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— Veronika Krejčová / executive editor —

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— Veronika Krejčová / executive editor —
Mariana Jaremková
Publicist and presenter. She collaborated with several editorial teams and worked for Film.sk for several years. Over a long period, she also worked as a vice-rector (2004 – 2007). Author of the scientific monograph Odložený čas (Time Delayed), co-author and editor of two more books on film. She translates prose, poetry and non-literary texts from French. Author of five poetry collections.

Jaroslava Jelchová
Editor of Film.sk. Former lecturer at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and Audio-visual Studies (FTF VŠMU). In cooperation with the Cultural Centre of Gemer-Malohont in Rimavská Sobota, she does audiovisual creative workshops for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Lecturer of the Film Cabinet for Children, an educational project of the Association of Slovak Film Clubs.

Mária Ferenčuhová
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Matúš Kvasnička

Miroslav Ulman
Film publicist, researcher at the Slovak Film Institute, co-founder of the monthly Film Fan (1990 – 1995) and founder of the first Slovak website about cinema Filmstar (1997). Co-organiser of several festivals, co-author of the book Správodca klubovým filmom (A Guide Through Club Film), dramaturge of the Music & Film cycle at the Cinema Lumière. Holder of the Slovak Film Critics Award.

Jana Dudková
Senior Researcher at the Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. Her main interests include postcolonial and multicultural studies, balkanism and transcultural influences in Slovak and Balkan cinemas. Author of around sixty papers published in various languages, author of three monographs on Emir Kusturica, Serbian cinema of the 1990s and Slovak cinema in the era of transculturality.

Erik Binder
Film critic and publicist. Graduated as an architect, currently a PhD student at the Department of Audio-visual Studies (FTF VŠMU), from which he graduated in 2018. He lectures on world cinema and publishes on several portals and in magazines. Editor of the anthology Pavel Branko – v znameni filmu a jazyka (In the Sign of Film and Language) about film critic Pavel Branko.

Eva Šošková
She works at the Department of Audio-visual Studies (FTF VŠMU), focusing on animated film. She participated in the preparation of the retrospective of Czechoslovak animated films for the Filmuseum in Vienna. Every year, she reviews the past year’s Slovak animated films on various platforms.
“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 romanticizing 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 paths of emotional blackmail,” Kirchnerová says. “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 Lazaro. 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 (Obeť). 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 (Plaeta lod’)) participate in the film.

Czech director Zuzana Kirchnerová won in the Cinéfondation section at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival with her graduation drama Bábá (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 mŕtvého) 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.
**Annecy: Competing After Thirty Years**

Feature animated film by award-winning director Michaela Pavlátková *My Sunny Maad* (Mají 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* (Motýlifatka) by director Jiří Bartoška. For Pavlátková, *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 *Feštíta*, 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 Hlhola and the Czech company Fzeh Films joined forces with Alexandre Charlet from Les Films du Cygne in France as the main producers of *Even Mice Belong in Heaven* (Mylí patři do neba). Next co-producers came to be Czech, French and Polish partners, Slovakia is represented by Marek Jeridable and Tomáš Janíček from CinemaArt Sk. The film is an adaptation of Iva Procházková's bestseller of the same name. “In terms of form, the story of Mice looks like an uncomplicated story for children. What we, personally, enjoy about it is how charged it is with seemingly insurmountable conflict and difficult and truly fundamental themes, like death or the loss of loved ones,” said Denisa Grinmanová and Jan Bubeníček who directed the film together. Both were pupils of already mentioned Jíří Bartoška. “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 Kerecosová and *Heart of a Tower* (Srdce Veže) by Peter Budinsky will take part in *Meet the... Producers - Gap Financing program*. 

*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.st. “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 Ostrovsky’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 Loven* (*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 complex shoot with an international cast, taking place at the time of the pandemic restrictions which forced both director Juraj Lehotský and producer Michaela Jeleníková 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 Voňtěch 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, Judit Bárdos and non-actor Vojtěch Zdražil.

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 Heinzen, 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.
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 very firm, they will continue to be a valuable space for personal get-togethers of filmmakers and viewers from around the world.

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 baronka)? — 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 Mednansky. 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 Lavrik 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.
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

Searching for Magical Moments

text: Mária Ferenčuhová
photo: Miro Nôta
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, “Love.” Then, almost proudly, she elaborates that she killed 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 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.


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 feel regarding such a female topic?

— 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 Juanu 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.

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The premiere - Oteckovia. Meanwhile, I am preparing a short Interiéry, a feature documentary which is O nepotrebných veciach, published in 1979. The project is created in Bratislava, adapted for television Najhorší Filthy Death’s-Head Horse (Mrtvy 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.

At the moment, I am traveling by train to Bratislava, we have an acting rehearsal, and then we start shooting a fiction film Unbalanced (Zosilieň). 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 us "wisely connect" all the dots in the world. What is important is an analysis without ideology, an attempt to guide us "wisely connect" all the dots in the world.

Currently, we have two feature animated films in production. The first is a 2D/3D film for adults White Plastic Sky (Osomohômne nebo, dir. Tibor Bándoczki, 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 (Čo nepotrebných veciach a ľuďoch, dir. Martin Smatana (Slovak part)), a family stop motion film which is co-produced with Czechia, Slovenia and France. We recently premiered Icons (Šíkany), 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.

Currently, 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 (Mrtvy 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.
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, their personality, 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-govern- ing 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 rethink- ing 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.

We Cannot Imagine an Emotionless Gaze

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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 Janošík: The True Story (Jánosík: 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 filmSPACE S (MEZERY) 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, SPACE S won a number of awards around the world, which, unfortunately, Nora could not personally receive because festivals moved into the online space due to the pandemic. I am sorry she could not have experienced the overwhelming acclaim personally. On the other hand, I am pleased that she has not slipped into tearful sentiment, which is always a threat with such sensitive topics, and that she has managed to process it extremely sensitively, with a huge overlap and recognition. Of course, she had the strongest emotional support from us as parents, and that was the only thing, everything else is strictly the result of her authorial approach.

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

There is no secret without a shadow. For me, the shadow is one of the most important means of expression. The shadow awakens the viewer’s imagination, awakens in him the ‘co-author’ of the story. Paradoxically, I grew up listening to radio dramas myself. Throughout my childhood, I sat with my ears glued to the radio because my father refused to buy a TV for years. It was thanks to him that films began to be created in my head, when pressed against the radio speaker. It can be said that, at that time, my imagination developed fundamentally.
Lines, Wrinkles and City Limits

The Lines (Cláry) 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 Barbara 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 (PFÚ 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 Juráš’s The Golden Land (Zlaté zem) and Jakub Julény’s The Commune (Komuňa), 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 Barbara Sliepková and 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 gained a lot professionally. And what was it like to end up with an ambitious feature-length project in a professional environment?”, asks the producer. “When preparing for The Lines, there was more than enough time management as well as the necessity to bear the crew in mind in many 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 bringing 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 Fehlfest 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.

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 emphasizes 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 Tomáš Krížka, 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 something 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. “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 relations 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 Ales Březina. “The story is about suffering as well as fulfillment and understanding the mind of an artist. When writing the screenplay, we relied on the composer’s experience in order to offer Lehotský authentic and truthful setting possible. Ales 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 Jr. (dramaturge), Juraj Fábry (architect), Alexandra Grusková (costume designer), Pavol Jelenek (production manager) and Rado Dubravský (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.

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The Power to Replace Reality
With the Pretense of Truth

Director Mátias Prikler debuted with his feature narrative film Fine, Thanks (Dahjsem, debre) in 2012, and one of the film’s main stories was already presented within the Cinemation Selection at the Cannes Film Festival in 2020. 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 Mátias 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 dilemma of power, helplessness of the powerful and power of the helpless,” says producer Zora Jaurová for Film. sk. Together with Mátias Prikler, she produced the film in the company MPILMS. “Our film is obviously playing with the genre of political thriller, and its protagonist is minister Benger, who is currently running for a major international post. However, as usual in this genre, the real protagonist is the inconsiderate 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 evenkeen participants would be convinced that it is just 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 the films and theangers of power, helplessness of the powerful and power of the helpless.”

Joanna Kożuch made her debut in 2014 with Fongo-poli, the film won the category of Best Animated Film at the National Film Awards Slinky v sieti. As her other works, it is a proof that the artist can combine different animation techniques, but she also bears the message in mind. Her new film Once There Was a Sea... occurred to me during my train trips to the Central Asian region, as I first stopped in the wonderful, surreal city of Muynak—a port without the sea,” says director Joanna 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 Molíková and dramaturges Phil Parker and Barbora Budinská also collaborated on the film, at a later stage, editor Marek Sušík, master musician Dušan Kozák and composer Martin Hasák put their shoulder to the wheel. The Slovak producer of the film is Peter Badaj 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 packartaj, Radio and Television Slovakia, the Polish company Asima-Pol and the Polish Public Television. The filmmakers consulted and presented the project on forums, such as Pitching du Réel 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 onecherrerasa.com.
The story of Slovak Countryside Where Witches Still Exist

Teréza Nvtová's second feature film *The Nightsiren* (Svetlneć) 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 alacrity in a common enemy," director Teréza Nvoťová 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 realize 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 Nvtová.

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," Nvtová explains. In the story, the village community sort of constitutes a collective antagonist. Charlotte befriends Mirá, 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 accuses 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 storybooks, but are open-minded women who embrace nature and love men, sex, and themselves. Regarding the screenplay, the creators attended the ScriptFirst workshop, where they consulted with experts, such as screenwriter Wiebke von Carolsfeld or producer Meinolf Zurhorst. The project was also successfully presented at the Crossroads Co-Production Forum in Thessaloniki, at the Frontières Finance & Packaging Forum in Karlskrona, Sweden, and at the MIA/Film Co-Production Market in Rome, where it won the Eurimages Award for best project in development. The film is produced by Peter Budaľ from the company BFILM and coproduced by moloko film (Czech Republic) and Silverwa 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 Natálie Germáni and Eva Mores play the lead roles.

The Old Man and the Harbour

The hero of the feature debut *The Sailor* by documentary filmmaker Lucie Káková 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 Lucie Káková tells Film.sk, having an experience of sailing across the Atlantic Ocean and life on board herself. In the film, however, she does not set out to sea, but to the soul of a sailor, who will probably never leave his port again.

Thus, it brings up topics such as old age, loneliness and dying, which are contrasted with freedom and unrestricted life at sea.

"The Adventures 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, who would even after having children. Freedom was his greatest value in life, and now that he is stuck on a ship which no one escapes. The small Caribbean island, where everyone 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 him with him," explains the director of several short films, who also took part in several documentary series for television. "I was important to ask the right questions, which perhaps more people are dealing with. Where is the line of freedom or ego?" Káková 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 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 Názarij Klufujev, from the production company Toxpro, tells Film.sk. The director invited him to collaborate when she found out that the project had grown out 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 work 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 Klufujev, adding that the shooting in 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 Belgrade, DoccBarcelona, Meeting Point Vilnius, the Cannes Film Festival, IFFA 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 Lucie Kálová retrospectively. DoPs Martin Jurčí and Maxim Klufujev, sound engineers Tomáš Bauer and Igor Jedinek, editor Roman Kelemen, composer Martin Turčan and Czech dramaturge Jan Gogola Jr. were involved in making the film.
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 Mitij – 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 Palio Bielik, Stefan Uher, Peter Solan, Štefan Uher, Peter Solan, Ela Bialkowska, 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 Body Lady (Květá paní, 1980) travelled from Lyon to the Sitges Film Festival, one of the most prestigious fantasy film festivals in the world. Peter Solan’s The Barnabš Kos Case (Pripad Barnabš 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 has repaired itself after the pandemic, in the beginning of 2022, the travels of comrades 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 Barnabš 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 Coordás.

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 submissions, 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 is never 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 ‘reguals’ 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 is the Institut Lumière, situated in the Lumière Villa. However, the festival is spread around the city – in single-screen cinemas, multiplexes and multiplexes. Based on my own experience, the festival cinemas are always full. The same goes for the Comédie Odeon theatre in the city centre, which hosts masterclasses open for the festival audience. If I mention that Frances McDormand, Jane Fonda, the Dardenne brothers, Viggo Mortensen, Francis Ford Coppola, Bong Joon-ho, Alfonso 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.

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

— I had an amazing feeling after each and every screening, whether it was The Bloody Lady, The Barnabáš Kováč 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.

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 intimately bound as regards of cause and effect. We applied a method that Havetta and I called “from the suitcase.” You sit in the editing room, you don’t know exactly which shot is going to follow, so you reach into the suitcase, you pull something out and edit it into the film. At least that is the impression it’s intended to make. But it has to be well thought out, and there have to be internal links so that the gradation possesses the right dynamics.

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

— That sense of improvisation or working with it is justified. Havetta often worked with non-actors; 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 composed. If you want to work with the illusion of coincidence, 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 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 retrospective creation of the screenplay. 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 extraordinary job, but Maximilian Schell was extraordinary himself.


The World Discovers a Hidden Gem: Šulík’s Tenderness

A long time after release, Martin Šulík’s Tenderness is an eternal gem of Slovak film. The Slovak Film Institute and distribution company Second Run have restored this feature film, making it available to viewers for the first time.

After years, Šulík’s film reaches foreign audiences digitally restored. 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. Šulík’s film is 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. Šulík’s film is 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. Šulík’s film is a Pinteresque psychodrama existing in its own circumscribed universe.

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“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 (Obrázky z starého sveta, 1971), 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 screenwriting 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 explains.

Rosy Dreams is the only Slovak film that managed to penetrate the foreign market in the 1970s. The poetic story of the first big but forbidden love, in which Jakub (Jura) 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 humor, 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.

Dušek’s writing debut with Rosy Dreams and I Love, You Love (Ja miluji, 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.
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.

“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 be able to purchase 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 Festebofest 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 film 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.
Mariana Čengel Solčanská and Rudolf Biermann’s Scumbag (Svína) 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 benefitted 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 of 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 (Slovensko moje, otčina moja), 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 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 of contemporary Slovak cinema, Martina Saková’s Summer Rebels (Letni rebeli) is indeed a welcome film for children. After Iveta Grófová’s Little Harbour (Pláza lod), feature films with a child-hero set in the present day have again become an almost non-existent species. This time, Jonáš from Dresden, the protagonist of the film, decides to spend the summer with his beloved grandfather in Slovakia. Fortunately, the film avoids cheap exotics, but its co-production character is revealed in speech: Czech, Slovak and German are spoken, although it is “only” a Slovak-German co-production. In the town of Handlová, Jonáš meets the peculiar boyish Alex, and together they experience typical summer adventures and business games as well – for example, they try to sell flowers, however, as a result, the cultivated flowerbeds of Alex’s mother are destroyed. Unlike Little Harbour, which had art ambitions and aspirations to appeal to children and their parents, as well as to disturb them, Summer Rebels is more of a summer family film without serious conflict. It lacks the pace and real adventure to be able to compete with successful foreign works.

In 2020, the renewed premiere of Stefan Semjan’s digitally restored debut On the Beautiful, Blue Danube (Na krásnom modrom Dunaji) also took place. The film, which is described as almost amateurish in the book History of Slovak Cinematography from 1999, has meanwhile become a cult classic in certain circles, remaining one of the films that most convincingly depict the atmosphere of the “Wild 1990s”. The trio of undisguised sexist friends roam the neglected Bratislava, appearing as postmodern players and flaneurs at the same time, in anticipation of a monetary reward for masking the tracks of a chief of Andy Warhol’s painting. Calling themselves actors, they bear the names of the real actors who portray them. Their actions are often impulsive, the expression affected. Like the heroes of the early films of directors Juraj Jakubisko and Elő Havetta, the characters do not have a job and avoid stable partnerships. Instead, they indulge in their own feelings of madness and playfulness. The film expresses concern about the values of the lost generation of the thirty-somethings and emphasises the thin line between artists and criminals. At the same time, however, it manages to portray the protagonists mainly as artists of life.

From the perspective of majority cinema, the year 2020 is relatively inhibited. The Auschwitz Report (Správa) by Peter Bebják, Cook, F**k, Kill (Žaby bez jazyka) by Mirza Fornay, The Man with Hare Ears (Muž so zajačimi ušami) by Martin Šulík, Perinbaba: Two Realms (Perinbabu a dva sveta) by Juraj Jakubisko and also Zuzana Mariánková’s debut Perfekt Strangers (Známi neznámi), all scheduled for the fall of 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.
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 Lučeník. 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 dis-
traction from reality for a moment, and not just from the
totalitarian one.

Patrick “Rytmus” Vrboslav already has his “own”
film. RYTMS: A Dream from the Block (Rytms: Sídliskový
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,
dramatically 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

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 por-
trait of the world-famous Slovak mime. Viewers witness
a cross-section of the acting genius’ work, from his be-
ginnings 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 pro-
vokes nostalgia that is rarely exposed and felt. When
retold, few people who were born after the fall of the
previous regime will believe the film’s content, so it is
truly a great pity that the premiere date was moved
several times and finally took place just before the
December lockdown and another cinemas closure in
Slovakia. Maybe even the future generation will not
believe our present times, unless the film about it is
to be directed by Lukáš Bulava, for example.

Seemingly, neither Paradise on Earth (Raj na
ezemi), 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 person-
ality in the end, and the document implicitly raises
the question of whether our mentality is still that
of a caveman.

Whatever the answer to this question, poten-
tial discussions about human nature can also be sparked
off by the confrontation of the viewer and film’s pro-
tagonists with online sexual predators in the staged
documentary Caught in the Net (V sietí). In the Czech
Republic, the film became the most visited documentary
in modern history, seen by record-breaking 179,139 view-
ers 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.

Domingos Justas’s The Golden Land (Zlátá zem)
comes across as a documentary remake of some older
American western dealing with the colonisation of a new
land and even humorously plays around with elements
of this genre. Today, after the legendary Wild West long
gone, Slovakia also constitutes a new, “golden” country
for foreign investors, however, it does not grant them
the right to behave similarly. A few activists from three
East Slovak villages are fighting the oil conglomerate,
trying to prevent the economic colonisation of Slovakia.
At the same time, in order to be impartial, the opposite
side also gets a word in edgewise, and those who are not
experts in ecology and industry (though commendable,
activism is not an exact science and too self-absorbed)
may have a hard time keeping up. Nevertheless, the arro-
gance 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. To-
gether with Barabáš and his team, we will absolve 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

...
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. Krisa Sagan, 2018) screened prior to the main film _Babyteeth_ (dir. Shannon Murphy, 2019). Both works were successful at various festivals. Filip Pošivač and Barbora Valečká’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.

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

_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.

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.

No Need for Home-bodies to Remain Idle

2020 in animated film
The documentary focuses on institutional care for socially excluded children, an issue that is still overlooked in Slovakia but represents a necessary extension of the politically preferred topic of abortions.

**Online and on TV**

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

**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, 2018) by Slovak director Martin Smatana.

**The Flood** (Pudesse eu, 2020) by Czech and Slovak artists drew pictures and animated short videos about isolation within the Domased (Homebody) project. Staying-at-home director Martin Sulik also pursued animation – intended only for friends, however. Last but not least, director and producer Ivana Lauchičová became an online curator of publicly available animated films for children.

In a very accessible manner and with regard to raising awareness, Ivana Lauchičová 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 Home Felix, a journal and online platform founded and headed by Lauchičová, she came up with yet another substantial medium to educate (not only her) audiences.

**The Kite** (Šarkan, 2018) by Slovak director Martin Smatana.

**Forget Me Not** (Kerekesová, dir. Róbert Šveda, 2018–2019) were broadcasted on RTVS on Christmas (Raketa, 2018) and Trust Me (Homebody) project. Staying-at-home director and producer Ivana Lauchičová became an online curator of publicly available animated films for children.

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**Compared to 2019, fewer projects premiered in 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.**
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 395,604 viewers. However, due to the increased spread of COVID-19 and subsequent protection of the health of visitors, for the first time, all cinemas in Slovakia were forced to close on 10 March.

Let’s take a look at the distribution of Slovak films from the statistical point of view. The total attendance in Slovak cinemas fell by 63.78% year-on-year, to 2,364,834 spectators. This is the lowest number since Slovakia gained independence. In particular, the attendance of domestic films dropped by 27.86%.

Apart from such declines, the pandemic caused one sharp increase. As a result of the premiers of American blackbusters 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 2020, as blockbusters being postponed to 2021, the share of domestic films attendance increased by merely 100,000. Nevertheless, it should be noted that cinemas in Slovakia had to be closed for 116 days last year, so far 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.

### Films Attendance in 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Week Number</th>
<th>Film Title</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Year of Premiere</th>
<th>Country of Premiere</th>
<th>Infant viewers</th>
<th>Adult viewers</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Gross Box Office (€)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>28.79</td>
<td>Scumbag</td>
<td>Mariana Čengel Solčanská, Rudolf Biermann</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>SK/CZ</td>
<td>2,987</td>
<td>176,080</td>
<td>1,077,006</td>
<td>Continental Film</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.79</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Films Attendance in 2020

- **Scumbag**: Directed by Mariana Čengel Solčanská and Rudolf Biermann, this film was the second most-attended domestic film in Slovakia in 2020. It opened on 8 March and had the highest average attendance (39.24). The film was released by Continental Film and grossed €1,077,006.
- **Far Too Personal**: Directed by Roman Kelemen, this film was released by Film Expanded in 2019 and grossed €241,342.
- **Caught in the Net**: Directed by Barbora Vaceková, this film was released by Continental Film in 2020 and grossed €138,342.
- **On the Beautiful, Blue Danube**: Directed by Jakub Kroner, this film was released by Film Expanded in 2020 and grossed €120,087.
- **And A Happy New Year**: Directed by Roman Kelemen, this film was released by Film Expanded in 2020 and grossed €101,251.

### Total Films Attendance

- **Total**: 8,066 films were screened in 2020, with 4,446,150 viewers.
- **Total Gross Box Office**: €2,806,232.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Films</th>
<th>Box Office (€)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,066</td>
<td>2,806,232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% Slovak Films</td>
<td>4,446,150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority Co-Productions</td>
<td>3,620,082</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Minority Co-Productions

- **Total**: 100 films were screened, with 446,150 viewers.
- **Total Gross Box Office**: €2,806,232.
- **100% Slovak Films**: €4,446,150.
- **Majority Co-Productions**: €3,620,082.

### Film Distribution

- **Slovakia**: 8,066 films were screened in 2020, with 4,446,150 viewers.
- **Total Gross Box Office**: €2,806,232.

### Source

- Union of Film Distributors of the Slovak Republic

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*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 395,604 viewers. However, due to the increased spread of COVID-19 and subsequent protection of the health of visitors, for the first time, all cinemas in Slovakia were forced to close on 10 March.*
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 *Sviniňa*.

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 25 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 wondrous *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 cinemashow 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 sanitizer, 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 all 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 cinemashow 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 sanitizer, and I also measured their temperature.

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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