

film



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Cannes
Edition 2021



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

EUROPEAN FILM MARKET,
BERLINALE



MARCHÉ DU FILM,
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



editorial



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* – the *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 their country? What Slovak films are about to be screened at the prestigious festival? 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 – the *Cannes & Karlovy Vary Edition 2021*. ◀

— Veronika Krejčová / executive editor —

THE HISTORY AND PRESENT OF THE SLOVAK FILM INSTITUTE

The Slovak Film Institute (SFI) is the sole state-funded memory and archive institution operating in the area of audiovision in Slovakia. The National Film Archive and the National Cinematographic Centre are the SFI's basic organisational units. The SFI is a member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), European Film Promotion (since 2006); it operates as a service workplace for the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO) and the Council of Europe cinema support fund – Eurimages. Creative Europe Desk Slovensko is also part of the Slovak Film Institute.

The Film Institute in Bratislava was established on 1st April 1963. The film archive, which was established in 1958, also became part of the Institute. In 1970, the SFI was presented with a copy of the first Slovak feature film *Jánošík* (dir. Jaroslav Siakeľ, 1921) which was later restored and provided with a soundtrack.

By the end of 1976, the Film Club of the Central Office of Slovak Film was opened in Bratislava. Cinema Lumière, opened in 2011 and operated by the SFI, is located on its premises at the present day.

In January 1991, the National Cinematographic Centre was established as an independent public contributory organisation managed by the Ministry of Culture. By delimitation, the SFI acquired producer rights to the archived Slovak films made before 1991.

Institute played a part in the preparation of the extensive publication entitled **History of Slovak Cinema** (*Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie*, 1997; updated issue 2016). In 2002, the SFI published its first DVD; since then, it has published dozens of other DVDs, which are now available with everything else related to films at the SFI's online shop *Klapka.sk*, opened in 2008. In 2002, the SFI started to implement the long-term integrated audiovisual information system project SK CINEMA.

In 2006, the Government adopted the draft Project of the Systematic Restoration of Audiovisual Cultural Heritage with the objective of rescuing cinematographic and audiovisual works and gradually making them accessible to the public. This is the SFI's long-term priority project.

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

Film.sk, the only printed film monthly in Slovakia, has been published by the SFI since 2000. During the 21 years of its existence, it has undergone other format and conceptual changes, but the goals remain to provide a wide range of information and opinions from the domestic audiovisual environment, capable of appealing to film experts and the wider public alike. The website www.filmsk.sk has supported its printed version since 2001. ◀

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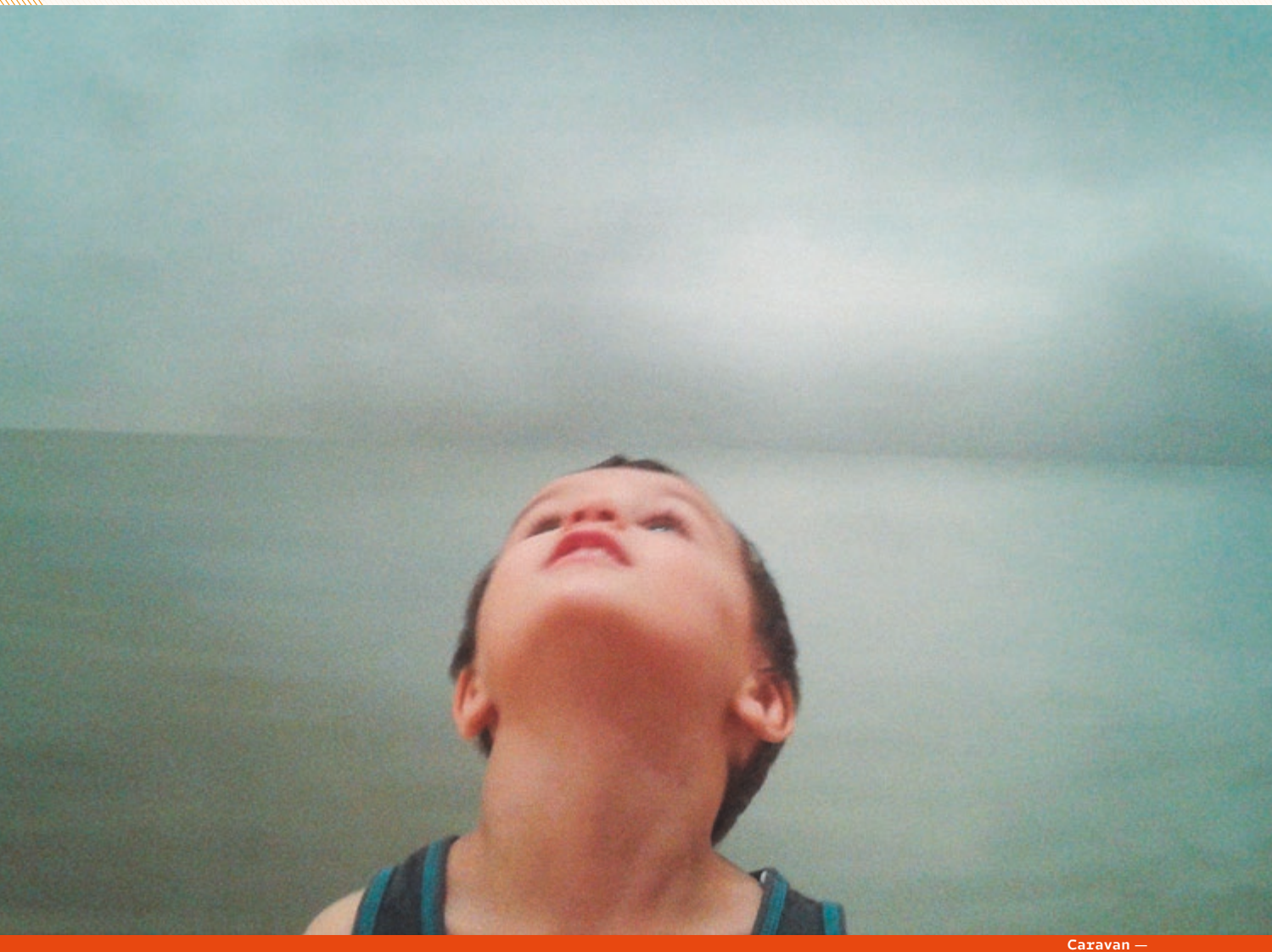
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Personal Stories to Be Presented in Cannes



Caravan —

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** (Správa o záchrane mŕtveho) 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.

“People with disabilities are often portrayed as cute, kind and a little silly in films. In my experience, this view is very limiting. On that account, when writing the screenplay, I tried to avoid false poetics or romanticising the mental disability. David is supposed to be a complex character with positive and negative personality traits,” says screenwriter and director Zuzana Kirchnerová about the main character of her upcoming film *Caravan*. “My son was born with Down syndrome and gradually developed autism. However, my fiction film is not purely autobiographical,” Kirchnerová explains. With Ester, the female protagonist of the story, she said to have in common the love for her child and the need to protect him as well as the desire to escape sometimes. “The story channels a personal wish to rebel and resist the role of a mother of a disabled child. For a long time, I struggled to find a way to capture it without being drawn into the expected smooth waters of social drama, into the pathos of emotional blackmail. Road movie happens to be the best possible way how to express Ester’s almost aggressive hunger for life,” says Kirchnerová.

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* (Obet'). 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* (Piata loď)] 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. “It all depends on the extent to which the filmmaker has individually dealt with a certain topic. If not processed yet, it should be avoided to cobble the whole thing together. Luckily, that was not Václav’s case. However, he was still 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 recently 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

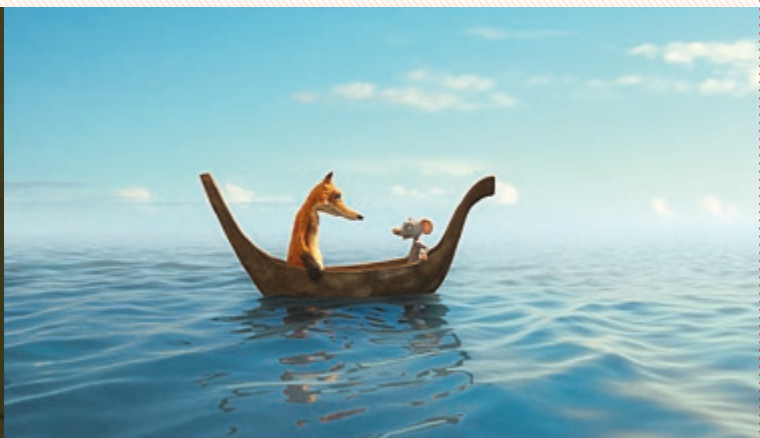


Saving One Who Was Dead —

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.” ◀



My Sunny Maad —



Even Mice Belong in Heaven —

Annecy: Competing After Thirty Years

Feature animated film by award-winning director Michaela Pavlátová **My Sunny Maad** (Moje slnko Maad) tells the story of Helena alias Herra, a Czech woman, who falls in love with Nazir, 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** (Motýlí čas) by director Břetislav Pojar. For Pavlátová, **My Sunny is 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 **Frišta**, 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.

Another film with Slovak participation, created in even bigger international collaboration, world-premiered in Annecy, although not competing. Vladimír Lhoták 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** (Myši patria do neba). Next co-producers came to be Czech, French and Polish partners, Slovakia is represented by Marek Jeníček and Tomáš Janísek from CinemArt 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 Denisa Grimmová and Jan Bubeníček who directed the film together. Both were pupils of already mentioned Břetislav Pojar. “It is a film about looking for love and truth, which are often closer than we think,” the filmmakers 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 will take part in **Meet the... Producers - Gap Financing** program. ◀



Katarína Tomková Is Producer on the Move

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 Úsvit, dir. Mária Rumanová, 2016) or **Servants** (Služobníci, dir. Ivan Ostrochovský, 2020).

“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 environment 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 Encounters at the 2020 Berlinale. Katarína is currently in post-production on Peter Kerekes’ feature **107 Mothers** (Cenzorka) and Juraj Lehotský’s third feature **Applause** (Potlesk).

“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 Kerekes and DoP Martin Kollar worked,” she describes the transformation of **107 Mothers** from a documentary into 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 Jelenek to take further action,” Tomková describes the filming, in which the Polish actor Bartosz Bielenia plays the lead role. The cast involves German actor Sabin Tambrea, Slovak actress Judit Bárdos and non-actor Vojtěch Zdražil.

The Producers on the Move initiative was established in 2000, 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 Heinen, European Film Promotion Managing Director. “And, who knows, if all goes well and many of the producers on the Move are able to make the journey, we might even have a chance of meeting in person at the festival in Cannes in July,” she concludes. ◀

— text: Matúš Kvasnička —
photo: archive of Katarína Tomková —



— text: Matúš Kvasnička —
photo: Miro Nôta —

Either We or the Internet and YouTube Will Educate the Viewer

Katarína Krnáčová produced *Little Harbour* (Piata loď, 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* (Správa o záchrane mŕtveho) 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.

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?

———— Without educating the viewer, I am afraid that such films, especially after the pandemic, will

wind up either online or on television. There used to be a tradition of family films, but the continuity was broken. The idea that a whole family goes to the cinema to see a film that is understandable as well as entertaining for both children and parents or grandparents is becoming increasingly rare. It is more convenient for a parent to turn on the TV for kids and just go and do something else. So, it also raises a question of whether we aim to educate the generation clinging to Youtube, or we will introduce them to the cinema world, bringing up compelling topics. Optimists believe that after the pandemic, people are about to be hungry for experiences and opt for a cinema. I think they may rather have a barbecue or attend an open air concert. At the cinema, which is an enclosed space, they could possibly ask: Is it really safe? Moreover, many do struggle with financial problems, and a family visit to the cinema accounts for an expensive concept. As producers, we will have to be more adaptable and much more active to attract the viewers.

How “audience-oriented” will *Saving One Who Was Dead* by Václav Kadrnka be? When his *Little Crusader* (Křižáček) won in Karlovy Vary, it stirred a discussion about being “defiantly not an audience darling”.

————— In this manner, *Little Crusader* is truly ambiguous. Viewers either loved it or hated it. Nothing in between, no chance that it would receive a lukewarm reaction. For me, it was a total delight. Looking forward to it, I saw it in the cinema on the big screen, which is fundamental, and I was ready for this type of film. A viewer going to the cinema must be willing to be percipient. Vašek filmed *Eighty Letters* (Osmdesát dopisů, 2011) before *Little Crusader*, and *Saving One Who Was Dead* concludes the trilogy in a way. These films share a lot in common, but *Saving One Who Was Dead* seems to be the most accessible one. The illness of a loved one is a topic that many can relate to. Adapted in the form of a film poem, if the viewers open up, they can be almost enchanted by its purity and sincerity. I do not expect it to attract the masses, such ambition was never taken into account. However, it can certainly reach a wider audience.

What captivated you about Margita Czóbelová, about whom you are developing a series *The Last Baroness* (Posledná barónka)?

————— She was born at the end of the 19th century into the “rose-coloured” world of the aristocracy. When she grew up, the First World War came, the end of the monarchy, then the second war and the Bolsheviks... Completely disparate worlds than the one they had been preparing her for years. She lived her whole life in a manor house where she was born, successfully coped with all the challenges, and she was smart and brave enough to preserve the heritage of the whole family, the manor as well as the huge artistic legacy of her uncle Ladislav Medňanský. Nowadays, it is under the administration of the Slovak National Gallery. Many art works of enormous

value were found by the workers during the reconstruction of the manor, rolled up in various tubes in the walls. The Baroness was an incredibly strong woman, though thin, short and in poor health. I was also fascinated by the opportunity to show the intellectually full life of the aristocracy, a social class that was devastated and suffocated by 20th-century regimes. The state of society today is largely related to the fact that we once destroyed part of the intelligentsia. In our period films, aristocracy is mostly portrayed as an exploiter who treats their subjects as they please. We are lacking films that would depict their pros and cons and draw attention to the enormous cultural and intellectual contribution.

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* 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.”



— text: Mária Ferenčuhová —
photo: Miro Nôta —

Searching for Magical Moments

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).

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. In

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?

————— 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?

————— 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 contradiction 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?

————— 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.

Did you lack women in the crew? The concept of the film is, perhaps a little stereotypically, female-focused, but the prison institution is, again stereotypically, male. Stereotypes are challenged by the prisoners themselves, especially Irina, who – dressed in a uniform as well as in a bathing suit or a bathrobe – mixes up the gender roles a bit.

————— We realised that we were a male crew, but it did not bother us much, we were not itching to hire a female camera operator just to have a woman among us. It is not about a gender perspective. The fundamental question concerns everyone: Who is really interested in our lives? Who cares what we truly think, without pursuing their own interests or judging us? It was a huge luxury for me to be able to sit with the protagonists and just talk to them. It has facilitated creating a space for stratification and trust. However, there is nothing strange about that – one opens up when feeling others’ interest.

How did you make the final cut?

————— We were choosing from a huge amount of material and from several storylines. Some had to be scratched, such as the prison wedding one. A friend of the protagonist, the imprisoned mother, was to marry. We filmed visits, censoring of the love letters, even a wedding night with erotic scenes, but it was not included in the film in the end because it would distract us from the main storyline, which is about finding a foster home for the main character’s son. We were noticing something, a situation, some scene, and we shot it straight away. That is how we worked. In this manner, for example, the scene of the beginning of the school year, where prisoners are dressed in school uniforms, made it into the film – it is such a post-Soviet tradition. Not only a visually interesting motif, it also constitutes a strong symbol that showed the mother and her child in a different light, especially in the context of the prison.

You made historical films, even slightly experimental ones, as well as a series on counterfactual history.

What about making a mockumentary?

————— I am not interested in imitation. I am curious about how people express themselves in a film, not what imitates reality.

What about a feature with quite a fixed screenplay, not just an outline?

————— I have just finished adapting the text of Dušan Šimek *Marathon of Juan Zabala* (Maratón Juana Zabalu) with Juraj Raýman. The film will be a historical epic, therefore, a storyboard and precise schedule is a must. It represents something completely different again, new, but that is what makes me excited about directing. ◀





What are they up to?



Zuzana Piusi

[director and documentary filmmaker]

At the moment, I am traveling by train to Bratislava, we have an acting rehearsal, and then we start shooting a fiction film **Unbalanced** (Zošaliet'). I have a costume with me, it includes crutches. When I was in a hurry, trying to catch the train, people started helping me. Well, that was a first! Sitting here, I am watching a documentary by Adam Curtis. I say to myself that everything has already been filmed, we are overwhelmed with videos, all you have to do is "wisely connect" all the dots in the world. What is important is an analysis without ideology, an attempt to guide people to look at the world outside their social bubble and to be able to understand the feelings and motivations of those in other bubbles. After the film comes out, I am curious about the discussion since I believe that a good film can initiate an intriguing debate. Suddenly, it makes sense why liberals are the better and more tolerant ones. So, the search continues... I love traveling by train.



Martin Šulík

[director]

Time both flies and stands still. Together with Marek Leščák, we are writing a screenplay. Right now, I am shooting a documentary about the painter Laco Teren, and I am curious how the audience will accept **The Man with Hare Ears** (Muž so zajačími ušami). The premiere is already two years overdue.



Zuzana Mistríková

[producer]

We are preparing to shoot a new period film **Ema & Death's-Head** (Ema a smrťhlav, SK / CZ / HU) by Iveta Grófová [**Little Harbor** (Piata lod'), Berlinale 2017, Crystal Bear for the Best Film Generation Kplus]] with Alexandra Borbély in the lead role. At the same time, we are developing a four-part miniseries by Tereza Nvotová [**Filthy** (Špina), IFF Rotterdam 2017)] **Convictions**, adapted for television from Jo Langer's memoir **Convictions: My Life with a Good Communist**, published in 1979. The project is created in a Slovak-Czech-Hungarian co-production, which has already engaged Czech and Slovak public televisions as well.



Juraj Krasnohorský

[producer]

Currently, we have two feature animated films in production. The first is a 2D/3D film for adults **White Plastic Sky** (Umelohmotné nebo, dir. Tibor Bánóczki, Sarolta Szabó), co-produced with Hungary with the support of Eurimages and scheduled for a premiere in 2022. The second is **Of Unwanted Things and People** [O nepotrebných veciach a ľudoch, dir. Martin Smatana (Slovak part)], a family stop motion film which is co-produced with Czechia, Slovenia and France. We recently premiered **Icons** (Ikony), an exclusive series of 12 documentaries on the Socialist architecture. The first season comes out internationally, and we are launching the making of the second season.



Barbora Berezňáková

[director, screenwriter]

I am finishing a short experimental documentary **Strigov** now – 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 working on the screenplay for a feature film **The Dead Horse** (Mŕtvy kôň) for which I received a grant from the Slovak Audiovisual Fund. Moreover, a documentary about relationships and love in the feminism times is being developed. On top of everything else, I am also preparing an experimental documentary book on the 120th birthday of Palárikova Street in Bratislava. It is my permanent residence, and I wish to celebrate sometime in 2022, when the weather will be nice.



Peter Hoferica

[director]

I am completing my student film **Maverick (Of Hen and Men)** [Samorast (O sliepkach a ľudoch)], a comedy to finish my Direction of Live-Action Film studies at the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. In addition, with producer Peter Kelišek and screenwriters, we are writing the second season of a comedy series **The Worst Week of My Life** (Najhorší týždeň môjho života). During the summer, I will probably participate in filming of a daily television series **Dear Daddies** (Oteckovia). Meanwhile, I am preparing a short film with the French producer Easy Tiger – still being written. My absurd comedy **Greetings 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.



Paula Ďurinová

[documentary filmmaker, photographer and journalist]

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 – **Insides** (Interiéry), a feature documentary which is being developed internationally in Berlin, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Through a group of people, the film examines how present anxiety-inducing society affects our lives and explores the possibilities of collective healing strategies. At the same time, I study experimental film at the Universität der Künste Berlin, I am curating an exhibition project and developing a short experimental film that deals with the feeling of sorrow through natural elements. ◀

— text: Mariana Jaremková / film journalist —
photo: Miro Nôta —

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* (*Biela 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. ◀





— text: Mariana Jaremková / film journalist —
photo: Garfield film —

No Secret Without a Shadow

He was behind the camera of all Martin Šulík's feature films, and his third collaboration with director Agnieszka Holland premiered last year. In March, DoP Martin Štrba won the Czech Lion award for Holland's *Charlatan* (Šarlatán). The fifth of nineteen nominations. Štrba may receive the twentieth nomination next year if the cinemas open by then, so Šulík's upcoming film *The Man with Hare Ears* (Muž so zajačími ušami) will be released.

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 Šimončíč 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. ◀

— text: Mária Ferenčuhová —
photo: HITCHHIKER Cinema —

Lines, Wrinkles and City Limits

The Lines (Čiary) 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 Jursa's *The Golden Land* (Zlatá zem) and Jakub Julény's *The Commune* (Komúna), both also in the last year. The cooperation of HITCHHIKER Cinema with Ingrid Mayerová, 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 film *Loggia* which already served as a preparatory work for a longer shooting with one of the protagonists of *The Lines*. "It was perhaps thanks to the success of the bachelor's short film *About My Sister* (O sestre) that I had the courage to plunge into developing a feature. Nevertheless, with the support of Barbara Janišová Feglová and Ingrid Mayerová, I learned a great deal while working on the film and grown a lot professionally." And what was it like to end up with an ambitious feature-length project in a professional environment? "When preparing for *The Lines*, there was more thorough time management as well as the necessity to bear the crew in mind much more – filming was no longer a school game, exploration, it was their daily bread," Sliepková explains. "I had to learn to convince both myself and the crew of the importance of what

we were filming together. I am very grateful to them for their work. Previously, I usually worked alone or with one sound engineer or cameraman. I had to get used to being more of a director, to lead them and also shape the reality in front of the camera."

— Shaping the film was a long and complex process. "The initial idea was great but difficult to turn into a film. It accounted for endless hours of discussions, doubt and setbacks. Nevertheless, I cannot imagine it being any different because, after all, it is a film d'auteur, providing a personal account. It was filmed from the very beginning, and we continuously examined the material," says producer Barbara Janišová Feglová regarding the author's and production approach and adds: "For us, each public presentation was a mobilisation and a test of whether we are understandable and that our ideas resonate with potential audiences. Even during the development phase, we presented the project in Bratislava at Febiofest Works in Progress where *The Lines* already received positive feedback. Last year, we won Docs in Progress at the Eastern Promises forum at the festival in Karlovy Vary, and we also participated in the Slovak module of the dok.incubator workshop, which helped us in the final phase of editing."

— The author's view, artistic research of the urban space and human stories finally formed an impressive essay about the city. "With *The Lines*, it was clear at every stage that we would see Bratislava from a very personal point of view, so we looked for a balance between what the individual characters are reporting and how specific their stories should be. As a result, we see a subtle tangle of micro-stories against the background of a changing city. The visual identity and language are very distinct, in terms of genre, *The Lines* seems to resemble an urban essay. The film is about entering and exiting from the personal and public roles and how our experience is reflected in the creation of real or imaginary barriers, limits, lines," concludes the producer of the film that is soon to embark on its festival journey. ◀

The Lines (SK, 2021, dir. Barbora Sliepková)

— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —
photo: ARYTMIA —

Happiness Is in the Small Things

Director Juraj Lehotský attracted attention with *Blind Loves* (Slepé lásky), a documentary which was awarded at the Cannes Film Festival. His feature films *Miracle* (Zázrak) and *Nina* were also successful on festival circuits.

Third in line, *Applause* (Potlesk) builds on the aesthetics of his previous films, presents authentic visuals and emphasises real-world observation. According to Lehotský, however, a shift occurs, so in addition to human values, the value of art as such is also discussed.

— "The desire to reach the pinnacle and become great is one of the story topics. The film plays with the idea of human greatness and smallness as well as seeks answers to questions: In what lies the greatness of a person? Does it constitute grandiose applause, likes on social networks, recognition, respect and glory... Or is it something else?" director Juraj Lehotský elaborates for Film.sk. He collaborated on the screenplay with Timotej Križka, who is also the DoP on *Applause*. "We live in a time when we are all competing. So here arises the question of what is still considered art and what is only an instrument designated to achieve recognition and fame. Even applause has lost its meaning and no longer shows respect for some thing that enriches us. I believe everyone should find the meaning of their life, and the word 'success' should be cast aside. The joy of improving our surroundings should come to the fore," Lehotský explains the initial motivations.

— The protagonist is a young talented cellist Matúš, frustrated by unfulfilled ambitions. His promising career is interrupted by the disease of his adoptive mother. After her death, he remains to live with his stepbrother Dávid, who, despite a congenital disability, rejoices and lives life to the fullest. As a matter of fact, it is talented Matúš who appears to be the person with a disability next to him, unable to lead a full life. Even when he gradually begins to achieve his ambitions and success, it seems to be in vain. Dávid's life, in its simplicity, seems much richer. The director continued to engage both professional and non-professional actors. In the role of Matúš, he cast Polish actor Bartosz Bielenie, the European rising star who played the lead in *Corpus Cristi* (dir. Jan Komasa). For *Applause*, he learned to speak Slovak and German and to play the cello as well. Czech non-actor Vojtěch Zdražil was cast as his brother Dávid, German actor Sabin Tambrea plays the role of Albert, Matúš's schoolmate from the arts acad-

emy in Berlin, while Slovak actress Judit Bárdos was cast as his friend Lenka.

— "A thirty-year-old man, his future in his own hands. An entity on the brink of real life, idealistic, brimming with physical energy, motivation, talent and believing in one's own abilities, however, lacking an empirical basis, strong social relationships and a purpose," film producer Michaela Jelenek explains one of the layers of the story and adds that its strength lies in the universality of the subject and "a sensitive portrayal of the emotional world of characters who have something in common with each of us."

— By the same token, the music in the film speaks the language which is also universal, not only in depicting the main character's world. It was composed by Aleš Březina. "The story is about suffering as well as fulfilment and understanding the mind of an artist. When writing the screenplay, we relied on the composer's experience in order to offer the most authentic and truthful setting possible. Aleš Březina was part of the process of writing the screenplay – he composed Matúš' music piece, and its development is highlighted throughout the story," explains the director.

— Among those who further collaborated on the film are Jan Gogola Sr. (dramaturge), Juraj Fábry (architect), Alexandra Grusková (costume designer), Pavol Jelenek (production manager) and Rado Dúbravský (editor). "Again, we have grown personally, it was a new experience, gained in more difficult conditions. Regarding the given period of the pandemic, shooting was quite challenging, and it is a miracle that we managed to make the film. We were lucky, and it is the merit and contribution of all the people who collaborated on it," says the director. "From my point of view, the film should enable the viewers, people in general, to discover a new facet to their personality, to point them in the right direction or make them grow so they could wrap their head around some things and possibly be happier," Lehotský concludes.

Applause (SK/PL/CZ, 2021, dir. Juraj Lehotský)

— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —
photo: MPhilms —

The Power to Replace Reality With the Pretense of Truth

Director Mátýás Prikler debuted with his feature narrative film *Fine, Thanks (Ďakujem, dobre)* in 2013, and one of the film's main stories was already presented within the Cinéfondation Selection at the Cannes Film Festival in 2010. Prikler'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 Mátýás Prikler 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 Jaurová for Film.sk. Together with Mátýás Prikler, she produced the film in the company MPhilms. “Our film is consciously playing with the genre of political thriller, and its protagonist is minister Berger, 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 truth. “Steiner is the ‘director’ of the whole operation, and his work bears resemblance to the filmmaking process. Arriving at the village to recce the location, he familiarises himself with the surroundings and, so to speak, starts casting – he finds a suitable candidate who takes all the blame,” Prikler 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 Krobot, Attila Mokos, Éva Bándor

and Ingrid Timková, while co-producers of the film are the Hungarian company Proton Cinema, the Czech company Negativ and Radio and Television Slovakia.

“Marek Leščák is the author of the original screenplay, and he has been collaborating with Mátýás Prikler for a long time. Hungarian DoP Gergely Pálos, who has been working with well-known Swedish director Roy Anderson on several occasions, contributed significantly to the final visual outcome,” explains producer Zora Jaurová. “Michal Ložonský and Anna Nyitrai 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 Jaurová.

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 opt for the easy way out, even though it meant difficult production decisions several times,” describes Jaurová. “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. ◀

Power (SK/HU/CZ, 2021, dir. Mátýás Prikler)

— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —
photo: BFILM —

Only Sea of Sand and Tears Remain

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

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

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

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

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

“All the characters that appear in the film were created based on the authentic people I met. However, I changed their names and appearance (I drew them new, different faces). For the purposes of the 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 Katarína Moláková and dramaturges Phil Parker and Barbora Budinská also collaborated on the film, at a later stage, editor Marek Šulík, master musician Dušan Kozák and composer Martin Hasák put their shoulder to the wheel. The Slovak producer of the film is Peter Badač from the company BFILM, and he already collaborated with the director on her film *39 Weeks, 6 Days*. Other co-producers of *Once There Was a Sea...* are the Slovak company plackartnyj, Radio and Television Slovakia, the Polish company Anima-Pol and the Polish Public Television. The filmmakers consulted and presented the project on forums, such as Pitching du Réel in Nyon, Cartoon 360 in Lille or Euro Connection in Clermont-Ferrand. “*Once there was a sea... was awarded at the presentation Animated in Poland on Krakow FF 2021.*”

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 Kożuch)

— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —
photo: BFILM —

Story of Slovak Countryside Where Witches Still Exist

Tereza Nvotová's second feature film *The Nightsiren* (Svetlonoc) is set in a small village surrounded by mountains. The dramatic story draws on Slovak realities, myths and legends, but it also discusses generally comprehensible topics: fear of the unknown, prejudice and various forms of discrimination. Formal elements of magic realism and the horror genre are employed in the film as well.

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

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

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

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

In the introductory phase, 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 ScripTeast 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 Badač from the company BFILM and coproduced by moloko film (Czech Republic) and Silvera Productions (France).

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

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

— text: Jaroslava Jelchová —
photo: TOXPRO —

The Old Man and the Harbour

The hero of the feature debut *The Sailor* by documentary filmmaker Lucia Kašová is British sailor Paul Johnson. His ship is stranded on an island where old sailors meet. Unlikely to set out on another journey, he dreads such thought more than the end of life drawing closer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— text: Matúš Kvasnička —

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

A Promise of Eastern Exotica Is Not Enough

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any limitations when selecting films for Lyon?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I had an amazing feeling after each and every screening, whether it was *The Bloody Lady*, *The 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 is 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. ◀



— text: Barbora Námerová / screenwriter —
photo: archive of the SFI/Vladimír Vavrek —

The Illusion of Coincidence Has to Be Well Thought Out

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Marlene. It was a strange sort of collaboration with Maximilian Schell. I wrote the screenplay, but it could never have been realised in that form. By that time, Marlene was already in a wheelchair, and she did not want to spoil her image as a diva. But Schell managed to record an amazing interview with her that she 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, so on Marlene’s side, there was also some sort of peculiar provocative interest. It ended with me putting the film together again in the editing room. It was actually a retroactive creation of the screen- play. We built the film from archive materials based on this interview in order to make it as spectacular as the portrait of this enigmatic character. It was an extraor- dinary job, but Maximilian Schell was extraordinary himself. ◀

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

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,” writer Vincent Šikula said about Elo Havetta years ago. One of the most distinctive Slovak filmmakers also cast Šikula in his debut *Celebration in the Botanical Garden* (Slávnosť v botanickej záhrade, 1969) and shot his second film *Wild Lilies* (Ľalie poľné, 1972) based on Šikula’s screenplay.

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

“Author’s progress and bold interpretation of reality broached the previously circumvented (taboo, undesirable) topics related to sexuality,” writes film historian Eva Filová in the book *Eros, sexus, gender v slovenskom filme* (Eros, Sexus, Gender in Slovak Film). Filová also argues against some of the previous views on Havetta’s debut. The author sees the weakness in their mechanical and pragmatic interpretation of irrational events and motifs in the film. “Do we have to seek the ‘incontrovertible’ logic behind everything? What if the essence hides behind chance, what if it is embedded in the manifestations of the subconsciousness?” Filová asks. Meir Lubor Dohnal, who wrote the screenplay for *Celebration in the Botanical Garden*, spoke to *Film.sk* about how the film was made. Allegedly, he and Havetta did not want chronology and causality to limit the latitude of their film story. For them, what was more important than the cause and effect were the intense moments – the core of the individual sequences. “The author does not waste time explaining and clarifying the connections or context, breaking his back so that everything fits perfectly,” Dohnal told *Film.sk*.

Celebration in the Botanical Garden is a colourful mosaic of stories that display the need for a miracle in

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

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

Apart from *Celebration in the Botanical Garden*, he could make only another feature film, *Wild Lilies*. His protagonists, war retirees, are looking for a home and their place in society. They equally long to settle down and to roam freely like nomads. In Peter Mihálik’s text in the daily *Práca*, at the time of the premiere, Havetta stated that there are many films about the horrors of war. Therefore, *Wild Lilies* was intended to provide a different perspective and show the psychological consequences of war, which, according to him, are worse than the physical ones. Supposedly, the film is based on the principle of multi-voice composition, it develops individual motifs so that in the end they merge into a symphony. Havetta was convinced that “the screenplay realised in a finished film will have a wide audience reach. Therefore, I strive for an audience-oriented film, in the best sense of the word.” However, during his lifetime, he did not manage to achieve what he was describing. Just like *Celebration in the Botanical Garden*, the film *Wild Lilies* ended up being banned. ◀

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

The World Discovers a Hidden Gem – Šulík’s Tenderness

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

After years, Šulík’s film reaches foreign audiences digitally restored.

“It’s a striking debut; formally and structurally rigorous, and elliptically designed to keep its central trio at arm’s length, foregrounding their alienation and rendering the film’s title cruelly ironic,” writes film critic Matthew Thrift, describing Šulík’s film as psychosexual drama with several features of the early works of Roman Polanski. An expert in Slovak and Czech cinema, British film critic and historian Peter Hames also mentions Polanski in an extensive text in a 20-page booklet of the British Blu-ray edition. According to him, however, the analysis of intimate male-female relationships conducted by the screenwriting duo Martin Šulík and Ondrej Šulaj resembles more Ingmar Bergman’s films, especially *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), despite having certain commonalities with Polanski’s *Knife in the Water* (1962) or Michael Haneke’s *Funny Games* (1997). According to Hames, the parallel is emphasised by the performances of György Cserhalmi and Maria Pakulnis, portraying Viktor and Mária. Twenty-year-old Simon (Gejza Benkő) becomes drawn into their relationship. After a conflict with his father, he leaves his parents’ house, becomes part of a peculiar ménage à trois and only gradually reveals the secrets of the older couple.

Mark Cunliffe in his review at thegeekshow.co.uk titled *Tenderness: The Past is a Foreign Country* in Martin Šulík’s (1991) *Debut* states that the film “deploys” a relatively standard, universal film genre of a coming-of-age story as a metaphor for Slovakia waking up to see the light after a period of communist oppression. “Using the backdrop of regime change and the anxiety of an uncertain future, the film analyses the basic values, sense of morality and the complexity of human relationships at the dawn of

a new age that is still intrinsically affected by the corruption of what has gone before,” writes Cunliffe.

The commentary at dvdbeaver.com praises, in addition to the film itself, the quality of the digital restoration under the supervision of the Slovak Film Institute, which was also approved by the director, and special bonus materials. Besides the film, the Blu-ray release of *Tenderness* offers the aforementioned booklet, Šulík’s short film *Hooray* (1989) and the new documentary *On Tenderness* (2020) directed by Michal Michalovič. Produced by the Slovak Film Institute, it sheds light on the historical context. *Sight & Sound* magazine highlights the importance of the context as well. “Without any 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. ▶

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

The Tragedy of Millions Through Two Fates

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— text: Matúš Kvasnička —

Greetings to the New Wave

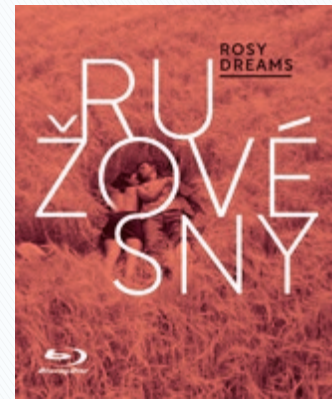
Dušan Hanák's poetic comedy *Rosy Dreams* (*Ružové sny*, 1976) was a hit, but the tragicomedy *I Love, You Love* (*Ja milujem, ty miluješ*, 1980) was banned by censors. Later, it received a Silver Bear Award for Best Director and a special FIPRESCI Award at the Berlinale in 1989. The Slovak Film Institute (SFI) released all Hanák's feature films on DVD, and two have now been released on Blu-ray.

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

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

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

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



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

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

— text: Matúš Kvasnička —
photo: Miro Nôta —

Letters, Entries, Themes and Forgotten Films

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

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

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

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

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

— text: Editorial team —

Ten years of Kino Lumière

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Limits of Inhibition

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

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

Rousing *Scumbag*

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

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

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

Evil, Beautiful Images and Intergenerational Affinity

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

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

snowball fight against the background of a huge socialist-realist monument signals the limits of playfulness.

No Cheap Exotics, Neither Real Adventure

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

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



Summer Rebels —

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

— *Servants'* theme revolves around the collaboration

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



Scumbag —

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

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

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

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

Portraits and Retro-spections

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

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

Portraits of “the Czechoslovak Golden Boys”

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Meky —



Ice-Hockey Dream —



The Golden Land —



Salto Is the King —

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No Need for Homebodies to Remain Idle

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

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

As Seen at Anča

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

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

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

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

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

Online and on TV

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

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

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

—— Compared to 2019, fewer projects premiered in



Chestnut Boy —



Cate Strophe Saving Christmas —



The Kite —



Forget Me Not —

when set in juxtaposition with the story.

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

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

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

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

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

New Situation, New Ideas

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

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



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

Year 2020:

Scumbag Versus Pandemic

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

100% Slovak films and Majority Co-Productions

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

Minority Co-Productions

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

* AVERAGE ATTENDANCE PER SCREENING

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

Waiting for a Miracle

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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