary films. After almost 20 years, his signature style has evolved and transformed, as manifested in his new film 107 Mothers (Cenzorka), which will compete in Venice within the Orizzonti section.

When 66 Seasons (66 sezón) came out in 2003, you were the first filmmaker from the young Slovak generation to make a documentary feature that was released in cinemas. How do you perceive your beginnings today?

Throwing myself into working on the film 66 Seasons, which I produced as a self-employed person with a budget of 2.5 million Slovak crowns, was a pure irresponsibility on my part. From a financial point of view, it was almost insane to plunge into such a project. Until then, the only documentary feature that was released in cinemas after the establishment of the independent Slovakia was Dušan Hanák’s Paper Heads (Papierové hlavy, 1995). However, we started filming with such a punk commitment that it had a happy ending after all. The film was screened at festivals as well as distributed internationally. In fact, nothing has changed since then: With 107 Mothers, we embarked on a large project without significant financial backing once more. In addition, we actually spent all the funds earmarked for development on filming. Again, it was irresponsible because we were shooting without a relevant screenplay, we changed the subject twice during the filming, and the only thing that kept us going was the punk enthusiasm: We knew that somewhere in the material the film was hidden, we just had to get to it.

Before 107 Mothers, you co-directed Velvet Terrorists (Zamatoví teroristi) with Ivan Ostrochovský and Palo Pekarčík. What did the collaboration with Ivan, the producer of 107 Mothers, mean to you?

For me, the most interesting part was to start considering the film in a different way. To observe the present rather than telling stories from the past, as in 66 Seasons or Cooking History (Ako sa varia dejiny). The unpredictability of the direction in which the film is heading piques my curiosity, and we have already outlined 107 Mothers to search for magical moments that arise from the protagonists’ interactions.

What is the ratio of your directing-producing “forces”, since Ivan Ostrochovský also directs, and you also produce?

With Velvet Terrorists and 107 Mothers, there was a completely different relationship between me and Ivan. He invited me to cooperate on Terrorists. So, it was a sort of commission, albeit a looser one. Ivan and Palo Pekarčík asked me to assist with the structure. Luckily, they did not accept my proposition. At work, we follow a single clue – it is such an instant self-reflection – to be able to recognise the vivacity. For this, we have one very important filmmaker in the crew, Martin Kollar, who is our DoP. He epitomises the litmus test of whether what we do is genuine or it is just about maintaining a structure.

How does it manifest itself?

As soon as he starts adding smoke in the background or wondering if something should be burning in the back, I know that he does not enjoy what is going on in front of the camera. The other way around, when it is compelling, it doesn’t really matter that there are just two medium close-ups in which the protagonists merely talk, Martin keeps rolling because he recognises the quality.

The topic of 107 Mothers was originally very broad – the censorship: in art and public space or regarding letter communication in prisons. How did you narrow it down?

At the beginning, there was a large documentary mosaic of various censors. One part of it consisted of prison guards who censor love letters. This took us to Odessa, where we met Irina Alexandrovna. And she fascinated me. Representing such a full-blooded and interesting character, I knew right away that she would be at the heart of the film. Suddenly, other things gradually began to fade away. At once, it started to turn from a documentary into a hybrid film, built around Irina. I realised that she was always at her best only in interactions.
such a way, the individual aspects of her personality can be revealed – acting nice towards someone, but she rebukes the other, and afterwards, it turns out how lonely she is. It drew my attention since Irina leads a very organised life yet remains on her own. On the other hand, she is confronted with women who have three children, each from a different man, whose lives are disorganised, but still – they have the children. Even though they quite burdened them. The kids are growing up in the nick because of the mothers committing a crime, however, they still want to give them a chance, though a small one, that their children will be happy one day. Irina did not give anyone such an opportunity – and I just liked it. You can live a ‘happy’, organised life, but you might be alone, and you can lead a life full of problems, however, you do have at least someone, something.

**How did you feel regarding such a female topic?**

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We started filming in a men’s prison. We had 22 filming days with men, practically, the whole film was done. It made an excellent teaser, which the men complemented with one-liners, but I did not gain any deeper insight. When I looked at the interviews made in the men’s prison, almost nothing could be used in the film. On the other hand, we would be able to make an interesting film out of women’s prison based only on research interviews.

**Why was it so?**

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Apparently, it was all me. Those men certainly have very interesting inner worlds, fears, dreams, ideas, however, I could not get it out of them, while women opened their hearts to me. A big plus was that nothing was based on a presumption. Curiosity was the driving force behind the film. For example, take a question about the limits of love. I was most interested in women who killed their husbands out of jealousy and the very connotation of it – you love someone so badly that you would rather kill them than lose their love or share it with another person.

**Here, however, heat of passion can interfere, sometimes even pathologies. Were you able to stay impartial?**

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There was no need for labels, I only wished to talk to them. Yet, one cannot just walk into prison and say: “Hello, I’m Peter Kerekes, could you please tell me why you killed your husband?” But if you have a film crew, you have an excuse. So, in the film, we requested Irina to ask, even though those are my words. “Why did such an educated and intelligent woman end up in prison?” At once, the older lady explains in front of the camera: “Love.” Then, almost proudly, she elaborates that she killed her husband’s mistress with two blows to the head. Not one blow. Two. Afterwards, she turned herself in. As I see it, that is what defined the relationship of those women towards me. I was truly just curious. Not asking for anything, not bossing them around to say this or that, I only listened.
Currently, we have two feature animated films in production. The first is a 2D/3D film for adults [Death's-Head Horse (Mrtvy kôň)] for which I received a grant from the Slovak Audiovisual Fund. Moreover, a documentary about Palárikova Street in Bratislava. It is my permanent residence, and I wish to celebrate sometime in 2022, when the weather will be nice.

Currently, I focus mainly on film and art projects that were inspired by the topic of anxiety while reflecting it as well. It especially concerns my debut as an author – its pitch has received the Best Febio Pitch Special Mention award from the international jury at the Febiofest Bratislava Industry Days in March. In addition, I am preparing a short film with the French producer Easy Tiger – still being written. My absurd comedyGreetings from Nigeria (Pozdrav z Nigérie) continues to tour various festivals. In my work, I look for diversity. In particular, I am inspired by Galileo. Better if it moves.

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We Cannot Imagine an Emotionless Gaze

Last year, Viera Čákanyová’s film FREM had its international premiere at the Berlinale shortly before the cinemas closed. Czech film critics later described it as the audiovisual achievement of the year. With White on White (Biéla na bielej), the director triumphed at the Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival in the Opus Bonum section and won the award for the Best World Documentary Film.

Interesting to see how short the time was for FREM and White on White to acquire new meanings. In addition, the viewer’s reception of FREM depends to a large extent on the viewer’s experience, which is new at present. How do you perceive it?

I don’t know if the experience of potential viewers can be generalised. Regarding the notorious bubbles, in which people live, there is less and less intersection, and it was probably only intensified by the pandemic. Everyone’s experience is slightly different – it depends on whether they have children, what type of job they have, where they live, what their personality is and how they manage stressful situations. There are people who hardly noticed the pandemic. Others work 12-hour shifts at Covid-19 hospital wards. This represents an extreme range of experiences, and there are a million shades of grey in between. I am aware of the fragility of the system of social and political relations – everything is based on trust. While the state has certain powers and offers some services or assistance, fewer and fewer people seem to feel that what the state provides is useful, functional and worth relying on. In many cases, self-help, self-governing or community mechanisms work much better, they are better directed and more effective, we only lack the “tradition” of solving (especially local) problems in this way. At the same time, many people are perhaps rethinking how they live and what is important to them. They sort what they essentially need and what only exhausts or bothers them. Such experience is good in this manner. However, I’m not sure what happens when these micro-experiences merge into one set.

The coronavirus very quickly showed us, as you say in White on White, “the ephemerality of our toiling”. How did unexpected stop-time affect your life?

Stop-time has been going on for over a year. It was different during the first wave, it is different now. I am quite used to varied types of deprivation, but it is rather tough sometimes. Frequently, even “the ephemerality of our toiling” happens to be the topic of the day. Then it becomes difficult to force yourself to do anything. During the day, it is good to have at least an elementary routine, time reserved for work and rest. That is what I am striving for. I need exercise, so I walk a lot – going on foot to the editing room, wandering. When walking, one is able to clear their head easily. Besides, I am teaching remotely at the Documentary Film Department of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and finishing the third part of the trilogy at the same time. I find it a little amusing, yet one more film is on the way, which broke loose from the swarm of points around the FREM’s theme. The whole film is shot on 8mm and 16mm material, plus I have some lidar scans (digital 3-D representations of areas created by a laser). The material is more or less shot, so the situation suits me this way. As was the case with White on White during the first wave, I can enjoy working in the editing room. Only that the first phase of editing, which is the search for shape, seems more difficult than usual in this situation since it is a totally solitary job. It is good to talk to someone at least once a day, preferably face-to-face.

FREM seeks to convey the view of artificial intelligence. In various experiments, it already writes and paints, but even the most advanced form cannot balance out the absence of emotion. FREM is emotional because even though it offers the view of a machine, there is still a person behind it. It cannot balance out the absence of emotion. I don’t know if it is a positive or a negative. Our world looks the way it does, with everything positive and negative, because we have emotions. It turns out that emotions also play a significant role in mental processes that were previously understood as analytical or rational. We cannot imagine an emotionless gaze. It is impossible, even though such a view would interest me – what kind of “feeling” is the so-called “non-feeling”, such state of mind. We even lack a word for it. Maybe it constitutes a condition that is not just black-and-white. Those shades are “feelings” in some other register of perception or feeling.
Several premieres, including The Man with Hare Ears, were cancelled due to the pandemic. So far, we learned from the summary that the film will be a bit of a surreal work. Did it give you more space to play with image, form?

Yes, I would discuss it in more detail, but people have not yet had the opportunity to see the film, so I would rather not deprive them of surprise. What I can reveal is also clear from the trailer. The film consists of several layers, which reflect multiple levels of the main character’s psyche. Therefore, it was possible to play out the formal composition of the film image in a more varied manner. I approached it with zest and joyfully mixed my full imagination, down to the last drop, into the optimal cocktail of imagination of Martin, architect Fero Lipták and costume designer Katarína Hollá.

A month before the cinemas closed, Charlatan managed to have its Slovak premiere. The film is receiving awards, and for some time, an Oscar nomination seemed to be within reach. It happened to be your third collaboration with Agnieszka Holland. How did your creative communication develop?

During the filming of Janosik: The True Story (Jánošík: Pravdivá história), Agnieszka was a world-famous director in my eyes, and I felt like a greenhorn next to her at the time, having too much respect. Obviously, she deserved it, but I mention it because you try to be overly perfect in such a position, which prevents you from being a bit authentic. During the making of Burning Bush (Hořící keř), I think that respect got on the right track, and I sensed it adequately from Agnieszka’s side as well. With Charlatan, the nascent friendship fully developed, what moved us both from the world of professional relations to the world of mutual trust. It did not remove all the surface friction, but the difference of opinion was addressed openly, clearly and immediately, without plotting and fighting dirty.

We talked about the awards for Charlatan, but among the nominees for the Czech Film Critics’ Awards in the category of short films was also the film S P A C E S (M E Z E R Y) by your daughter Nora Štrbová, which is interesting with regards to both content and form. It is a very personal, intimate film not only for her but also for you. What do you think about it?

In addition to being nominated by Czech critics, S P A C E S won a number of awards around the world, which, unfortunately, Nora could not personally receive because festivals moved into the online space due to the pandemic. I am sorry she could not have experienced the overwhelming acclaim personally. On the other hand, I am pleased that she has not slipped into tearful sentiment, which is always a threat with such sensitive topics, and that she has managed to process it extremely sensitively, with a huge overlap and recognition. Of course, she had the strongest emotional support from us as parents, and that was the only thing, everything else is strictly the result of her authorial approach.

I asked DoP Dodo Šimončič if the work on Lady Winter (Perinbaba), which offers a limited colour palette, was interesting for him, and he grew exhilarated: “But the light!” Light is, of course, the alpha and omega. And what about the shadow?

There is no secret without a shadow. For me, the shadow is one of the most important means of expression. The shadow awakens the viewer’s imagination, awakens in him the ‘co-author’ of the story. Paradoxically, I grew up listening to radio dramas myself. Throughout my childhood, I sat with my ears glued to the radio because my father refused to buy a TV for years. It was thanks to him that films began to be created in my head, when pressed against the radio speaker. It can be said that, at that time, my imagination developed fundamentally.
The Lines (Clairy) is a modern urban symphony about Bratislava, the little big Slovak metropolis, an (un)planned city that is constantly being redrawn, constantly being born, full of thick lines and fine cracks as well as crammed with people and their loneliness. The Lines is documentary filmmaker Barbora Sliepková’s feature debut, which she began working on during her studies at the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (FTF VŠMU).}

The film was produced by HITCHHIKER Cinema, which has additionally produced two other feature documentary debuts by young graduates from the FTF VŠMU: Dominik Jurča’s The Golden Land (Zlaté zem), and Jakub Julény’s The Commune (Komína), both also in the last year. The cooperation of HITCHHIKER Cinema with Ingrid Mayrová, a dramaturge who is the head of the Documentary Film Department at the faculty as well, helped the graduates to enter the professional environment. “All three filmmakers were introduced to Hitchhiker by Ingrid, the Commune was even based on her idea. She is largely credited with the thematic and author’s portfolio of our company today. I have great respect for the talent, courage and determination of these young directors; it’s safe to say that thanks to their debuts, we have all grown. In a sense, every new film constitutes a debut for me personally,” says Barbara Janišová Feglová, producer of HITCHHIKER Cinema.

The story, from which The Lines evolved, was written by Barbora Sliepková as an academic work, although it was not executed at that time. “It contained fictional characters, archetypes I had not met yet,” she says of the genesis of her film. In the fourth year, however, she made a short documentary debuts by young graduates from the FTF VŠMU: The Commune (Komína), both also in the last year.

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The Power to Replace Reality With the Pretense of Truth

Director Mátyás Prídlér debuted with his feature narrative film Fine, Thanks (Dobývaj, dobý) in 2012, and one of the film’s main stories was already presented within the Cinéfondation Selection at the Cannes Film Festival in 2020. Prídlér’s second feature Power (Moc) explores the functioning of politics and deals with its influential figures as well as the mechanisms of power. The filmmakers are playing with the genre of political thriller, however, nature was at play too – not quite complying with their wishes, so the shooting had to be put off twice.

“The topic of power and helplessness along with their forms in contemporary society has fascinated me and director Mátyás Prídlér for a long time. We have been searching for a story that would be the starting point for a film adaptation. In this manner, it introduces a prominent politician who accidentally kills a man during a hunting trip and discusses dilemmas of power, helplessness of the powerful and power of the helpless,” says producer Zora Jáurová for Film.sk. Together with Mátyás Prídlér, she produced the film in the company MPfilme. “Our film is consciously playing with the genre of political thriller, and its protagonist is minister Benger, who is currently running for a major international post. However, as is usual in this genre, the real protagonist is the inconspicuous agent Steiner. Through the interplay of various circumstances, he finds himself in the role of a director and has the opportunity to influence several stories,” explains the producer.

Agent Steiner’s role is to cover up the whole hunting case so that even hesitant participants would be convinced that it is for the best. The final version of the truth, what the world will accept, depends on him. He is creating an alternative story that may seem eventually more realistic than reality itself. Thus, in addition to the mechanisms of power, the film also reveals the true identities of politicians who hide behind public masks and deals with the topic of power. “Steiner is the ‘director’ of the whole operation, and his work bears resemblance to the filmmaking process. Arriving at the village to receive the location, he familiarizes himself with the surroundings and, so to speak, starts casting – he finds a suitable candidate who takes all the blame,” Prídlér describes in the film’s explication for the Audiovisual Fund. He cast Hungarian director and actor Szabolcs Hajdu in the role of Steiner. The cast of the film reflects the Slovak-Hungarian-Czech co-production. Following characters are portrayed by Mihály Kormos, Jan Kačer, Miroslav Krbovt, Attila Molok, Švábándor and Ingrid Tímková, while co-producers of the film are the Hungarian company Proton Cinema, the Czech company Negativ and Radio and Television Slovakia. “Márek Lešiček is the author of the original screenplay, and he has been collaborating with Mátyás Prídlér for a long time. Hungarian DoP György Pállos, who has been working with well-known Swedish director Ray Anderson on several occasions, contributed significantly to the final visual outcome,” explains producer Zora Jáurová. “Michal Lonoský and Anna Novotná designed an artistic component of the film which was shot in a muted black-and-white colour range with a hint of the timeless void of the present day,” adds Jáurová.

The filmmakers describe Power as a winter film that can be shot two to three months a year because it takes place in a snowy country. This, for various reasons, complicated the process, and the whole shooting had to be set back for a year twice. “We have been working on this film for a really long time. Although we have done several other film projects alongside, it was probably the most complex experience with a large international film production for us, from the initial idea through a lot of creative work and the development of rather demanding production strategy the film is funded by nine different sources all the way to filming during the pandemic,” says the producer. “The film is grounded and devised without any artistic compromises. Despite the production complications, I am very happy that we did not go for the easy way out, even though it meant difficult production decisions several times,” describes Jáurová. “Today, as we finish the film, I am fully aware that the result is not proportional only to the time and energy we put into it. Above all, it reflects the fact that we made the film with a team of people with whom we are in tune, both creatively and also as friends,” she concludes.

Joanna Kotouch made her debut in 2014 with Fongo-polis, 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… 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 Kotouch in the author’s explication for the Slovak Audiovisual Fund. “I was standing on a high cliff watching the dry, 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,” Kotouch 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 screenplay, 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.”

Screenwriter Katariina Molokhová and dramaturges Phil Parker and Barbora Budinská also collaborated on the film, at a later stage, editor Marek Šulík, master musician Dušan Kožák and composer Martin Hasák put their shoulder to the wheel. The Slovak producer of the film is Peter Badatí from the company BFLM, 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. “Once there was a sea… was awarded at the presentation Animated in Poland on Krakow FF 2022.”

An interactive educational project is also being created to support the film and its topic, and its outcomes will be added to Oncetherewasasea.com.

Once There Was a Sea… (SK/PL, 2021, dir. Joanna Kotouch)
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 shear 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.

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

In the introductory phase, screenwriter 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 screenplay, the creators attended the ScriptFirst workshop, where they consulted with experts, such as screenwriter 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 Badal 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. In the film, she collaborated with American DoP Federico Cesca, and Slovak actresses Natálie Germáni and Eva Mozes play the lead roles.

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

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

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 eternities – whether one’s own or somebody else’s, which is the cause 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, such as 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 film, 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.

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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?

— 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 Mitic – 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?

— 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 only for the films by two great Slovak filmmakers: Dušan Hanák and Juraj Jakubisko. Directors like Palo Bielič, Štefan Uher, Peter Solan, Karel Kuklík, Jaroslav Basl or Viktor Kuhal 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 (Pripad Barnabáš Kos, 1964) had an amazing world tour – Lumière Lyon, Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, CineFan Hong Kong, Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. When the world was reopened due to the pandemic, in the beginning of June, 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, we 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 set 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 process 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 the beginning of June. Otherwise, it does not practically 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.

A Promise of Eastern Exotica Is Not Enough

Martin Hollý’s Night Riders (Noční jezdecké, 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 2013, 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 film festivals several times a year.

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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 Odeon 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 Cuaron, 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.

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 Barnabás 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 The Slovak Film Institute being presented with Anna Karina or William Friedkin in the same gallery on the festival website, it’s a strange yet 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.

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 necessarily 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 screenwriter, can you elaborate on that?

That sense of improvisation or working with 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 screenwriter, can you elaborate on that?

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 screenplay, but it could never have been realised in that form. By that time, Marlene was already in a wheelchair, and she didn’t want to spoil her image as a diva. But Schell managed to record an amazing interview with her that she refused to give to other very famous filmmakers. He had a terrific charisma as an actor, and he was able to captivate her with it. On Marlene’s side, there was also some sort of peculiar provoking interest. It ended with me putting the film together again in the editing room. It was actually a retroactive creation of the screenplay. Anyway, the film, archive materials based on this interview 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.

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Elo Havetta - Destined for the Miracle of Cinema

“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,” writes Vincent Sikula 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 botanické 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 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. Doňo Dodo Simčíč was overseeing that they stay true to the original. In 1989, in the magazine Film a doba, film historian Václav Macák liked the significance of Havetta’s work to the work of Ludovít Fulla and Mikušák Galanda and what they meant for Slovak fine art and its contact with the outside world in the 1950s. According to Macék, Havetta and his peers in the late 1960s overcame the regionalism 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 an article about Šikula’s sex, gender discrimination film (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 see eye to eye on the choice and casualness 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 osameléj 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 Cinema, just to show them. You idiots, it is a miracle, what a beast!”

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 constructed by prohibitions and defined 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 argue Albert Marentín 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 to and to roam freely like nomads. In Peter Mikušák’s text in the daily Práza, 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.

—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 of Tenderness offers the aforementioned booklet, Šulík’s short film Horor (1980) 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 con-text, 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 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, offers the aforementioned booklet, Šulík’s short film Horor (1980) 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 con-text, 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 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.
The story is mentioned by Elmar Klas Jr. in one of the bonus interviews prepared by the Slovak Film Institute for the new edition of The Shop on Main Street. Klas, who visited the actor Jiří Vondra, says that “The Shop on Main Street was a film that had a huge impact on me.” Klas says that the film influenced his desire to become an actor. According to Klas, the film’s influence was so strong that he decided to study acting in Prague at the Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts.

In fact, before and after the filming, The Shop on Main Street was not entirely welcomed at home. A note from a critic for the newspaper “Národní filmový archiv Praha” comments on the film, saying that it is “one of the most arresting and devastating pictures of time.” The film was released on DVD and Blu-ray, and it received critical acclaim for its depiction of the past.

The convincing portrayal of the outcasts outraged the audience, and the film became a turning point in the history of the film world. It was a coincidence that The Shop on Main Street was among the first films released in Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The film was a major success at the New York Film Critics Award and won the New York Film Critics Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

For the writer Dušan Dušek, who made his directorial debut with Rosy Dreams, the film was also a documentary about the time in which it was made. The older they are, the more significant is its 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 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 (Jura) Novotný, a kind-hearted white postman, falls in love with Jolanka (Iva Bitová), a Roma girl, was seen by spectators at many festivals. Abroad, Hanák’s sense of poetry, authenticity but also his sensitivity and humanity, which is not malicious, were appreciated. “It seemed important to us as a film 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.

Dušan Hanák’s poetic comedy Rosy Dreams (Rušove sny, 1976) was a hit, but the tragicomedy I Love, You Love (Ja miluju, 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.

― text Matúš Kvasnička —
It is one of the last cinemas in the world that screens 35mm films on (almost) daily basis, most often in its FIAP screen called ‘Filmostka’,” 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 only for 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 37,000 spectators attended the screenings of Slovak and European films by March 9,” says Peter Dubec ký, 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 Dubec ký, 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, profi led as a ‘repertoire arthouse’ with 70 screenings per week, the domestic film Sumbag (Svíla, dir. Marína Čengel Soľanská, Rudolf Biermann) came second right behind the South Korean Parasi te (dir. Bong Joon-ho). Three more Slovak co-productions ended up in the top ten. Last year, Kino Lumière responded to the pandemic in mid-April with the first online screenings, streamed in real time. ‘Handy 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 Audio Visual 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 Flibo fest Bratislava, One World, Be2Can, the Slovak Queer Film Festival and MittelCinemaFest 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 kinds of 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.
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. As a result, 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.

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—

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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, stíhna 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).

**Summer Rebels**

In 2020, the renewed premiere of Stefan 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 *History of Slovak Cinematography* from 1999, 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 chief 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 Ela 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 between artists and criminals. At the same time, however, it manages to portray the protagonists mainly as artists of life.

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**No Cheap Exotics, Neither Real Adventure**

Unlike the films Scumbug 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 Ivetra Grófová’s *Little Harbour* (Pláza led), 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 Slovak-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.

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Servants’ theme revolves around the collaboration 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 not 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...
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 Blažek, 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 Lučeník. However, the director keeps the confrontations at bay, the work does not bear anything controversial eventually, after...
Patrick “Rytmus” Vrbkovský already has his “own” film. **RYTMUS: A Dream from the Block (Rytmus: Sládkovský 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 Divadlo a film, 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

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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.

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- **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 (Hokejovej seni) 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 Váňous 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 smooth in dramaturgical sense, in this case it is not a hindrance, moreover, several Slovak documentarians struggle with similar problems when sketching.**

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

-- The creators of the documentary Vide 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 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.

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- **Seemingly, neither Paradox 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. Paradox 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.**

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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 179,339 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.

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- **Domińczik Jaular’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 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.**

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- **Unaffected by slogans and labels, Pavol Barabáš presents his next expedition to beautiful nature. Together with Barabáš and his team, we will absorb 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 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 with a quasi-only global theme, affecting all areas of our lives, could be giving us a hint...**

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- **It cannot be predicted with absolute certainty what the year 2021 will bring (if we do not count the postponed premières), although the past turbulent year with a quasi-only global theme, affecting all areas of our lives, could be giving us a hint...**
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 premieres on the big screen. Though less striking compared to *SH_T HAPPENS*, they offered looser interpretative frameworks.

*Fruit of the Days* (2020) by Peter Martinka, alias Szilárd 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.

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.
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 Test Anča managed to be held in person in Žilina during the pandemic time, the Student Film Festival Ačko took place online. This year, an animated film about nuclear tests in America Daylight (2020) by Michaela Hybelová, 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.

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 a tajomstvo snehových vločiek, 2020) appears as a regular Christmas special. At first glance, her film Cate Strophe Saving Christmas (Kata Strafová 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 understand-able. In a typical Christmas film, what prevails is the Christmas atmosphere, sentimentality and pathos.
The year 2020 started very promising. 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 and subsequent protection of the health of visitors, for the first time, all cinemas in Slovakia were forced to close on 10 March.

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 2,364,834 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 premiers of American blockbusters being postponed to 2021, the share of domestic films attendance increased throughout Europe. Slovakia was not an 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% of domestic films (including non-premiere titles and minority co-productions) in 2020 (nine feature films – of which seven are minority co-productions) was 4.21% in 2018, it increased to 16.47% in 2020 (nine feature films – of which seven are minority co-productions). Together with the domestic films attendance increased throughout Europe. Slovakia was not an 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 2020 (nine feature films – of which seven are minority co-productions).

The results of premiered films do not include the numbers related to The Auschwitz Report (Správa, SK/CZ, 2020, dir. Peter Bebják), which was screened for one week in a cinema in Čadca in order to meet the conditions required for the National Film Awards. The Academy Award submission in the category of Best International Feature, nor screenings of Shadow Country (Alchymická pec, CZ, 2020, dir. Alexandra Májová, Kateřina Karhánková).

The best-attended domestic documentaries were Caught in the Net (V sieti, CZ/SK, 2020, dir. Vít Klusák, Barbora Chalupová) and the Academy Award submission in the category of Best International Film, nor screenings of Shadow Country (Alchymická pec, CZ, 2020, dir. Alexandra Májová, Kateřina Karhánková).

**Slovak Films were released to cinemas by seven distributors.**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLOVAK TITLE / ENGLISH TITLE</th>
<th>DIRECTOR</th>
<th>YEAR OF PRODUCTION</th>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>PREMIERE DATE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SCREENINGS</th>
<th>VISITORS</th>
<th>GROSS BOX OFFICE (€)</th>
<th>DISTRIBUTION FEATURE</th>
<th>AMC*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Tempus</td>
<td>Nazarz Klýš, Roman Kalémon, Martin Klýš</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>27-02-2020</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>23,491</td>
<td>150,015</td>
<td>Continental Film</td>
<td>28.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sládečkovi / Servants</td>
<td>Jan Ostrachovský</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>SK/RO/CZ/DE</td>
<td>10-12-2020</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>1,442</td>
<td>5,087</td>
<td>Fílmopis</td>
<td>10.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Raj na svet / Paradise on Earth</td>
<td>Juraj Vojtčak</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>01-10-2020</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>2,249</td>
<td>ASFK</td>
<td>9.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Zlata zem</td>
<td>Dominik Jurca</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>25-6-2020</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>Film Expanded</td>
<td>10.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Milan Sládek</td>
<td>Martin Sládek</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>08-10-2020</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>DDF</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Kriká víťaz / Video Kings</td>
<td>Lukáš Baláva</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>SK/CZ</td>
<td>17-12-2020</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>Continental Film</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUBTOTAL 100% Slovak Films and Majority Co-Productions 8,066 444,150 2,804,332 55.31**

**Minority Co-Productions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLOVAK TITLE / ENGLISH TITLE</th>
<th>DIRCTOR</th>
<th>YEAR OF PRODUCTION</th>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>PREMIERE DATE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SCREENINGS</th>
<th>VISITORS</th>
<th>GROSS BOX OFFICE (€)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Príliš osobná známost / Far Too Personal</td>
<td>Marta Ferencová</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>16-01-2020</td>
<td>2,087</td>
<td>176,080</td>
<td>1,070,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Šrátalat / Chaletland</td>
<td>Agnieszka Holland</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>CZ/PL/F/SE</td>
<td>20-08-2020</td>
<td>1,375</td>
<td>27,671</td>
<td>160,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bouزez / The Bargain</td>
<td>Ondřej Trojan</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>SK/CZ</td>
<td>02-07-2020</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>5,150</td>
<td>30,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. FREM</td>
<td>Viera Čákyová</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>17-9-2019</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>1,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Šťastný / Old Times</td>
<td>Martin Dutík, Ondřej Provenčák</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>10-9-2010</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>1,814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Milof / Parden</td>
<td>Jan Jakub Kolíč</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>PL/CZ</td>
<td>16-1-2021</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>1,531</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUBTOTAL Minority Co-Productions 6,957 234,558 1,412,061 33.72**

**TOTAL All Slovak and Co-produced Premiered Films 15,023 680,708 4,220,293 45.31**

**TOTAL 17,065 774,487 4,794,271 45.44**

**Note:** Films are arranged by the number of visitors.

**Source:** Union of Film Distributors of the Slovak Republic

**Note:** AMC* represents the average attendance for screenings in both domestic and international markets.
Slovak Film Institute and Second Run present a Slovak film classic

**Before Tonight is Over**
(Kým sa skončí táto noc)
dir. Peter Solan (1965)

World premiere on Blu-ray
Released on June 14

“A remarkably fluid, free-flowing affair, reveling in the caprices of its liquored-up characters... it’s a joyous discovery and essential catch-up viewing for anyone already bitten by the Czechoslovakian New Wave bug.”

CERISE HOWARD
SENSES OF CINEMA

**Special features:**
- Presented from the new 2K HD master
- A Conversation About Peter Solan and His Film 'Before Tonight is Over' (2020) – a newly filmed appreciation of the film
- Two contemporaneous short films reflecting the locale and milieu of the film: Operation BL (Akcia BL, 1959) and High Tatras (Vysoké Tatry, 1966)
- A 20-page booklet featuring new writing on the film by author Peter Hames

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Morris Chapdelaine, producer of Van Helsing

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