

special edition
of the monthly magazine
on slovak cinema

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film **sk**



review: The Line – Nina – Out

interview: Martin Šulík – Peter Dubecký

2017 IN SLOVAK FILM

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VAŠA BRÁNA
DO SVETA
FILMU
—
YOUR DOOR
TO THE WORLD
OF FILM

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55
ROKOV
YEARS



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editorial



— After the fall of communism, it may have become easier to breathe in Slovakia, but it was more difficult to make films. State funding was drying up, the annual production declining, cinematography was facing a crisis. In the 1990s, Martin Šulík was one of the few directors who managed to make films. And he made good films, such as *Tenderness* (Neha, 1991), *Everything I Like* (Všetko čo mám rád, 1992), *The Garden* (Záhrada, 1995), *Orbis Pictus* (1997), *Landscape* (Krajinka, 2000). Thanks to Šulík, important film signals also emanated from Slovakia abroad. Now, the latest film by this key Slovak director of the complex 1990s will receive its première at the Berlin International Film Festival. It is called *The Interpreter* (Tlmočník) and it views the present with interventions from the deep past associated with the main protagonists portrayed by personalities of European cinema – the Czech director Jiří Menzel and the Austrian actor Peter Simonischek.

— If we refer to the difficulties encountered by cinema in the 1990s, subsequently the situation started to develop in a more favourable direction and, after 2009, when the Slovak Audiovisual Fund was established, this trend became more pronounced. In this issue of *Film.sk* you will read not only about what the previous year achieved within the positive development of Slovak cinema (in particular, domestic films recorded a remarkably high attendance in cinemas), but we will also describe in individual studies last year's Slovak feature, documentary and animated works. In addition, we include reviews of the new films made last year – *The Line* (Čiara), *Nina* and *Out*.

— However, let us return one more time to Martin Šulík who also made documentaries about outstanding filmmakers from the history of Czechoslovak cinema. These filmmakers include the Slovak directors, Dušan Hanák, Elo Havetta and Juraj Jakubisko. All three made their débuts in full-length feature film in the second half, or even the late 1960s, all had the potential to captivate audiences abroad as well, and all were born in 1938, so this year we commemorate their eightieth birthday. The Slovak Film Institute (SFI) will commemorate it also. It is the institution tasked with overseeing the audiovisual heritage and on this occasion, it plans to issue DVDs and Blu-rays. And the SFI itself, the publisher of *Film.sk*, will celebrate the 55th anniversary of its establishment. ◀

— Daniel Bernát / Editor-in-chief —

THE HISTORY AND PRESENT OF FILM.SK

— *Film.sk* is a monthly about film events in Slovakia published by the Slovak Film Institute. It has been published since January 2000 and it is the only film periodical in print in Slovakia. The magazine's editor-in-chief Simona Nôtová was present at its birth and she managed it until September 2012. Naturally, the monthly has undergone conceptual changes over the course of its existence but it was always based on the principle of the provision of a broad range of information on the events in the local film and audiovisual milieu.

— *Film.sk* is comprised of permanent sections: the Interview, Topic and Review which are complemented by further regular and irregular sections. These include current film events, reports on film festivals and film presentations in Slovakia and abroad, evaluating reflections on important events, the glosses or comments of experienced film journalists, contributions by filmmakers who respond to questions about the projects they are currently working on, profiles of personalities of Slovak cinema, separate texts about new Slovak films based on the accounts of directors and producers, presentations of inspirational new books from the area of film literature and several other sections. *Film.sk* also contains attachments which chart the annual results in one of the areas of Slovak cinema and provide valuable statistical data.

— One of the regular attachments brings a report summarising Slovak cinematography for the previous year, divided into a number of chapters: Legislation, Financial Support, Film Education, Film Production, Film Distribution, Cinemas, Multiplexes and Film Clubs, Film Festivals and Film Screenings. The study of Czech cinematography, which is also published as an attachment to the monthly magazine, takes on a similar structure.

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

— Contemporarily, *Film.sk* is a well-established film magazine capable of appealing to film experts, filmmakers, students and the wider public alike. The website www.filmsk.sk has supported its printed version since 2001. ◀



film.sk

Publisher:

Slovak Film Institute

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Cover photo:

Still from The Interpreter (Tlmočník)
– IN Film Praha/Garfield film

Film.sk is supported by the Ministry of
Culture of the Slovak Republic.

The opinions of the editorial staff do not necessarily
comply with the opinions expressed by the contributors.

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

The Film Institute in Bratislava was established on 1st April 1963 and it was placed under the directorate of Film Production and Distribution (Filmová tvorba a distribúcia) in Bratislava. The film archive also became part of the Institute; it was established in 1958 by the film historian Ivan Rumanovský at the Slovak Film Distribution Company (Slovenská požičovňa filmov).

In 1970, the SFI was presented with a copy of the first Slovak full-length feature film *Jánošík* (dir. Jaroslav Siakel, 1921) which was later restored, provided with a soundtrack and in 1995 UNESCO placed it among the world cultural heritage.

In 1972, the Film Institute came under the Central Office of Slovak Film (Ústredie slovenského filmu).

By the end of 1976 the Film Club of the Central Office of Slovak Film was opened in Bratislava; at the present day, Cinema Lumière, belonging to the Slovak Film Institute, is located on its premises.

In July 1989 the SFI came under the state organisation Slovak Film Production Bratislava – Koliba (Slovenská filmová tvorba Bratislava – Koliba) up to 1st January 1991 when, by decision of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic (MC SR), the Slovak Film Institute – National Cinematographic Centre was established as an independent public contributory organisation managed by the MC SR. Hence, by delimitation, the SFI also acquired producer rights to the archived films which were made before 1991 by Slovak Film Production.

The Slovak Film Institute played a part in the preparation of the extensive publication entitled *History of Slovak Cinema* (Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie, 1997); the second, updated issue of the book has been published last year.

In 2001, the SFI became a full member of the prestigious International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP).

In 2002, the SFI published its first DVD (*Pictures of the Old World/Obrazy starého sveta*, dir. Dušan Hanák, 1972); since then it has published dozens of other DVDs in over 500,000 copies.

In 2002, the SFI started to implement the longterm integrated audiovisual information system project, SK CINEMA, for processing, storing, interconnecting, organising and presenting information from the SFI's individual departments.

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

In 2008, SFI's shop Klapka.sk was opened. It presents a broad offer of filmological literature, DVDs and CDs and other materials.

Since 2011, in association with the Radio and Television of Slovakia, the SFI has implemented the national project entitled Digital Audiovision in order to systematically digitise the audiovisual heritage and make it accessible. Two specialised digitisation workplaces are part of the project. SFI's digitisation workplace is located in the basement of Cinema Lumière in Bratislava. The national Digital Audiovision project was concluded on 30 November 2015; however, it will be retained until 2020.

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

— text: Miro Ulman —
photo: All or Nothing
/ Continental film —

2017:

Over One Million Viewers!

After the record year of 2016, the succeeding year brought new records for Slovak cinema. The gross box office grew year-on-year by almost 19% and totalled over 34.5 million Euro, which is the highest since Slovakia gained independence. Total attendance increased by 18% to almost 6.7 million viewers, being the highest since 1993. And the share of domestic films in the total attendance increased to 21%, which would formerly have been an inconceivable figure.

— Last year's record attendance dramatically altered the ranking of the best-attended domestic films over the era of independence. Four of last year's premières were placed among the historical top ten and the most successful of them – **All or Nothing** (Všetko alebo nič) with 340,535 viewers – even challenged the second place of the seemingly unassailable **The Fountain for Suzanne 2** (Fontána pre Zuzanu 2, 1993). Two domestic titles were viewed by more than 300,000 people (**All or Nothing** and **The Line/ Čiara**) and altogether four exceeded 100,000 viewers. This situation will probably not be readily repeated.

— As regards production, last year was also a record year. 27 full-length Slovak and co-production films (of these 14 minority co-productions) were made. And the number of premières was also a record. As many as 31 Slovak full-length films were released in cinemas – 21 feature films (of these, 10 were minority co-productions), 9 documentaries (of these, 3 were minority co-productions) and one minority animated film. Two mid-length documentaries were also in distribution – **Hotel Sunrise** (Hotel Úsvit) directed by Mária Rumanová and **Varga** by Soňa Maletzová. Two short Slovak animated films were screened prior to the main film in cinemas – **39 Weeks, 6 Days** (39 týždňov, 6 dní) made by Joanna Kozuch and Boris Šima and **Yellow** (Žltá) by Ivana Šebestová.

— **The Lust for Power** (Mečiar) by Tereza Nvotová with 15,621 viewers was the best-attended domestic

documentary. In turn, Nvotová's feature film **Filthy** (Špina) with 50,564 viewers was the most successful minority co-production.

— Ten distribution companies distributed Slovak films to cinemas; the Association of Slovak Film Clubs (ASFK) with seven domestic premières was again the most active in the field. Three production companies (Peter Hledík – Barok Film, Reminiscencie and Wide Road Films) released their films directly in cinemas, without collaborating with the standard distributors.

— We were happy when the average attendance at a 100-percent Slovak film or majority co-production increased from 30.26 viewers in 2015 to 31.83 viewers in 2016. However, the average attendance almost doubled last year, as 61.67 viewers on average came to watch a majority Slovak première film. The feature films **All or Nothing** (79.34 viewers), **Kidnapping** (Únos, 78.48 viewers) and **The Line** (68.97 viewers) had the highest average attendances.

— While in 2016, 377,072 viewers came to cinemas for all the screened domestic titles, not only the première ones, which was a 6.6 percent share of total attendance, last year almost four times as many came to view all the screened Slovak films – 1,431,297 viewers. The share of domestic films in the total attendance increased to 21.37% and, as regards this indicator, we will probably be ranked among the best within the European Union for 2017. ◀

Distribution of premiered Slovak and co-production films in Slovakia in 2017

	SLOVAK TITLE / ENGLISH TITLE	DIRECTOR	YEAR OF PRODUCTION	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	RELEASE DATE	NUMBERS OF SCREENINGS	ADMISSIONS	GROSS BOX OFFICE (EUR)	DISTRIBUTOR
1.	Všetko alebo nič / All or Nothing	Marta Ferencová	2017	SK/CZ	12-1-17	4,292	340,535	1,734,924	Continental film
2.	Čiara / The Line	Peter Bebjak	2017	SK/UA	03-8-17	4,775	329,349	1,749,425	Continental film
3.	Únos / Kidnapping	Mariana Čengel Solčanská	2017	SK	02-3-17	3,552	278,763	1,467,614	Continental film
4.	Cuky Luky film / Cuky Luky Film	Karel Janák	2017	SK	20-4-17	2,307	116,139	580,882	Itafilm
5.	Spievankovo a kráľovná Harmónia / Spievankovo and Queen Harmonia	Diana Novotná	2017	SK	12-10-17	1,863	86,555	424,400	Itafilm
6.	Masaryk / A Prominent Patient	Julius Ševčík	2016	CZ/SK	23-3-17	1,316	55,183	272,490	Garfield film
7.	Mečiar / The Lust for Power	Tereza Nvotová	2017	SK/CZ	12-10-17	557	15,621	77,994	PubRes
8.	Piata loď / Little Harbour	Iveta Grófová	2017	SK/CZ	16-3-17	473	12,027	44,856	CinemArt SK
9.	Vábenie výšok / Addicted to Altitude	Pavol Barabáš	2017	SK	19-10-17	291	8,005	27,637	ASFK
10.	Nina	Juraj Lehotský	2017	SK/CZ	21-9-17	334	5,714	22,175	FEMC
11.	DOGG Enrik Bistika, Slavomír Zrebný, Vilo Csino	Jonáš Karásek	2017	SK	09-11-17	335	2,866	16,013	Continental film
12.	Out	György Kristóf	2017	SK/HU/CZ	07-9-17	103	1,529	2,588	ASFK
13.	Diera v hlave / A Hole in the Head	Robert Kirchhoff	2016	SK/CZ	30-3-17	73	1,140	1,760	ASFK
14.	Sprisahanie šedej rasy / Grey Lizard Conspiracy	Maroš Berák	2017	SK/CZ	23-2-17	32	688	1,380	Filmtopia
15.	Profesionálna cudzinka / Professional Foreigner *	Anna Grusková	2016	SK	27-2-17	15	270	1,125	Reminiscencie
16.	Varga * / **	Soňa Maletzová	2017	SK/CZ	17-12-17	9	223	647	Filmtopia
17.	Hotel Úsvit / Hotel Sunrise **	Mária Rumanová	2016	SK	06-3-17	13	156	434	Filmtopia
18.	Obchádzka na ceste k dokonalej ilúzii / Detour on the Path to Perfect Illusion *	Róbert Fiľo	2016	SK	07-2-17	9	143	536	Wide Road Films
19.	Ťažká duša / Heavy Heart	Marek Šulík	2017	SK	05-10-17	12	96	317	Filmtopia
Sub-total 100% Slovak films, majority co-productions and 50/50						20,361	1,255,002	6,427,195 €	
1.	Špina / Filthy	Tereza Nvotová	2017	CZ/SK	22-6-17	1,222	50,564	257,193	Forum Film
2.	Po strništi bos / Barefoot	Jan Svěrák	2017	CZ/SK/DK	24-8-17	1,394	41,203	202,833	Forum Film
3.	Lichožrúti / Oddsockeaters	Galina Miklinová	2016	CZ/SK/HR	12-1-17	785	20,214	88,477	Forum Film
4.	Baba z ľadu / Ice Mother	Bohdan Sláma	2017	CZ/FR/SK	02-3-17	379	14,491	44,606	ASFK
5.	Tri želania / The Third Wish	Vít Karas	2017	CZ/SK	07-12-17	905	10,325	48,500	Continental film
6.	Záhradníctvo: Rodinný priateľ / Garden Store: The Family Friend	Jan Hřebejk	2017	CZ/SK/PL	01-6-17	550	7,494	36,456	Forum Film
7.	Záhradníctvo: Dezertér / Garden Store: Deserter	Jan Hřebejk	2017	CZ/SK/PL	28-9-17	475	5,815	28,552	Forum film
8.	Záhradníctvo: Nápadník / Garden Store: Suitor	Jan Hřebejk	2017	CZ/SK/PL	16-11-17	387	5,707	29,225	Forum film
9.	Cez kosti mŕtvych / Spoor	Agnieszka Holland, Kasia Adamik	2017	PL/DE/CZ/SE/SK	06-4-17	134	1,409	3,099	ASFK
10.	Svet podľa Daliborka / The White World According to Daliborek	Vít Klusák	2016	CZ/SK/GB	23-11-17	94	810	2,711	Bontonfilm
11.	Křižáček / Little Crusader	Václav Kadrnka	2017	CZ/SK	28-9-17	76	638	1,036	ASFK
12.	Vlk z Královských Vínohrad / The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street	Jan Němec	2016	CZ/SK/FR	20-4-17	73	600	1,060	ASFK
13.	Červená	Olga Sommerová	2017	CZ/SK	07-9-17	27	496	1,091	PubRes
14.	Opuštěný vesmír / Abandoned Space *	Peter Hledík	2015	CZ/SK	28-1-17	11	380	799	Peter Hledík - Barok Film
Sub-total Minority co-productions						6,512	160,146	745,638	
TOTAL All premiered Slovak and co-production films						26,873	1,415,148	7,172,833	
TOTAL All Slovak and co-production films screened in 2017						27,399	1,431,297	7,203,508	

source: Union of Film Distributors of the Slovak Republic, Reminiscencie, Peter Hledík - Barok Film, Wide Road Films

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

A Prominent Patient (Masaryk) – distribution première: 23 March 2017, pre-release showing: 15 December 2016. Total results for the film from the pre-release: 1,323 screenings, 55,619 viewers and gross box office: EUR 274,234.

* film outside of the Union of Film Distributors' plan of premières / ** mid-length film

About Water, Fears and Non-Comparability

— Nina (d. J. Lehotský) —

— Little Harbour (d. I. Grófová) —

— text: Jana Dudková —

photo: Film Europe Media Company, filmpiatalod.sk/Denisa Buranová

| ASFK | Garfield film —

2017 appears to be rather varied in Slovak feature film. And to such an extent that, after several years of ongoing increase in diversity, it is more and more difficult to assess the production as a whole. The trends noted in the previous years are strengthening, whilst attendances are growing in record figures. However, the qualitative non-homogeneity is also increasing. Unlike 2016, when I adapted the imaginative quality scale to the tendencies which seemed most original to me, this time at least two films really made me happy.

— Nina (dir. J. Lehotský) and Little Harbour (Piata lod', dir. I. Grófová) are ripe, empathic, and both visually and acoustically perfectly developed works whose authors are not afraid to work with imagination and metaphor. In both cases, it is the metaphor of water, in particular, which affords safety, escape and return to the original integrity. The metaphor of water – this time mainly in the context of inundation but also the yearning for the exoticism of the sea or being caught in a net just like helpless fish – also appears in another example of the festival film “genre” – in György Kristóf’s debut *Out*. But while the first two films remain compact in aesthetic terms, *Out* tries to achieve a balance (not always successfully) on the cusp between the stern, even academic minimalism of a festival film and bizarre humour. That the humour is largely based on hyperbole is too obviously confirmed shortly before the end of the film when the main protagonist meets a Latvian beauty exaggeratedly “pumped up” by plastic surgery.

— By contrast, the images in *Nina* and *Little Harbour* are just as impressive as they are accurate. Both films are also linked by the fact that they take the series of Slovak social dramas in the direction of family film. While the social dramas made up to the present dealt with the problems of marginalised adults, adolescents or teenagers, both films focus this time more on the world as viewed by children. As if the films’ imaginativeness was directly related to this in both cases, thereby rejecting the rational perspective of an adult “white” man that has defined Slovak post-socialist cinema for such a long time.

— While these two films did not significantly attract the interest of domestic audiences, 2017 also brought films which fought for audience interest in a more superficial manner. *All or Nothing* (Všetko alebo nič, dir. M. Ferencová) and *Cuky Luky Film* (dir. K. Janák) invite comparison, in particular with regard to their (successful) attempt to appeal to the broadest possible audiences. At the same time, both films move the comedy genre a little bit further on from “first attempts” like *The Corpse Must Die* (Mrtvola musí zomrieť), *So Fine* (Tak fajn) or *Vojtech* which were not fully competent in terms of dramaturgy. However, if we seek to compare them with the art films mentioned above, we quickly discover that these are non-comparable categories, especially with regard to quality. That is because both films represent an advance within the development of comedy in Slovakia, but that does not mean that they do not also have many weak points. *All or Nothing* is visually attractive, like a Christmas bauble, a shiny fusion of several familiar romantic comedies, mainly of Hollywood provenance. This film does not even attempt to resemble real life, it creates a picture of Prague which is interchangeable with generic images of any other European metropolis –

but it does contain an episode of a romantic weekend in Italy or a trip to the Tatras. Solid acting and well-chosen types save this obvious kitsch feature full of stereotypes about homosexuals, single mothers and university professors from the threat of its becoming a total fiasco. By contrast, *Cuky Luky Film* is far more unbalanced, albeit, maybe precisely for this reason, more interesting for some – as it also includes an attempt at self-reflexive narration or a sense for auto-irony and it is certainly commendable that in the full-length feature film the main protagonists have abandoned the excessive expressiveness typical of the TV sitcom the film refers to. Even in this case the film is overburdened with familiar motifs copied from Hollywood romantic comedies, although it is rather heading toward being a farce.

— All the other films made last year prove that Slovak cinema does not have to be polarised solely on a strange axis of “festival” versus “audience” film. They either try to combine both tendencies or they present quite untraditional deviations from what we imagine under Slovak cinema. The biographic mid-cult drama *A Prominent Patient* (Masaryk, dir. J. Ševčík) would appear to be the most successful in this regard – in terms of quality but also the number of awards. It is a professionally unusually mastered off-shoot of Hollywood representatives of this genre which, moreover, ushers in an important historical theme. However, the filmmakers were not able to resist clichés, not even trivial attempts to create a metaphor – by accident again largely associated with water. The repeat motif of the tempestuous ocean completes the dramatic atmosphere of the film and helps to render it comprehensible for the less perceptive viewer. *A Prominent Patient* remains a local work within the global context, even though English is spoken in the film to a quite unusual extent, but it is definitely an above-average work within the Czech and Slovak Republics as regards the depiction of critical moments of our national history (in this case the relation between Jan Masaryk and Edvard Beneš at the time of the Munich Agreement).

— The sequel to the popular series about Spievankovo is a totally different type of film. It already occupies a stable position in Slovak audiovision even despite this being a series of films which are regularly denied support from the Slovak Audiovisual Fund. What is positive about the entire project is that progress is visible in it and its latest instalment *Spievankovo and Queen Harmonia* (Spievankovo a kráľovná Harmónia, dir. D. Novotná) makes a far more harmonious and professional impression than did the earlier ones. The combination of the peculiar acting expression of the project’s authors and professional actors does not harm it either. The gender stereotypes remain, but they are amusingly disrupted here and there and, instead of getting to know professions, the authors enter the more neutral territories of musical instruments and styles. The film has weaker and stronger episodes, constructs and performances. Many melodies and

arrangements look as if they were adopted from the children’s musical programme *Golden Gate* (Zlatá brána), while others react in a quite humorous manner to various musical genres and styles. However, all in all, the film does not leave the impression of any greater theft of motifs from other films than, for instance, *All or Nothing*.

In addition to more confident work involving other languages, several of last year’s films are also characterised by being set in other countries and some of them are ineligible to compete for a “being Slovak” status.

— *Detour on the Path to Perfect Illusion* (Obchádzka na ceste k dokonalej ilúzii) was literally a surprise last year, albeit not a positive one. It was not made by a professional filmmaker and it did not receive any support from system sources. Unlike some other attempts to make an amateur full-length film, such as the cult title *Nothing Bleeds Forever* (Nič nekrváca večne), the author of this film does not make an attempt at irony, and certainly not self-irony; on the contrary, it is intended absolutely seriously despite failing to master the basic rules of film language. And its focus on alienation, cheating, deception is also serious, even existential. The film also quite obviously draws on the style and acting stylisation of the new wave and combines it with a pinch of Lynch. However, its attempts at metaphors border on embarrassment (for instance the repeat motif of a steamboat) and though it creates an expectation of an important punchline that would resolve everything, it does not offer any.

— Among the excellent or at least interesting representatives of art film (*Nina*, *Little Harbour* but also *Out*), an attempt to make a world-class mid-cult (*A Prominent Patient*), non-systematic attempts to make art, a block of songs for children and romantic comedies, several other films were made last year, where the filmmakers tried to link their artistic ambitions mostly with popular genres or at least bizarre humour. These were mainly films with socially urgent themes, although no other Slovak film managed to demonstrate an illusion of influencing social events to the extent of the cleverly deployed *Kidnapping*. In short, *Kidnapping* (Únos, dir. M. Čengel Solčanská) established a precedent despite reacting belatedly to the theme of Mečiar’s amnesties and,



— Out (d. Gy. Kristóf) —

moreover, in a markedly tendentious manner, as the story of Róbert Remiáš’s murder is not only likened to the story of Christ on the cross (with his mother as Virgin Mary and the journalist investigating the case as Mary Magdalene) but it is also presented as part of the fight between two specific political camps – the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH).

— If *Kidnapping* lures audiences with the noir atmosphere of the story of crime in the highest circles, *The Line* (Čiara) by Peter Bebjak, who previously displayed noir positions in *The Cleaner* (Čistič), is a gangster movie obscuring these positions to the benefit of Eastern Slovak exoticism, which is mediated more by kitschy exotic music than by image. This is unfortunate, as the film broaches the important topic of the derelict border region and it presents a more humane approach to the theme of fear of immigrants with even existential persuasiveness. Incidentally, this theme also appears in one of the stories of the omnibus film *DOGG* which re-introduces fear to Slovak cinema after several years without horror movies. The original set of stories has been adapted in the long-awaited project so as to better correspond to the current social-political situation. In particular, the first story *Duet* by Slavomír Zrebný is updated; as regards the invocation of fear, this story is the best and least obtrusively directed. Just as in *The Line*, the migration crisis is given room in the story, this time in connection with fear of terrorism. In addition, the second story (Viliam Csino’s *Opus Dei*) reacting to the legacy of the Slovak State corresponds to the social events of the past years, while the third and fourth stories attract interest more by their timeless themes and the effort to move from concern for national values to the issue of transnationality. Out of the four stories, the third story *Grasswater* is the one that tries least to invoke fear by traditional horror or dystopic action film means. This story might make fans of the little-known experimental filmmaker Enrik Bistika happy, but it is least related to the overall concept of the omnibus film, mainly because, instead of invoking fear, it invokes loathing, even aversion. The last story *Game* directed by Jonáš Karásek is a dystopian story on the extreme consequences of the reality show trend. It captivates with references to video games and classical film dystopias from *Metropolis* to *Blade Runner*, or Gilliam’s *Brazil*, but, in particular, with its harsh ideas and even neurotic pace.

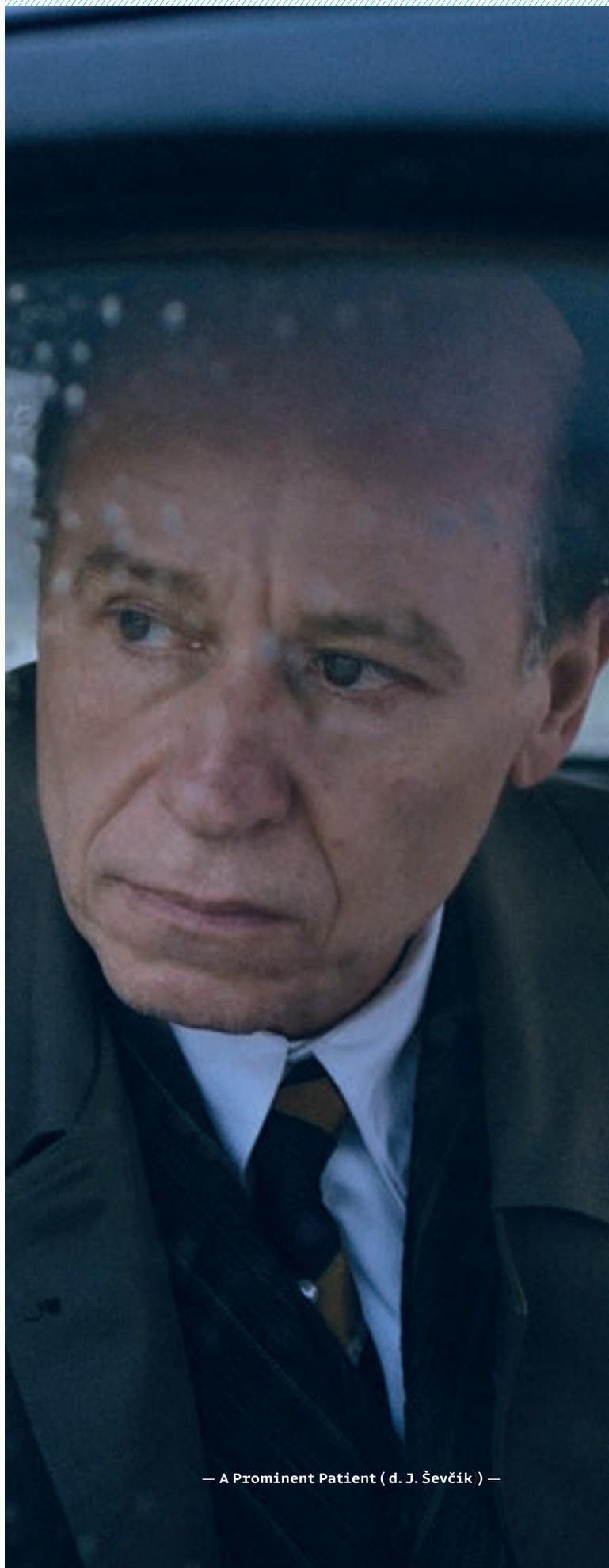
— It is not just the last two stories of the omnibus film *DOGG* that are characterised by the effort to move toward the disconcerting current effects of globalisation or even to some exoticism of transnationality – including the use of foreign language (German in *Grasswater* and an invented language in *Game* giving the impression of “universality”). We can find similar features in György Kristóf’s debut *Out*, which erodes the dominance of the Slovak language that we are accustomed to in Slovak films. The film’s main

character speaks mainly Hungarian and only starts to speak Slovak when he arrives in Latvia where he tries to communicate with the local people in a kind of Slavic gobbledegook.

The feature films screened in cinemas in 2017 are not only diverse in terms of their genre and quality, but also interconnected by common or similar metaphors and motifs.

— In addition to more confident work involving other languages, several of last year's films are also characterised by being set in other countries and some of them are ineligible to compete for a "being Slovak" status. *A Prominent Patient* which received many Sun in a Net awards is spoken mostly in English and *Filthy* (Špina) – the last film that I am going to mention – is, in turn, a Czech majority film but made by a Slovak director (Tereza Nvotová) with predominantly Slovak actors. The film has a confident expression and, even though it is a début, it is more balanced and more compact than for instance *Out* – but it contains fewer surprises. Not only with its theme and choice of actress in the main role who by chance also appeared in a similar type of role in the début by the Klein Svoboda spouses *Little Feather* (Pirko), but especially with its conciseness which is, surprisingly, only connected with some illogical motivations (for instance the sudden change in the relation of the main character's brother to his favourite teacher). Despite all this, it is one of last year's better films.

— The feature films screened in cinemas in 2017 are not only diverse in terms of their genre and quality, but also interconnected by common or similar metaphors and motifs. From the water that provides the illusion of integrity and transcendence but also (un)safety, up to seeking out ways of transcending the limits of what is still a Slovak film – not only at the level of production but also for language, quality and themes. ◀



— A Prominent Patient (d. J. Ševčík) —

From Exotification to Understanding

— text: Marek Urban — photo: ASFK | PubRes | Filmtopia —

The films that we designated as documentaries in 2017 had a common theme: they go from what we term "exotification" to allowing us to understand each other.



— If we exotify a certain group of people, their activities or traits in film, it means that we view them as something unknown, mysterious, as something meriting our interest. There are many exotifying films which managed either to completely astonish or to totally horrify. *Lessons of Darkness* (Lektionen in Finsternis, 1992, dir. Werner Herzog) compelled us to be mesmerizingly paralysed while viewing the process of human destruction, the films *Animal Love* (Tierische Liebe, 1996) and *In the Basement* (Im Keller, 2014, both dir. Ulrich Seidl) pinned us to our seats when we saw the socially tabooed manifestations of affection between humans and animals or just between humans. A certain degree of exotification in everyday life is even necessary: to be able to look at common and everyday objects as at things with a secret or a question makes it possible for us not to succumb to scepticism, emptiness or boredom. G. K. Chesterton wrote in his book *Orthodoxy* that to see something repeatedly (for instance, brightly-coloured fallen leaves, the first snow, flowers in bloom) but to consistently view it with amazement is one of the greatest challenges of adult life (because everything is new for children and it is not difficult for them to be amazed). To summarise and underline: exotification is not necessarily a negative phenomenon.

— However, and this is equally important, there is one fundamental “but” here. When exotifying, an abyss appears in the film. The abyss between them and us. Some sort of irresolvable *differend* (Lyotard) between two groups of people when one group (filmmakers via film and the audience) has the right to attribute to another group of people (protagonists) traits reducing their individuality without them having the possibility to do anything about it: the audience can talk, discuss and think, but the representation of the protagonists in film is final, it is irrevocable, it is as it is. This dispute brought such varied films in 2017 as *Grey Lizard Conspiracy* (Sprisahanie šedej rasy, dir. Maroš Berák) and the mid-length film *Hotel Sunrise* (Hotel Úsvit, dir. Mária Rumanová). In both cases, we enter stories of strangers – them – as filmmakers and the audience and they differ from us. The former try to communicate with a UFO, they send light signals in a hexadecimal code from a small village and on the global scale of the even smaller Slovakia to the night sky, and believe in the dominance of lizards who look like people without emotions. These latter gamble on slot machines, do not pay alimonies, are on the run from the law, watch soap operas, try to lose weight and hope that they will capture the interest of the love of their life by spending a few minutes with her in one room and not doing anything at all. In both cases we approach them from the perspective of their difference, we take part in an excursion to a sort of imaginary human zoo – and maybe we even mean well – but we are simply not able to understand them. In the first case we casually realise that the UFO is just a hobby and proxy problem (maybe it plays a role

similar to that of collecting stamps or match boxes, maybe not), but the film reduces its protagonists just to the UFO, and that is why we do not know how it actually is. In the second case we watch human suffering and hopelessness, ensuing from the seemingly irresolvable life situation; however, we are the ones who attribute this hopelessness and irresolvability to the protagonists: simply because we cannot imagine living their lives, being able to feel love, hope, a lust for love, passion, ordinary joy or amusement in their situation, in their living rooms, in their city. But what about them? I do not wish to require understanding from films that do not demand this from themselves. However, we have to ask: what do the films in question demand from us? Astonishment? Pity?

— Films that exert the requirement of understanding but are unable to meet this requirement put us in a different situation: *A Hole in the Head* (Diera v hlave, dir. Robert Kirchoff), *The Lust for Power* (Mečiar, dir. Tereza Nvotová), or the minority co-production *Červená* (dir. Olga Sommerová).

„And to understand herself, she (Tereza Nvotová) tried to understand Mečiar himself.”

— *A Hole in the Head* primarily represents the Roma Holocaust, wherein the stories of the individual protagonists merely play an instrumental role. They do not serve to allow us to watch the influence of the Holocaust on their lives or to understand the protagonists themselves as human beings who have experienced a traumatic event. In effect, it is quite the reverse: the stories of the protagonists serve as an illustration of the Holocaust; the film’s dramaturgy does not follow the inner logic of their stories, but sequences various segments of their accounts so as to create an imaginary mosaic of the Roma Holocaust. The individual accounts are accumulating in the mosaic, but they link to each other rather by their emotional tone, which makes it impossible to create a picture of the event, to understand the causes or express the implications for the lives of the protagonists. Hence, the film constantly manifests just one solitary clear message: it is an atrocity. However, we are less able to understand what this atrocity meant for the particular lives of particular people who experienced it and who survived it. The urgency of the message presented is hence lost by its being constantly repeated.

— *The Lust for Power* explicitly sets the requirement of understanding: the protagonist of the film, Tereza Nvotová, wanted to understand her childhood affected by her parents’ engaged approach in the times of Vladimír Mečiar’s government. And to understand

herself, she tried to understand Mečiar himself. The ferocity and the ambition to penetrate deep into his thinking, to unmask him – and maybe even uncover illegal facts as David Frost did in his interview with Richard Nixon – are almost palpable in the film’s introduction. All the greater, then, is the inner tension that the film creates in itself because the historical line depicts Mečiar’s rise and fall – how he swore at journalists, shouted, sought to depose the president and fully met our concept of an anti-hero of dramatic art, arousing the opposition of a democratic society (see last year’s film *Kidnapping/Únos*, dir. Mariana Čengel Solčanská); however, the contemporary line depicts Mečiar as a disarmingly charming, somewhat tired old man spurned by society who welcomes you with flowers, grills sausages with you and who meant everything well.



— The Lust for Power (d. T. Nvotová) —

Regardless of how it was “in reality”, whatever relationship dynamics developed between the film crew and the respondent, who stylised himself into what role while making the film, etc.; the film itself is incapable of fulfilling its ambition to go “beneath” and in its inner inconsistency (or accompanying commentary beyond the image) even arouses feelings of disappointment, resignation or failure (which makes it almost too severe on itself).

— Then, in contrast with *The Professional Foreigner* (Profesionálna cudzinka, dir. Anna Grusková), *Červená* makes it possible to clearly outline the contours of what understanding in film permits. Both films thematise the lives of their protagonists in emigration, they are not critical toward the protagonists (they do not question their accounts, do not make a problem of them) and both are equally lionising (they view the prota-

gonists as authorities, the perspective of the film is subordinated to them, it is not on an equal footing). Despite all this, *Červená* asks a fundamental question – potentially explosive and controversial: how is it possible that the protagonist loved theatre and singing so much that she did not care about being separated from her husband, about the rise of the communists to power or the tragic death (or politically motivated murder) of her mother? The film does not provide an answer to this question, the protagonist is able to enumerate her life successes without giving us to understand why they are so important to her – and hence also for us. Conversely, *The Professional Foreigner* penetrates the depths and allows us to get through to the protagonist. That is because it transfers the extremely intense and, for the protagonist, unpleasantly

revealing sense of “guilt” at leaving Czechoslovakia at the time (in her view) of its greatest distress, which subsequently motivated her to become involved as a journalist and activist in places of conflict all over the world. This deconstruction of the protagonist’s motivation enables us, as viewers, to identify with her, to understand what she has gone through, what she has experienced, what it has meant for her, and so, together with her, we can enter our own *unforgettable observations* (Adler), in a catharsis realise their impact on our life, and if we choose – continue without them. — A catharsis is also the determining experience in the case of *Addicted to Altitude* (Vábenie výšok, dir. Pavol Barabáš) – well, provided that we agree to the intoxicating game against deadlines which could seem too mainstream to some (we constantly have to ask whether the protagonists will manage to get

here or there without being killed by the cold, lack of oxygen or mutual animosity). However, the film stands out in particular for its deconstruction of the group dynamics between Czechoslovak mountaineers, their struggle for power and primacy and enables us to understand the role of leadership in directing them, achieving success, but also in overcoming a trauma (tragic death of close friends), or in coping with envy and jealousy.

— But, with regard to the theme of understanding, in particular, *Heavy Heart* (Ťažká duša, dir. Marek Šulík) is unique as it creates a common space for dialogue between us and the Roma minority living in Slovakia – as it allows us to build on what we have in common as human beings and not on what differentiates us. However, paradoxically, I do not think that the film's main theme – mournful songs and the ensuing emotions – is the key to mutual understanding, but rather the themes that open with them. The death of a loved one, separation from family, trying to win the love and affection of a parent are general themes and they allow us to be equal partners in the conversation – just as the film *Black White* (Čierna a biela, 2014, dir. Samuel Jaško) did previously with the theme of the emotional adoption of a child and *Koza* (2015, dir. Ivan Ostrochovský) with a sporting theme. But,

„But, with regard to the theme of understanding, in particular, *Heavy Heart* is unique as it creates a common space for dialogue between us and the Roma minority living in Slovakia.”

at the same time, *Heavy Heart* is different – by openly drawing attention to its limits (that some of the protagonists are “playing” for money and that we are often more interested in their songs than they are) and by being very elegant in its humility (the seven chapters provide a rhythm for the narrative and create a transparent structure without the needless effort to combine everything into a single coherent story), and in this way it actually does not demand anything – but it gives us a lot. ◀



— *Heavy Heart* (d. Marek Šulík) —



— *Yellow* (d. I. Šebestová) —

Festivals Signal a Drop in Quality

— text: Eva Šošková — photo: ASFK | Plackartnyj —

Slovak films were not screened in a separate competition at last year's Fest Anča International Animation Festival in Žilina; only a non-competition panorama was assembled. In turn, the small jury of the 2017 Áčko Student Film Festival selected only one animated film for the competition. Thereby, festivals are stating their negative position towards the works of the youngest authors, while the standard high quality of works of the older generation of professional animators is maintained in distribution channels with a larger audience reach (cinema and television).

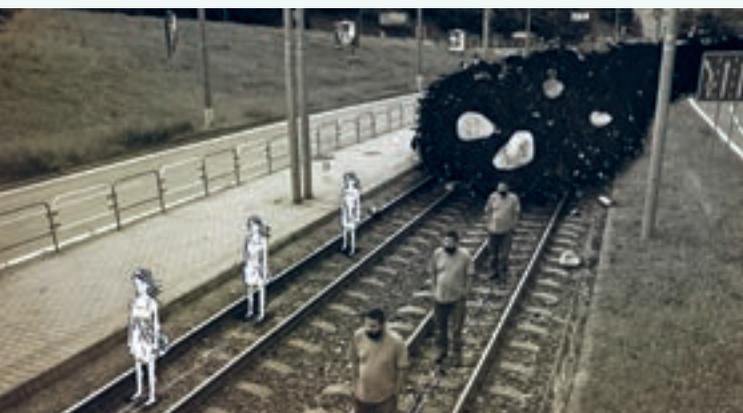
— The contributions and discussions held within the 2017 Slovak Film Week talked about the crisis in animated film. In addition to the older problems, such as the unresolved distribution of short films or the lack of specialists in production positions due to the undiversified education system and the related low annual production, the renewed theme of the missing reflection of works also figured last year. However, this public mention of the decreasing quality of auteur works, which have been dominant to date, is new, even though still not supported with argument.

— If we compare the 2016 Slovak competition at the Fest Anča Festival with the 2017 Slovak Film Panorama, we will discover that in 2016 there were two professional short films in the programme, while last year, in addition to video clips, there was just one episode of a series

coming from the professional environment. This was not because the already low number of professional titles would have decreased, but the unfavourable relation between the long-term production of films (due to financial and personnel reasons) and the festival dates was again demonstrated, as the festival is unable to include the production from the current calendar year in the programme.

— When comparing the quality of semi-professional student films, it is mainly the technical aspect that comes into the foreground. More technically demanding projects were included in the 2016 Fest Anča competition – the puppet animation *Brother Deer* (Braček jelenček, dir. Z. Žiaková, 2015) and a collage of techniques *Mila Fog* (dir. M. Prokopová, 2015) which encompass smooth motion; when speaking of style, it is a very saturated

image full of interesting visual elements supporting the narration by image (as was the case in the digitally animated film *Balloon Girl – Balónové dievča*, dir. M. Frajštáková 2015). By contrast, last year's Slovak Film Panorama presented a simpler animation, in technical terms, drawn on the computer with a low saturation of the image, as exemplified in the films *I Am Jumping! (Skáčem!)*, dir. P. Martinka, 2015) and *Automatina* (dir. A. Bolaňosová, 2016); in turn, the more saturated image of *Strawberry Days (Jahodové dni)*, dir. E. Sekerešová, 2016) communicates more by spoken word than by image. *Automatina* is an economically presented metaphor of a trap in which performers find themselves when facing their audience. It is characterised by a quick message and long contemplation after the film. Quite the opposite holds true for *I Am Jumping!*. The somewhat lengthy narration carries a nice punchline, but the theme of addiction, even though innovatively conceived, comes over as "out-of-date". *Construction Planning (Projekt výroby stavieb)*, dir. P. Bláha, an experimental project consisting of fragments of text and drawings in stroboscopic sequence, which can scarcely be deemed an animation, was the sole film with a 2017



copyright at the Fest Anča Festival. The trash film *Solar Box* (dir. L. Sigmund, 2016) also uses printed texts and rapid editing which gives it a stroboscopic effect. *Solar Box* seems to be more suited to the internet than to cinemas; you can pause the film on the web, read the images and have fun. An amusing punchline and technically amateur treatment of 3D models characterise the film *Stranger (Cudzinec)*, dir. P. Cabarka, 2016) which clearly demonstrates that mixing professional, semi-professional and amateur works at a festival is not always justified. However, last year's Panorama films *Chilli* (dir. M. Mikušová, 2016), included in the international competition, and *Tutti* (dir. M. Jasaň, 2016) are comparable with the films from the 2016 Fest Anča Festival. Both films involve expressively dynamic animation drawn on the computer, with saturated image and colours. Moreover, in the context of Slovak works, *Chilli* moves the female character from being a victim towards being an "accomplice" in complicated partner relations and *Tutti* extends the very small group of Slovak non-narrative films in an original manner.

Only one of all the applicant animated films was selected at the 2017 Áčko Student Film Festival –

The Contrast (Kontrast), dir. B. Bárková, 2017). It joined the list of many women's films about partnership relations based on the contrast of genders or on the motif of female victims.

— Last year, the professional films *Yellow (Žltá)*, dir. I. Šebestová, 2017) and *39 Weeks, 6 Days (39 týždňov, 6 dní)*, dir. J. Kožuch, B. Šima, 2017) were screened in cinemas prior to the main film. Ivana Šebestová continues the creative line of women's films but, for the first time, she accentuates it in technological and ideological terms. Cut-out animation is replaced by total animation and the female identity, which previously related only to the complementary male identity, this time stems from the relation to itself. The surrealist film about pregnancy *39 Weeks, 6 Days* introduces the theme of modern fatherhood to Slovak animation, where the father is in closer contact with the child, even at the prenatal stage. In addition to the short films already mentioned, the full-length co-production title *The Oddsockeaters (Lichožrúti)*, dir. G. Miklínová, 2016, Czech Republic/Slovakia/Croatia) was also in conventional cinema distribution, albeit without any creative contribution on the part of the Slovak partner.



— Two years after *Mimi & Lisa (Mimi & Líza)*, Katarína Kerekesová offered the first Slovak 3D animated bedtime story, *The Websters (Websterovci)* to television over last Christmas (2017). These two titles are diametrically different, not only from the technical aspect (2D versus 3D) but also with regard to their poetics. The TV series about two girls is built on sensitivity, on the stimulation of the senses in fantastic imaginary worlds, but the spider family transfers realistic family relations to the big world of small spiders. The TV series *Mimi & Lisa* is more charming and poetic, *The Websters* are more down-to-earth. Last year, RTVS also broadcast the complete 52-episode TV series by Ivan and Dávid Popovič, *If I Only Had a Screw Loose! (Mať tak o koliesko viac!)*.

— Due to the generally low productivity of Slovak animation, even a partial decline in quality has a large impact on the whole. That is why 2017 is frustrating in terms of animated film, even despite the partial successes. ◀

Last Year Slovak Films Had a Busy Festival Life

The year just past was successful for Slovak cinema on several levels. Domestic films not only broke records in attendance figures but they also managed to win recognition at important international festivals (Berlinale, Cannes, Rotterdam). **Little Harbour, Out, Nina, The Line** and **Filthy** had an excellent year.

— Right at the start of the year, the full-length debut of director Tereza Nvotová *Filthy (Špina)* received its world premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam (25 January – 5 February 2017). This drama treating the theme of victims of sexual violence and the psychiatric treatment of juveniles, which is taboo in Slovak society, was screened in the Bright Future Section for new talents with a personal vision or an individual style.

— The prestigious Berlin International Film Festival (9 – 19 February 2017) was also successful for Slovak cinema. The drama *Little Harbour (Piata loď)* by director Iveta Grófová, inspired by Monika Kompaniková's eponymous book, was presented in its world premiere in the Generation Kplus Section at the 67th Berlinale. The visually attractive story of two children who decide to create their own world and family rules resonated with the Children's Jury and won the Crystal Bear. "We chose a creative and authentic film... The story touched us very much and we truly believed the actors," stated the Jury's position. The Silver Bear – the Alfred Bauer Prize last year went to *Spoor (Cez kosti mŕtvych/Pokot)*

which was made in a Slovak minority co-production by director Agnieszka Holland (in collaboration with Kasia Adamik).

— A Slovak film was presented in the Un Certain Regard competition for the first time in history at the 70th prestigious Cannes Film Festival (17 – 28 May 2017). György Kristóf's full-length debut *Out* also vied for the Golden Camera Award. Kristóf's road movie follows the fifty-something family man Ágoston who, after losing his job, embarks on a journey from Slovakia across Eastern Europe in an attempt to find a job and make his dream – to catch a big fish – come true. The Slovak film *Atlantis, 2003 (Atlantída, 2003)* by Michal Blaško, a student of directing at the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, competed for the jury's favour among 16 films in the Cinéfondation student film competition in Cannes. The film raises the question of morals in the story of a young Ukrainian couple who try to get to Germany illegally.

— The Czech-Slovak film *Ice Mother (Baba z ľadu)*, dir. B. Sláma) with Slovak actress Zuzana Kronerová in the leading role was successful on the other side of the ocean; it won the Best Screenplay in an International Narrative Feature Film Award at the 16th Tribeca Film Festival in New York (16 – 30 April 2017).

— Several Slovak films were presented at the 52nd Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (30 June – 8 July 2017). The thriller *The Line (Čiara)* also received its premiere here; ultimately it won the Best Director Award for Peter Bebjak. The Jury granted the Crystal Globe for Best Feature Film to the Czech-Slovak Medieval road movie *Little Crusader (Křižáček)* by Václav Kadrnka. *Censor (Cenzorka)* by director and producer Peter Kerekes managed to attract interest in the Festival's Industry Programme – it won the Works in Progress Award.

— The family drama *Nina* by director Juraj Lehotský was also successful last year at an A-list festival; it won the FIPRESCI Award at the 33rd Warsaw International Film Festival (12 – 21 October 2017).

— So far, only new films have been mentioned, but last year intensive work was also carried out on the international presentation of films from the Slovak Film Institute's archives. Perhaps most significant was the participation of the full-length animated film by Viktor Kubal, *The Bloody Lady (Krvavá pani, 1980)* at one of the most highly regarded international festivals of classical films, the Lumière Grand Lyon Film Festival in France. The digitally restored version of *The Bloody Lady* received its world premiere there on 18 October 2017 in the Treasures and Curiosities Section. Works from the archives of Slovak cinema will be presented this year too, and one of these important presentations is, for instance, the screening of selected titles at the prestigious short film festival in Oberhausen, Germany that will take place at the beginning of May. These are predominantly films of the 1960s and they will be screened in the Presentation of Archives Section at the festival. ◀

— text: Lea Pagáčová —
 photo: Wandal Production —

The Line of Life Remains Constant

Slovak filmmakers remain loyal to thematic realism, they continue in social criticism and in the depiction of the manifold malfunctions of the state. However, reflection is appropriate, the current socio-political situation affords many impulses and, finally, journalists are not the only ones qualified for this role. Art has the ability to enhance the knowledge of reality. **The Line** courageously drew on the well-tried theme of smuggling on the Slovak-Ukrainian border, and thereby got itself into a risky position, not only with regard to authenticity, but also the idea it wants to address to sensitive Slovak audiences.

— Adam Krajňák is the main character of *The Line* (Čiara). The cigarette-smuggling gang leader is an anti-hero for whom the viewers have a liking, even despite his illicit source of living; well, he does love his family, he is a (sometimes even brutally) just and beloved boss who, in principle, refuses to have anything to do with drugs. Allocating the title role to Tomáš Mašťalír who meets (perhaps too much) the current attributes of the physical beauty of a so-called lumber-jack also increases the viewers' liking for him. However, the attractiveness of the criminal should not serve the story genre, rather the chosen benevolent view of the criminal activities. We gradually discover that, as is usually the case in the criminal world, Adam is just a tiny bit bigger fish in the pond. It becomes more and more inevitable that he will be caught, depending on how well he obeys Krull, who ranks above him in the gang.

— Family relations constitute the second line of the story; these evolve from the business activities of the head of the family. All the other members of the family do not just complement Adam's world, they are directly linked to the film's main theme or even influence its classification as a genre. Adam's mother, his wife and his oldest daughter are the most important ones. In describing them, an analogy with a gangster movie comes to mind, which is a genre closer to *The Line* than the thriller genre which is often used to classify the film. The protagonist's mother, Anna, originally led the difficult life of a physically abused wife but, thanks to her inner strength and determination, she managed to get up on her feet, got rid of the undesirable ones and established a smuggling trade which was later taken over by her only son. The seemingly submissive position of a fragile grandmother walking with a stick is quickly overlaid by her resolute statements and commands. The founder of the family business remains in the background, keeping the aces up her sleeve. Conversely, Adam's wife Saša is full of emotion and she would rather leave the family business than further support it. She represents both the attractive and passionate femme fatale and, simultaneously, the family protector. Accordingly, it becomes inevitable that she leaves the family. The eldest daughter Lucia serves as a means of expressing the basic feature of the main hero – his love for his family. Lucia brings her fiancé Ivor into the story who is then introduced to the secrets of the smuggling world.

→



— The many characters of the film usher in scenes that are often associated with the depiction of gangs or the mob in film. “Our” family also meets the types of people and situations that are characteristic of the genre – this includes the training of a new member of the family in illegal practices, the punishment of betrayal among smuggling colleagues and almost poetic discussions between Adam and the top representatives of the criminal underworld based on ingenuity or analogies, or the parallel montage of celebrations and the imminent tragedy. The gangster movie presents stories from the viewpoint of the “bad guys” in the fight with the even “worse guys” and *The Line* divides these groups up on the basis of the nature of the smuggled goods and their consequences for society. Adam refuses to smuggle drugs, while he doesn’t question the illegal trade in cigarettes and refugees despite the questionability of its financial gains or the welfare of his family. High returns are usually linked with high risk and unpleasant consequences, such as imprisonment – in the worst case, even loss of life. In addition, Adam risks his family happiness every day, and that without any pertinent profit. Hence, the question arises: “Why?” Unlike the motivation of his right-hand man, Jona, Adam’s motivation to continue taking chances is minimal, we do not sense the endeavour and, at the same time, the inability to tackle the problem. The fight with fatalism is absent, we sometimes even get the impression that the hero can at any time kiss the disconsolate situation good-bye. The lack of answers and the lack of effort on Adam’s part to fight against the situation drains all the tension from the film, and it does so right up to the moment of betrayal. After this moment all possible exits are closed. Just like when the Titanic hit the iceberg – some people managed to get out from the lower deck, but others remained in the centre of the room and helplessly watched as all exits became closed. Just like Adam.

— Antiheroes have the ability to appear mysterious, we seek to uncover the reason for their behaviour and our affection for them, even though on many occasions these are characters with fundamental flaws in their character. That is why a film should enable us to gain a better than shallow insight into their psychology, to uncover the face behind the mask, either via a monologue, a subjective view, the reactions in an extreme situation, or in any other way. The filmmakers depict Adam as a man of action, who at first gives the impression of being a big boss at home and at work, but who ultimately has nothing to offer to his family and audiences. Where Bebjak’s previous film *The Cleaner* (Čistič) was brilliant, *The Line* fails.

— So we had better return to the more inspiring genre classification of the film. Corrupt police and

criticism of the establishment are usually essential parts of a gangster movie; in our case this also plays in the hands of the filmmakers in their effort to maintain realism at the thematic level. The atmosphere of brooding tension, fear or sudden twists in the plot is relieved by occasional comic moments which ensue mainly from the limited vocabulary and education level of the smugglers – these sometimes appear like caricatures. As the line between humorous and not so humorous moments is thin, sometimes the humour is cheap and shallow. However, satire works well in the given theme, hence further attempts to make the audience laugh seem to be redundant. Adam’s briefings of his gang, which start only after everyone lights up a cigarette, are a sort of mockery or parody of mobster films. The lighting of cigarettes might be a ritual, an analogy with similarly dangerous characters in other films or maybe just the result of the fact that the smugglers always have cigarettes to hand. And when a van carrying cigarette cartons meets with an accident, we see almost the whole village smoking, even the very youngest ones. We encounter characters from socially weaker groups in *The Line* more frequently, they help to complete the picture of this sleepy corner of Slovakia, characterised by indifference to the lack of decent jobs. The critical view offered in Bebjak’s film does not give the impression that the problems can be tackled; it rather just illustrates that there is no resolution to the situation. Therefore, *The Line* contains observations about the economic instability of the country and the maladies of the post-revolution period, and even though the impact of these attributes on the lives of the family is visible in the story, it is not of primary importance. As for the formal aspect, a dynamic camera with attractive image compositions, enriched by non-diegetic music with folklore motifs, complementing the atmosphere of a village on the border, is characteristic of *The Line*, unlike several other domestic social dramas. *The Line* attracted very sceptical Slovak viewers; the audiences filled cinemas readily. However, the question is to what extent the film really does address them. I am afraid that Adam’s weak points (apart from his relation to the law) bring the ambitious project down and the hole that opens up in the film’s foundations cannot be sealed even by information about secondary characters, or twists and turns in the plot, tragic departures or artistically motivated images. The evident excess at several levels of the film is simply a burden and it then becomes all the more demanding to sort out what is essential in order to have a fully-fledged experience. Accordingly, *The Line* leaves the viewer behind the imaginary line, even despite the local theme, a relatively expensive production or the cast of popular actors. In this case, less would have meant more. ◀

The Line (Člára, Slovakia/Ukraine, 2017) DIRECTED BY Peter Bebjak SCRIPT BY Peter Balko

DOP Martin Žiaran EDITED BY Marek Kráľovský MUSIC Slavo Solovic CAST Tomáš Mašťalir, Emília Vášaryová, Zuzana Fialová,

Andy Hryc, Eugen Libezniuk, Filip Kaňkovský, Milan Mikuščík LENGTH 113 min.

— text: Erik Binder —
photo: Punkchart films —

Nina Appeals without Being Literal

Young protagonists are all the rage in the current wave of Slovak social drama. Juraj Lehotský’s full-length début *The Miracle* (Zázrak), Iveta Grófová’s *Made in Ash* (Až do mesta Aš), Zuzana Liová’s *The House* (Dom) and last year’s *Little Harbour* (Piata loď, dir. I. Grófová) or *Filthy* (Špina) by Tereza Nvotová present multi-dimensional female characters. It is difficult to say whether this represents a trend or is just a coincidence. It might have been caused by the fact that women do have more difficult lives from childhood and audiences can thus more readily identify with their fates and show more empathy and compassion. That is why it is all the more remarkable that Lehotský did not venture on a purely social drama in his new film after the maybe too depressing *The Miracle*.

— Nina is an eleven-year-old girl who loves swimming and hates or does not understand mathematics. Her parents – somewhere in their late thirties – are getting a divorce and Nina finds herself in joint custody. Her mother is somewhat more successful as far as finances are concerned, as she works in Austria, lives in a family house and is trying to build a new relationship with her colleague. Her father is a crane driver at the Bratislava docks and his daughter’s visits to his workplace are among the moodiest and most elegantly shot scenes of the film. Throughout the film we see mainly cuts from the house, the docks, from the father’s sparsely furnished apartment and from the swimming pool. As Nina is continually on the road between both her “homes” and the swimming pool, the camera also cleverly focuses on claustrophobic shots from both cars. And, to be precise, close-ups of faces in the cramped space add drama to the dialogues during yet another transit from one place to another.

— Juraj Lehotský intentionally avoids broaching financial questions, the broken family is not in a more difficult economic situation and this decision of the author is justified and logical. First, we can quickly classify the protagonists as Bratislava (more or less) middle class – within this environment their fates appear to be more credible and many a viewer-parent will recognise that their own family could easily get into such a situation at any time. Next, the state of mind of the child (but also that of the parents) yearning for a peaceful loving life in a complete family is the object of the authors’ interest. Nina is not a victim of bullying at school, she is not experiencing her first love, she does not feel any desperate lack of money.

Accordingly, the director, as co-writer (together with Marek Leščák), does not intervene in the psychological concept of the film with any superfluous superficial detours which might be attractive for the audience.

— We find ourselves together with Nina, so to say, in the midst of events right from the very first scenes. Thanks to the cleverly conceived exposition, we quickly discover the state of affairs and the feelings of the characters. Ultimately, we do not require any further plot information. As viewers we take our experience from real life, and the question of the specific reasons preceding a divorce in a modern Slovak family is largely irrelevant for the child’s state of mind – of course, so long as the reason is not domestic violence or aggression when a divorce would actually mean liberation. The way the individual characters are depicted does not indicate anything like that, the love of both parents for Nina is incontestable right from the beginning, regardless of what we think of her “selfishness” – particularly in the case of the mother. Lehotský’s presumption of life experience on the part of the potential audience, and his reliance on it, is decisive and thanks to this *Nina* never becomes superfluously literal. That is why we never learn what preceded the divorce, nor what will follow once the film ends. This presentation of what represents, in essence, an infinite number of possible variants on the plot turns out to be a clear intention on the part of the authors towards the audience, and it can bring intellectual satisfaction as well as a certain frustration from what remains unstated. Maybe that is why more experienced people in middle and older age will like *Nina*. In this case, the plot is simply a kind of manual enabling →



the viewer to assemble an overall, much more comprehensive, picture of the destinies of one family which has become unravelled.

— Lehotský unerringly adapts the film's audio-visual form to the content of the script. As co-author, he is very well aware of what he wants to say, and he often says a great deal just via image and sound. The consummate editing of some scenes is worth mentioning; several times we witness short cuts of shots of a lonely mother, lonely father and lonely daughter in semi-close-ups or close-ups. This way of expressing the isolation of the individual characters that originally functioned in one family could not have been bettered. We are reminded of the joint moments of happiness that will probably never return, solely by way of photographs and hardly discernible videos on the cell phone. The chosen style and darker image-tinting create a unified atmosphere for the work and at some moments – for instance, in the port scenes already mentioned – a kind of agreeable melancholy comes to prevail. No wonder Nina feels better there than in the enclosed spaces. With the exception, of course, of the swimming pool – a metaphor for escape, but also for the protagonist's fighting spirit and ability to swim or rather “not drown” in real life which does not correspond to her and our ideas of perfect happiness. And so, despite its small number of characters, the film never gives the impression of being a “filmed theatre performance”.

— As for the acting performances, suffice it to say that the casting was perfect. Thanks to the mature script, Bibiana Nováková as Nina, Petra Fornayová as the mother and Robo Roth as the father know what to play and they fit into the demanding roles of “sane, fully aware people in a difficult life situation”. It may well be of interest for film critics to monitor the collaboration of Lehotský with Roth. *Nina* is definitely not “The Miracle II”. Robert Roth plays a diametrically different role to his role in the 2013 film and there is no reason to discontinue this alliance in Juraj Lehotský's next project.

— If you simply ask whether the director's new film is better than his feature debut *The Miracle*, the answer can be found, in part anyway, in your genre preferences. A family drama from the lower middle class or an uneasy social drama from the fringes of society? What is more important is the statement that Lehotský's script and directing make more of a mature impression this time, albeit not quite attaining “perfection”. A third film with another charismatic female protagonist and a rather more courageous deviation from the formal trends of contemporary festival film towards an even more pronounced, more distinctive, authorship could achieve it. To date, all the steps have been taken in the right direction. ◀



Nina (Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2017) DIRECTED BY Juraj Lehotský SCRIPT BY Marek Leščák, J. Lehotský

DOP Norbert Hudec EDITED BY Radoslav Dubravský MUSIC Aleš Březina CAST Bibiana Nováková, Robert Roth, Petra Fornayová,

Josef Kleindienst, Miroslav Pollak, Simona Kuchynková LENGTH 82 min.

— text: Martin Pálúch —
 photo: Sentimentalfilm —

Out – Ágoston's Journey after Work from Slovakia to the East of the EU

“The sea begins here, but it definitely doesn't end here.”

The Slovak-Hungarian-Czech film *Out* by director György Kristóf is the full-length début from this native of Košice who graduated from FAMU, Prague, in film directing. It was the first film in Slovakia's history to receive its world première at the Un Certain Regard competition section at last year's prestigious Cannes Film Festival where it vied for the Golden Camera.

In soccer terminology an *out* means that the ball is behind the line, outside of the playing area, which means that its position and existence are insignificant with regard to the further development of the game. It can be replaced by another ball, set aside or lost forever. However, the principles and rules of the game are not in any way disrupted by this fact.

When watching *Out* we get the impression that, following his dismissal, the protagonist, the fifty-something Ágoston, chooses as his next life trajectory a route that takes him as far as possible from the known game plan of his current life, certainties and practices. At the beginning he appears as clueless as Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's story *Metamorphosis* who wakes up one morning and discovers that he has been transformed into a huge insect and, in effect, everything has changed for him irreversibly. Ágoston also finds himself in a new situation, behind the line and “out of the playing area”. He must learn to face up to new challenges and confront coincidental and unforeseeable realities. The repercussions that he feels in these confrontations drive him even further away from the traditional world and thinking to places where the social categories which were quite normal for him up to that point cease to exist. From that moment on, Ágoston's unusual adventures are determined by the need to succeed in the new situation, both in his own eyes and those of the world. He resolutely takes a further step behind the line, having broken loose from his home and the habits that determined the rhythm

of his everyday duties until then, into a zone beyond the traditional social category.

Then the film is conceived as a road movie. At the symbolic level, it is accentuated as the pilgrimage of a fisherman from a small European country as Slovakia after work but, paradoxically, eastwards, to the shores of the vast sea where far bigger fish swim than the ones he is familiar with from the pond. The desire to catch them becomes a fateful challenge for Ágoston and his journey to this target acts as a film parable on the absurd functioning of our society.

In a certain sense, his endeavour is reminiscent of the protagonist's fate in the Russian (Soviet) film *City Zero* (*Gorod zero*, dir. Karen Shakhnazarov, 1988). The similarity between the engineer Varakin and the protagonist of *Out* is all the more distinctive as, despite a relatively logical initial motivation – Varakin tries to arrange a business matter, Ágoston heads eastwards for work – both face the struggle between loneliness and absurdity which colours the reality of our world, whereby the materialised expressions of this absurdity take on more and more surrealistic contours. For this reason both directors, Shakhnazarov and Kristóf, resort to symbolic means of expression which enable them to encompass the absurd manifestations of reality more accurately and to offer the viewer a certain tangible key for the interpretation of gradual scenes and sequences. The changes in the situation are then determined by an unconventional logic and original interplay of meanings which does not always

have to be explicable down to the tiniest detail.

— Shakhnazarov tried to capture the emotions of the contemporary Russian (Soviet) man in the late 1980s. To achieve this, he used the analogy of city Zero to convey the structural absurdity in the way the Soviet bureaucratic machinery worked – he chose to employ apparently surrealist symbols and absurd situations in order to depict it and he was not afraid to cross the lines of common logic. By contrast, Kristóf does not deviate from recognisable reality in *Out*. In the film, the symbolic level and absurdity are firmly embedded within the realistic scope of the free-flowing situations which Ágoston experiences on his journey outside of the game plan. The director's criticism of social conditions is revealed by means of a deviation from the imaginative axis of the standard, which from the perspective of our society makes things automatically redundant, worthless and devoid of purpose, just like our hero in his current life situation. In order

stuffed earless rabbit which, fulfilling the role of the protagonist's materialised alter ego, travels with him for a part of his journey to the sea in order to ultimately fall into the hands of a similar outcast once more.

— Not only are the sizes of the fish standardised, but also the instruments by which the fish are caught. If the fish are too small, they are unsuitable and redundant, in both consumption and economic terms. It is considered normal to have a job, family and friends. Whoever doesn't have them becomes untrustworthy. Again, in consumption and economic terms. In *Out* Kristóf highlights the fact that a system set up in this way inevitably produces a certain type of individuals who are non-standard in the view of the current consumer society, and thus get assigned beyond the general and social interest against their will. Being so small that you get caught in the mesh of a fishing net is just another manifestation of inconvenient size. You are either caught in the net or on the hook and you cor-

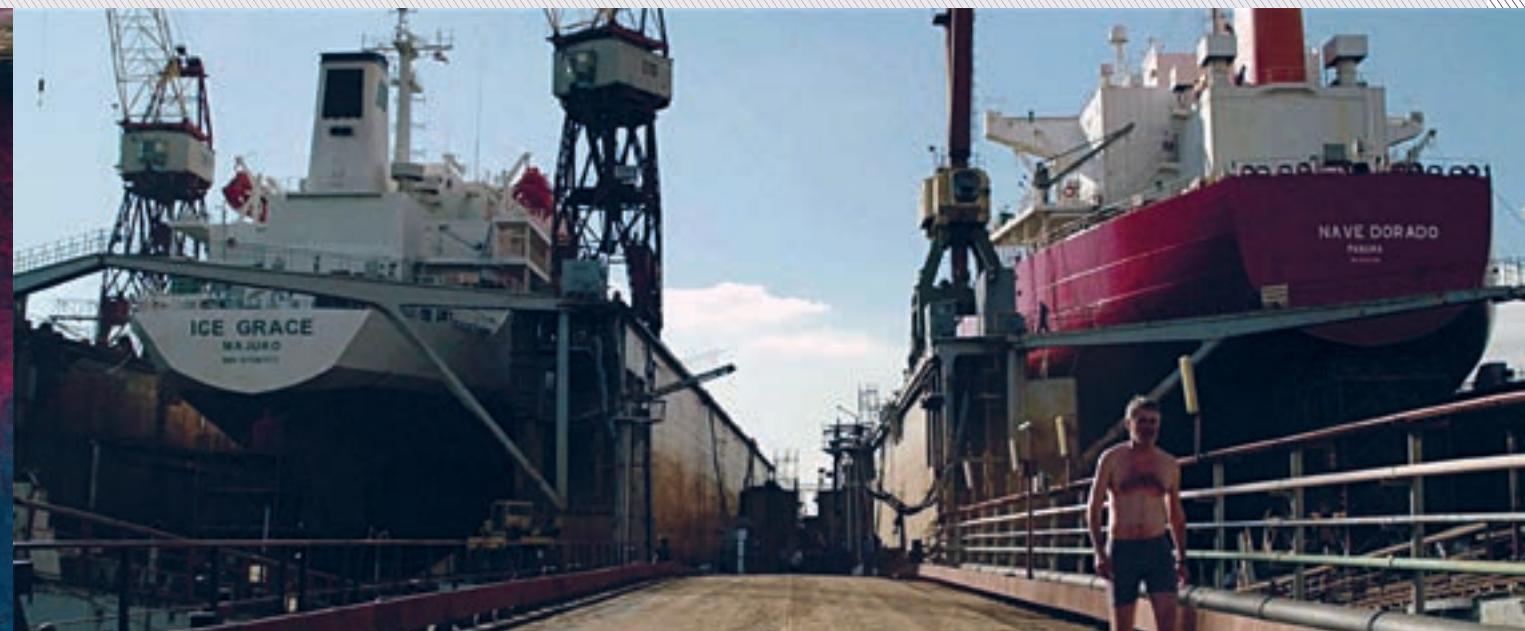
his alter ego – the earless rabbit Lev – in front of his new friends.

— Kristóf's story is overfilled with bizarre people, places and situations which represent characters and phenomena from both sides of the line. Ágoston's female counterpart is the mysterious basketball player Gaida who gives him the earless rabbit as a relay baton and thus definitively marks him out while she herself disappears from the story forever. Her presence is just a memento which shows the peripheral existence of numerous similar lonely destinies like the one that Ágoston encountered.

— Wild animals are also an important symbol of the story; they have to be taken care of. In the words of the employment agency clerk, that is because they do not have the option to independently apply for a job like people do. Even though people and their economic and consumption reasons determine that we perceive even wild nature through standardised categories.

the sea, which is why he heedlessly sweeps it together with the under-sized fish back into the sea, which in the figurative sense reflects the completion of his inner transformation. He has come to terms with fate out on the open sea and among animals, far from the places where social rules and standards apply. Beyond the game plan where the picture of a nun drinking Coca-Cola during a bus pause at a filling station somewhere in Poland is the symbolic expression of the sanctification of the consumption direction of our society.

— As regards the film's formal aspect, the precise work of director of photography Gergely Pohárnok attracts particular interest; his previous works include, for instance, the Hungarian director György Pálfi's *Hukkle* (2002) and *Taxidermia* (2006). The visual division of elements within the images is characterised by well-constructed composition-shape solutions which define what the main protagonist feels and goes through.



to emphasise the dictate of the “standardisation” of everything and everyone and of its implications for the individual in the current “European western civilisation” from Porto to Vilnius, Kristóf uses a symbolic-metaphoric apparatus based on the theme of fisheries and other associated motifs related to it. Everything is standardised, without any exception. No matter whether it is the size of an apple, a fish, or an individual and his thinking or social behaviour. This dominant symbolic-metaphorical theme runs through the entire story.

— Figuratively speaking, we can perceive Ágoston as being the fisherman, the bait, and also the imaginary catch. Despite finding himself abroad, out of his home pond, he has a will of his own and voluntarily heads to the sea to free himself from the dictates of the “standard” which engulfs us in all spheres. Anything not conforming to it is automatically excluded, it is “out” and hence becomes redundant. Just like Lev, the

respond to the standard or your existence is pointless. Fish which are too small are rejected. That is because they don't even fit into a sardine can of standard size where the fish are optimally placed as if according to a ruler.

— After a series of rebounds behind the line, Ágoston often finds himself in situations which consistently exclude him from the game plan. Out of his job, his family, home, out of the shipyard for being late, out of the disco. Just once he tries to fight with a seemingly equal rival while visiting the absurd couple at their home. However, Dimitri and his artificially enhanced girlfriend are virtually an epitome of consumer values and orthodox exponents of traditional rules. Once the supersized lips modified by botox reminiscent of a fish mouth kiss an icon, it is clear that Ágoston cannot win this fight. They overcome him again and definitively kick him out without any means. And, paradoxically, all that just because he revealed

Ágoston, once again symbolically, comes to terms with himself and the absurdity of the world in the position of an unskilled deckhand on a trawler manned by his fellow countrymen. In the sea he is no longer catching fish with a rod as he did previously, but in a net and he sweeps non-standard specimens back into the sea with a broom. However, he does not feel any guilt because in this way he at least feeds the redundant fish to the gulls, which gives a higher meaning to the seemingly useless fish in economic and consumption terms – these fish have become food for animals that are otherwise “unsuitable for employment”.

— Anyone who wants to catch fish must have a suitable fishing rod. But even that is not enough if you don't catch fish of the required size with it. The size of the artificial lure is equally important. The one he brought along is not suitable for catching fish in

Sometimes they emphasise his feelings of withdrawn-ness, his gradual opening up or searching for a new direction, while at other times they evoke a promise of Ágoston being liberated from the overwhelming weight of reality. Pohárnok works sensitively with the atmospheres of the scenes and he chooses the angles and dimensions of the shots with great care in order to support the final conclusion of the storyline through contrasts in shapes and sizes, through the proportionality of the lines and the extreme close-ups of things up to abstraction. The visual solutions without superfluous words emphasise the symbolic-metaphoric level of the narrative in an original manner and enhance the action with shape-spatial meanings.

— If you also would like to discover where the sea begins, don't pass up on the opportunity to see this original film. ◀

Out (Slovakia/Hungary/Czech Republic, 2017) DIRECTED BY György Kristóf SCRIPT BY Gy. Kristóf, Eszter Horváth, Gábor Papp

DOP Gergely Pohárnok EDITED BY Adam Brothánek MUSIC Miroslav Tóth CAST Sándor Terhes, Éva Bandor, Judit Bárdos,

Ieva Norvele Kristóf, Guna Zarina, Viktor Nemets LENGTH 88 min.



Peter Bebjak (1970)

He studied acting and directing at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. In 2001, he established D.N.A. Production together with Rastislav Šesták. This production company completed several television projects, such as **Greatest Criminal Cases in the History of Slovakia** (Najväčšie kriminálne prípady Slovenska), **City of Shadows** (Mesto tieňov), **Dr. Ludsky**, **Behind the Glass** (Za sklom), **Murder Police** (Mordparta) and **Specialists** (Specialisté). He made his full-length feature film debut in 2011 with **Apricot Island** (Marhuľový ostrov) which won the Grand Prix at the film festival in Rouen, France. In 2012, his horror movie **Evil** (Zlo) was premièred. **The Cleaner** (Čistič) was Bebjak's third full-length film in cinema distribution. His latest film **The Line** (Čiara) won, for instance, the Best Director Award at the 52nd Karlovy Vary IFF.



Juraj Lehotský (1975)

He studied photography at the Secondary Technical School of Art in Bratislava and then documentary filmmaking at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts. He has directed several short films and has made contributions to large series. He made three full-length projects – the documentary **Blind Loves** (Slepé lásky, 2008), the feature film **Miracle** (Zázrak, 2013) and another feature film **Nina** (2017). The former won many awards, inter alia the C.I.C.A.E. (International Confederation of Art Cinemas) Award in the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs (Directors' Fortnight) Section at the Cannes IFF; in Slovakia it won five national film awards – Sun in a Net – including the award for Best Documentary and Best Director. Lehotský's film **Miracle** was awarded a Special Mention in the East of the West Section at the 48th Karlovy Vary IFF and the Best Actress Award for Michaela Bendulová at the 23rd Film Festival Cottbus. **Nina**, for instance, won the Bronze Pyramid Award at the 39th Cairo International Film Festival or the FIPRESCI Award at the 33rd Warsaw International Film Festival.



György Kristóf (1982)

A native of Košice, he studied philosophy at the University of Miskolc in Hungary where he discovered his fondness for film. To fulfil his dreams, he worked in the production teams of Hungarian films and in big American productions (**The Eagle**, **The Boy in the Striped Pajamas**, **The Secret of Moonacre**). He worked as assistant director under Ildikó Enyedi and Daniel Young. In 2008, he started studying directing at FAMU in Prague where he made several short films presented at more than fifty festivals. After receiving his Bachelor's Degree in 2011, he moved to Riga in Latvia for a year; there he worked as the director in charge of the preparation of TV commercials. After returning to Prague, he started work on his full-length feature debut **Out** which was eventually selected for the Un Certain Regard Section and the Golden Camera Award at the 70th Cannes Film Festival. He is currently preparing a dance sci-fi thriller with the working title **Bunker**.

The Interpreter Will Start Its Journey at the Berlin International Film Festival

— text: Zuzana Sotáková —
photo: IN Film Praha/Garfield film —

The new film by director Martin Šulík *The Interpreter* (Tlmočník) will receive its world première at the 68th Berlin International Film Festival (15-25 February 2018). The co-production animated film *Untravel* will also be screened at the festival, in the Generation 14plus Section.

— One is an Austrian bon-vivant with a weakness for alcohol and beautiful women, the other is a Slovak Jew and an ascetic man. The first is played by the acclaimed Austrian actor Peter Simonischek, who last year won the European Film Award for Best Actor for *Toni Erdman*. The other is portrayed by the Czech Academy Award-winning director, Jiří Menzel. This mismatched pair are brought together in *The Interpreter* by director Martin Šulík whose most recent films in cinema were the documentary *Milan Čorba* three years ago and, as regards feature films, *Gypsy* (Cigán, 2011). The peculiar road movie *The Interpreter* will be screened in the Berlinale Special Section. Šulík's film was inspired by the book *The Dead Man in the Bunker* (Der Tote im Bunker) by writer and reporter Martin Pollack. In this book he describes his relationship with his father – the commander of SS special forces who was deployed in Slovakia somewhere around Ružomberok at the end of 1944. "We wanted to look at the whole issue from two sides and so we invented a counterpart to the Austrian – the interpreter who lost his entire family during the war. A sort of tragi-comic road movie gradually evolved, the story of two old men who, at the end of their lives, are seeking to understand their own lives," specified Martin Šulík in a press release. "When we wrote this script in tandem with Marek Leščák, we wanted it to be not just about the past but also about the present of Slovakia. That is why many of the episodes in the film are contemporary. They encounter young girls but also problems which are currently found in Slovakia. So, it should be a look at the past but through the eyes of contemporaries," said the director for

Film.sk while shooting the film last year in Bratislava. *The Interpreter* was made in a Slovak-Czech-Austrian co-production and it will be released in Slovak cinemas on 1 March.

— Slovakia is also represented at the Berlin International Film Festival in the Competition Section, with the Serbian-Slovak animated film *Untravel* made by Ana Nedeljković and Nikola Majdak Jr. The film about patriotism, tourism and emigration was co-produced by the Slovak companies BFILM and Your Dream Factory and it will be screened in the Generation 14plus Section which focuses on works for children and young people. Last year, Iveta Grófová's *Little Harbour* (Piata lod') received its world première in the related Generation Kplus Section where it eventually won the Crystal Bear. This year, *Little Harbour* is nominated for the European Children's Film Association Award which will be presented during the Berlinale.

— Three other Slovak films – *Nina* (dir. J. Lehotský), *Freedom* (Sloboda/Freiheit dir. J. Speckenbach) and *Barefoot* (Po strništi bos, dir. J. Svěrák) will be screened at the European Film Market in Berlin.

— Over the course of the festival, Slovak cinema will be represented in the Central European Cinema stand No. 137 which also serves for working meetings of film professionals. It operates under the aegis of the Slovak Film Institute which also prepared the *Slovak Films 17 – 18 Catalogue* for the festival, and the *What's Slovak in Berlin?* bulletin. ◀

Beneath the Story's Surface



— text: Simona Nôtová —
photo: Miro Nôta —

Martin Šulík's new film *The Interpreter* (Tlmočník) is in distribution to cinemas. It revisits history via the main protagonists in order to show a picture of our society today. A Jewish interpreter and an Austrian teacher represent two different views of the events that took place during the Slovak State. Martin Šulík bore this idea in his mind for several years. It will be presented to the audiences at the prestigious Berlin Film Festival in its première in February.

The film will receive its première in the Berlinale Special section which presents extraordinary productions or works of world cinema personalities. It is an excellent start for a film but what does it mean for you?

—— I am happy about it. The Berlin Film Festival is one of the most prestigious in the world. It can open the road to foreign audiences for our film. Thanks to the screening in Berlin, it might even be sold to countries that it would not get into from Slovakia. And I am interested in the reactions of the German-speaking audience, as a big part of the film is in German.

The film is about two contrasting men who travel around Slovakia to find the truth about their own pasts. You admitted that you were inspired by Martin Pollack's book *The Dead Man in the Bunker* (Der Tote im Bunker); its story moved you. What affected you so much that you made the decision to shoot such a story?

—— When working on a film, several sources of inspiration and concepts always converge. *The Interpreter* was initially part of a ten-part television series *Faces* (Tváře) about various professions. We wrote it together with Marek Leščák and we expected to present a picture of society, rather like Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*, via portraits of people in a variety of professions. We sought to depict each profession in some sort of ethical conflict and, by means of these conflicts, we wanted to understand not just the individual people but also the society we live in. The TV companies showed no interest in our project, it struck them as far too expensive, which is why, along with Marek Leščák and producer Rudo Biermann, we took the decision that we would gradually start to make films from the scripts already written. The first we chose was the interpreter's story.

Does it mean that Pollack's book entered the process only once the story about the interpreter had been devised?

—— When we were writing the TV series *Faces*, I accidentally heard a short excerpt of Pollack's book in my car – he was describing his journey in the tracks of his father, commander of the SS special forces in Ružomberok. It was only a few pages, but they affected me as I grew up in Ružomberok and I knew the particular places mentioned in the text very well. I realised that I'd never been very interested in the history of these places even though now-forgotten war events continue to shape life in the entire region to the present day. In addition, I like the almost biblical story of a son tainted by original sin who tries to understand his father's dark past. By coincidence, at the same time, Marek Leščák also brought to my attention director Malte Ludin's film *2 or 3 Things I Know About Him* (2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß). In this film the director talks about his father, Hitler's close associate. We found the confrontation of the past and the present in both stories of real interest. We saw it as interesting material which enables us to analyse historical events from two aspects and to compare our experience with the experience from the other side of the Iron Curtain. However, *The Interpreter* is not an adaptation of Pollack's book. It just served to get our imagination working.

Both of the film's protagonists are confronted with events from the period of the Slovak State. Jiří Menzel as the interpreter, Ali Ungár, is an orphan whose parents were murdered during the Slovak State, Peter Simonischek, as the Austrian teacher Georg Graubner, is the son of a commander of SS special forces who was stationed in Slovakia during the war. This theme is highly topical nowadays as the voice of ultra-right parties is getting ever stronger in Slovakia and across the whole of Europe, and people who have not learned the lessons from the past tend to succumb to it. *Is **The Interpreter** intended to be a contribution to the discussion on this topic?*

— Together with Marek, we follow what is going on in Slovakia and Europe, how people's thinking changes at various levels. Views very close to Fascism are currently being presented not only by various militant organisations but also by politicians in top positions. As if they didn't comprehend the impact of their words. We travelled across a large part of Central Slovakia, the places in which our story is set, and we had no trouble in finding people who would be keen to send someone to the gas chamber or shoot a whole ethnic minority. However, many Slovaks are not interested in the past, they are consumed by the contemporary social problems, they have lost all awareness of the context and, without batting an eyelid, are capable of accepting any political demagoguery manipulating history and offering radical solutions. Our heroes, just like we did, encounter various people on their road, people who represent a variety of views from our past and, based on these coincidental encounters, they create a picture of the world they live in, of its values.

Given the number of sources of inspiration for the film, it is evident that you have carried this theme around for a longer time.

— It is an active theme, today maybe even more than twenty years ago. Despite everything we know about the Slovak State, we still haven't managed to clear away the layers of false mythology it has accrued. It is true that, during the war, we had an independent state for the first time in history, but at what cost? We sacrificed 60,000 people. We stripped them of their civil rights, we robbed them and transported them to the gas chambers. We passed laws in the parliament in order to be able to do so. If we really didn't know they were going to their death – as is often contended – that is not an attenuating circumstance, quite the opposite. In addition, there are many examples in historical documents that Slovaks performed “surplus work”, not just in Kremnička and Nemecká. In many places members of the Hlinka Guard shot Jewish and Roma families and took part in what is currently attributed only to Germans. All these crimes – there's no other name for them – are being permanently relativised. In the Slovak National Uprising Museum in Banská Bystrica we were told that young Neo-Fascists are diligently studying archive materials from the Slovak State. So they are not uninformed flatheads. They wrest the facts out of context quite consciously, they alter the proportions of events and distort history. That is why we should think about how it really was with our first state.

*Does the character of the interpreter who you have chosen from the original TV series **Faces** have a model in real life?*

— When, together with Marek, we created the character of Ali, we wanted him to be the picture of a post-war left-wing intellectual in Slovakia. He lost his parents in the war and, in order to come to terms with Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, he became a member of the Communist Party in the 1950s. He wanted to settle the account with the Hlinka Guard members and the only possibility that seemed realistic to him was the communists – they did it radically. He earned his living by interpreting and translating, he made the propaganda work with his



„Marek (Leščák) and I liked the idea of making a road movie with two old men.“

newspaper articles. In the 1960s, he suddenly woke up and found that he had done the same work as the Slovak People's Party – as an uncompromising journalist he was eliminating people from ideological positions. We merged several real fates into the character of the interpreter. We built the character of Georg, the Austrian teacher, in a similar manner. When I wanted Jirka Menzel and Peter Simonischek to understand both characters, I wrote parallel CVs for them – who did what and when, where he worked, who he married and so on. I wanted them to know what was lurking under the surface.

They are totally different characters. Was it easy for Menzel and Simonischek to get into them? Did they also bring their own views or suggestions as to how the characters might react?

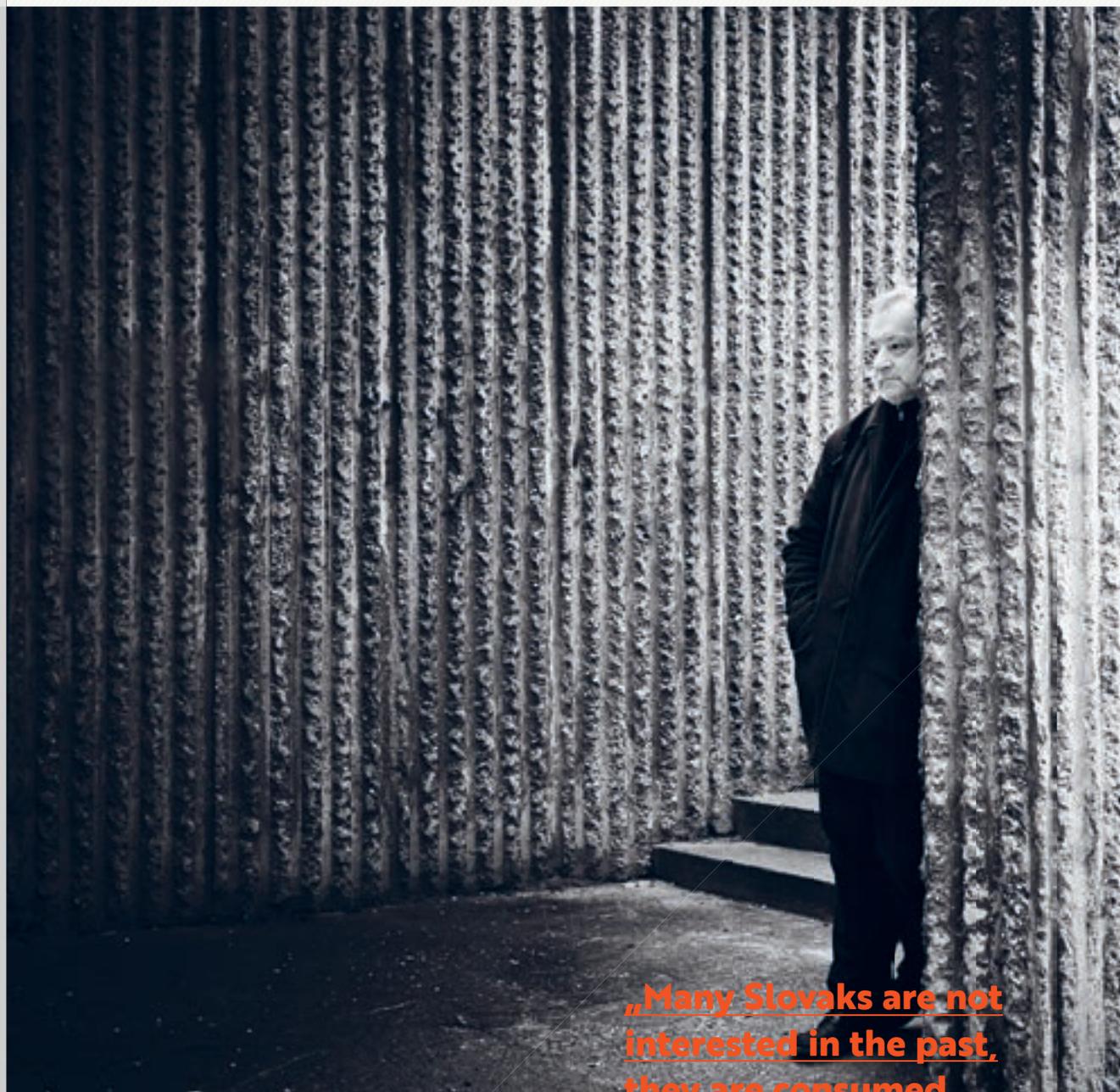
——— When Peter read the script, he said that he understood him very well and that Georg's nature seemed to be close to him. His father was a dentist in the German Army service troops, so he had a certain amount of familiarity with this theme. He was interested in the confrontation of lives that our protagonists experienced on the opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. He especially liked how they get to know each other and become close. He already knew his scripts at the first readings and he modified the text in some places. He liked to improvise. Jirka received the script several days before shooting started and he developed together with his character on the run. He gradually transformed into a slightly bitter Ali right before our eyes. I think that their real human experience was also impressed onto the final form of the film. They didn't know each other before the film was made, but they gradually looked for a way to each other until they eventually became friends. They went everywhere in costume, they were an inseparable pair. I became so used to their characters that I found I minded when they changed into their non-role clothes in the evening.

Peter Simonischek and Jiří Menzel are pronounced personalities. One of them is an experienced actor, the other an experienced actor and director. How did that show while shooting the film?

——— Peter and Jirka are two contrasting acting types. Peter is a noted stage actor with big screen experience. He is used to rehearsing and he built his character gradually. Jirka says of himself that, despite the large number of films that he's acted in, he is just one prominent type and so only able to play himself. Unlike Peter he doesn't like to talk about his character. His principle was: "Don't talk, act!" It was intriguing that they not only played two contrasting characters, but they also worked using different methods. Peter liked to check his work on video and, based on what he viewed, he was able to offer variations on the individual scenes from a critical distance. Jirka did not, on principle, view himself while shooting and stated that he placed all his trust in the director. It was interesting how one influenced the other. When Jirka talked about his character, he said he didn't want to play it tragically, but with a certain distance, since Ali has already come to terms with his past. But when we started shooting, he changed everything under Peter's influence. He started playing a man for whom the past is alive and who comes to terms with it only thanks to their journey together.

The film is mostly in German. How did Jiří Menzel master the scenes in German?

——— It was very difficult for Jirka. He had to play in two foreign languages – in German and in Slovak. He had to concentrate not just on the acting expression but also on using the correct grammar and pronunciation. In addition to language assistants, Peter helped him very much, he was patient and often coached him in the correct German



„Many Slovaks are not interested in the past, they are consumed by the contemporary social problems...“

intonation. When I observed them at work, I realised how fortunate we'd been in the casting. If those two hadn't found a way to themselves, it would have been a disaster.

You tell the story non-traditionally through a road movie. Did you opt for this genre with regard to the motif of the journey which carries cognition in it?

——— Marek and I liked the idea of making a road movie with two old men. They are both set in their ways, they don't want to adapt to each other and sparks fly between them. The shooting concept also resulted from this. I was happy to watch the faces of both the old men when they reminisced about the past. I wanted to see what they felt when doing so, I was interested in whether they were ashamed, laughing or moved. We shot a lot of material with the director of photography, Martin Štrba, we wanted to overlap the conversations with this material, to create an image counterpoint to them, but eventually we discarded everything with the editor, Olina Kaufmanová. That seems to have been a good solution. I like watching Jirka and Peter as they gradually get to know each other.

At the outset they set limits in their relation to each other, they frequently face off, but they also get into situations when they depend on each other. What kind of knowledge do they achieve?

——— Many years ago, I spent a pleasant afternoon with Juraj Špitzer in Trenčianske Teplice. He was also a left-wing intellectual who had led a life very similar to that of our interpreter. And at that time, he developed the theory that, if nations knew the language of their neighbours, they would talk to each other more, be interested in their culture and history, there would be far fewer conflicts in Europe. But, since we still do not know each other, do not talk about the past, whereby we retain different views of it, as we do not try to understand each other, there remains a huge barrier between us. Our film is about the effort of our protagonists to understand each other. When we were in the editing room, someone suggested cutting out their conversation about Georg's son in the second half of the film, that it was superfluous information. Then the music composer, Vlado Godár, said to me: "Leave it there! It doesn't matter what they talk about, what is important is that they are talking and listening to each other." And I realised that it's true. It is vital that they should want to understand each other. ◀

— text: Daniel Bernát
 — Maria Theresia (Mária Terézia)
 photo: RTVS —

A New Start for the Audiovisual Industry Support

A producer was required to invest at least two million Euro in Slovakia to be eligible to apply to the Slovak Audiovisual Fund for a retroactive grant of twenty percent of the sum invested in the project within the Audiovisual Industry Support Programme in Slovakia. However, this was how the programme was organised only up to 1 August 2017. The Ministries of Culture and Finance, in collaboration with the Fund, have since agreed on new, substantially more accommodating conditions.

— The Slovak Audiovisual Fund opened the above programme in September 2014 and, among others, its aim was to generate interest in shooting and making films or TV series in Slovakia and to increase the international competitiveness of the local audiovisual industry. However, the conditions in this programme, as originally determined, appeared to be too strict, especially as regards Slovak producers. In effect, only projects with a budget of at least four million Euro met the conditions, as the eligible expenditures were required not to exceed fifty percent of the project's total budget. This substantially reduced the number of eligible applicants for a retroactive grant.

— The current changes to the programme should also make this type of support more accessible to Slovak projects. That is because the minimum invested sum condition has been reduced to 150,000 Euro per full-length film (seventy minutes and more) or documentary and animated series (not more than thirteen episodes each lasting at least five minutes). If the project includes two or three films, this limit is reduced to 300,000 Euro which also applies to feature series (not more than thirteen episodes each lasting at least forty minutes). The conditions for the registration of a project in the Slovak Audiovisual Fund and for the completion of the cultural test remain unchanged.

— Similar supporting mechanisms apply in several European countries, but the Director of the Slovak

Audiovisual Fund, Martin Šmatlák, sees the advantages of the Slovak programme largely in the option to apply for a retroactive grant for two or three works registered as one project. The programme afforded this option previously; however, by reducing the limit of funds invested, it now becomes more attractive. Under the revised conditions, the producer can also obtain a grant for works that would not meet the required financial limit as stand-alone projects.

— As soon as all the conditions are met, the producer may apply for a one-off retroactive grant only once the whole project has been completed, but also for a grant paid in several stages – albeit, not more than once a quarter. Naturally, those expenditures that were paid from public funds in Slovakia may not be included in the application.

— This revision to the conditions of the Audiovisual Industry Support Programme in Slovakia has already brought an increased number of projects registered in the Slovak Audiovisual Fund. And in respect of potential interest of foreign productions in making a project in Slovakia, the incipient Slovak Film Commission might represent another accommodating step. ◀

— text: Daniel Bernát —
 The Miraculous Virgin
 photo: archive of the SFI —

Slovak Films on Foreign DVDs

The Slovak Film Institute also collaborates with foreign DVD publishers. This year, the British company Second Run DVD plans to issue *Before Tonight Is Over* (Kým sa skončí táto noc, dir. Peter Solan), *Tenderness* (Neha, dir. Martin Šulík) and Štefan Uher's *The Miraculous Virgin* (Panna zázračnica). *The Miraculous Virgin* will be even issued on Blu-ray with ample bonus material.

— The above films differ in many aspects, but while *Before Tonight Is Over* and *The Miraculous Virgin* date back to the 1960s, *Tenderness* was made in 1991 and it was the full-length début of director Martin Šulík whose latest film *The Interpreter* (Tlmočník) is being screened at the current Berlin International Film Festival. *The Miraculous Virgin* (1966) was made by Štefan Uher who, just a few years previously, made *The Sun in a Net* (Slnko v sieti, 1962), regarded as the “opening” film of the Czechoslovak New Wave. Solan's film *Before Tonight Is Over* (1965) was interesting within the context of the period and the region, among others, for the exceptional degree of acting improvisation. “They may be very different films but they all have the same ethos in common. Important films with techniques that clearly mark them out as very special, not just the direction but also the incredible soundtracks, the mise-en-scène, the editing, the camera – I could go on and on! And so they fit into the Second Run catalogue perfectly – wonderful films awaiting reappraisal,” says Mehelli Modi, the founder of Second Run DVD. “I'd like to say that the Slovak Film Institute has been extremely supportive of our work, not only in creating beautiful HD masters for us but also helping us put together bonus features, such as on-disc interviews and booklets, which provide the essential context necessary for viewers to understand why we believe these films are important. I'm delighted that Uher's *The Miraculous Virgin* will be the first of our Slovak films in 2018 and it will be a world-première Blu-ray release. And there are just so many more Slovak films that I wish we could release...”

— Modi is talking about the future, but Second Run has already issued several Slovak films on DVD in the past. What are the criteria applied when choosing specific titles from the history of Slovak cinema? “The answer is simple. The selection is a totally personal choice just like every other film that we have ever released, a very personal curation of cinema. These are films that I've seen over the years, love very much and want other people to see and discover them,” explained Modi. “The Czechoslovak New Wave has always been very important for me. Incredible filmmakers were making incredible films. Generally, people have known them as ‘Czech’ films, not even realising that a number of the most important films were actually made by filmmakers who were Slovak... greats like Juraj Herz, Ján Kadár to name just a few whose work we've released. And then the Slovak films I'd seen which never received wide distribution abroad. Grečner's *Dragon's Return*, the films of Štefan Uher and Dušan Hanák and Jakubisko. And now the responses we get to those films? Each and every one considered exceptional. That's very thrilling and I feel that actually we are the ones who are lucky to be involved with these very special films.”

— The French company Malavida Films has also offered several notable Slovak films on DVD to foreign audiences in the past. For the current year, they have announced a new issue of the digitally restored film by director Dušan Hanák, *Rosy Dreams* (Ružové sny, 1976). ◀



Revisiting the Past

— text: Zuzana Sotáková —

After last year's domination of Slovak cinema by feature films, which were successful both with audiences and at festivals, it seems that this year there's a flood of documentaries awaiting us. Of course, new feature films will not be absent either. Several of them will take a look into the past and they will reflect on significant historical events, such as the events of 1968, but political-social problems currently resonating in Slovakia and elsewhere will also have the word.

— The distinctive road movie of director and screenwriter Martin Šulík *The Interpreter* (Tlmočník) will receive its first distribution première within Slovak feature production and it will also be screened at the 68th Berlin International Film Festival, so you can read more about it in the article on Slovak participation at the Berlin International Film Festival and in the interview with the director. In addition to *The Interpreter*, the dance film *Backstage* by director Andrea Sedláčková will also be presented in Slovak cinemas in the spring. It follows a group of young dancers from a small town, their dreams of fame, their ambitions, family relations and friends.

— The historical film *Dubček* by director Laco Halama will tie in with the 50th anniversary of the significant events of 1968. "The entire story is conceived as a major retrospective which starts and ends on the day of Alexander Dubček's fateful journey to Prague in 1992; in the course of this trip it's as if he reminisced about the breakthrough events of his life – his greatest successes and popularity, but also his greatest humiliation which followed during the period of normalisation," explained Halama. The co-production film *Toman* by director Ondřej Trojan will also look back into history. It talks about the contradictory head of the foreign intelligence

service, Zdeněk Toman, who substantially influenced political development in Czechoslovakia from 1945 to 1948 and largely contributed to the take-over of power by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia by way of a political coup.

— In the second half of the year, actor Jean-Marc Barr should introduce himself to audiences in Slovak cinemas in the lead role of the psychological drama *Cellar* (Pivnica) in which parents lose their only daughter. "Richard Pupala's script and Igor Voloshin's directing intention focus on creating a powerful psychological thriller depending on high-quality acting performances. The director's work will bring in unique film poetics which will enrich Slovak cinematography," said Lívia Filusová, the Slovak producer of *Cellar*. Teodor Kuhn's full-length debut *By a Sharp Knife* (Ostrým nožom) will also be released in cinemas. It was freely inspired by the murder of the young student, Daniel Tupý, which still remains unsolved to date. However, according to the filmmakers, it contains elements of several issues or problems faced by Slovak society. "We wanted to make an archetypal story about injustice in order to make audiences more aware of the fact that there really are people in Slovakia whom the state mistreats. We strove to concentrate the full extent of injustice into our film," said Kuhn for Film.sk.

— This year, further feature films should be released into cinemas, among them, for instance, *Insect* (Hmyz, dir. J. Švankmajer) which received its world première at the Rotterdam IFF, but also *Who's Next?* (Kto je ďalší?, dir. M. Drobný), *When Dragon Has a Headache* (Keď draka bolí hlava, dir. D. Rapoš), *Loli Paradicka* (Loli Paradička, dir. R. and V. Staviarsky), *Punk Never Ends!* (Punk je hned!, dir. J. Šlauka).

— Significantly more documentaries will be released into distribution this year than last year.

Nvota's film *Elsewhere* (Inde) will deal with the painter and pilgrim, Alex Mlynárčik. *Earthly Paradise* (Raj na zemi) made by Jaro Vojtek captures the fate of the reporter, Andrej Bán (this year, Vojtek will also première his documentary *7 Days/7 dní* about people who live double lives as a result of them working far from home). *Tereza* is Peter Gašparík's biographical film about his mother – the translator and interpreter, Tereza Gašparíková. Two further titles focus on personalities from cultural life. *Stolen Lives of Peter Kalmus*



The events that occurred in our country after the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw Pact countries in August 1968 will be brought closer to audiences in the international documentary *Occupation 1968* (Okupácia 1968), made under the aegis of the Slovak producer, Peter Kerekes. Five directors from five countries (E. Moskvina, L. Dombrovsky, M. E. Scheidt, M. Szymkow, S. Komandarev) made short films about this invasion from the perspective of people who took part in it. Tomáš Krupa's *The Good Death* (Dobrá smrť) refers to another fight. It questions whether we own our life, or whether it owns us. The main protagonist Janette is terminally ill and she wants to die with dignity, but at home, in the United Kingdom, this is not possible. That is why she contacts doctor Erika in Switzerland who is willing to help her.

— Films touching upon the Roma issue are also in preparation for release in cinemas this year. Pavol Pekarčík looks into hearing-impaired children living on the periphery of society in *A Long Day* (Dlhý deň) by way of four stories. Ladislav Kaboš's docudrama *The Band* (Kapela), in turn, depicts the birth of a music band under the difficult conditions of a Roma settlement in the east of Slovakia. Yet more documentaries will focus on portraits of personalities. Director Juraj

(*Ukradnuté životy Petra Kalmusa*, dir. A. Hanuljak) follows the distinctive visual artist of the title of the film, *Válek* (dir. P. Lančarič) talks about the significant poet, publicist and former Minister of Culture from the socialist era, Miroslav Válek. As regards other titles, let us, for instance, mention *Roughly*, *Softly* (Drsné a nežne, dir. Ľ. Štecko), *Unseen* (Neviditeľná, dir. M. Martiniaková), *Sad Languages* (Smutné jazyky, dir. A. Grusková) and *The Bright Spot* (Svetlé miesto, dir. D. Trančík). ◀

1 — *Insect* photo: PubRes —2 — *Cellar* photo: Furia Film —3 — *A Long Day* photo: partizanfilm —

Key Steps of Slovak Cinema

— text: **Simona Nôtová** —
photo: **Miro Nôta** —

In April, the Slovak Film Institute (SFI) will commemorate its 55th anniversary. In the last five years since it celebrated half a century of its existence, it has experienced dynamic development under its General Director, Peter Dubecký. A modern digitisation workplace has become a part of the SFI, the repertoire Cinema Lumière in Bratislava has become established and the SFI published the fairly extensive *History of Slovak Cinema 1896 – 1969* (*Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie 1896 – 1969*) and issued the first Blu-rays of Slovak films.

We last talked to you in *Film.sk* five years ago when the SFI celebrated the 50th anniversary of its existence. Another five years have passed by very quickly. What do you consider important in this period with regard to the SFI's activities and development?

—— Five years in the life of an institution or man is not a long period, but things that should be mentioned have happened during this time in the SFI. The completion of the digitisation workplace was a key event, it elevates the Institute to the position of a respected institution. It was an extremely big responsibility. The entire Digital Audiovision project cost 22 million Euro and we were also responsible for it on behalf of the partner in the project, Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS), which also built a digitisation workplace. The digitisation of over 1,000 items was the result of the work of our institution, and we continue digitising more than 50 items a year within the sustainability of the project. It is also important that we have managed to digitise not just full-length feature films, but also documentaries and newsreels, because when we want to license films to public or private television companies, an HD medium is a basic condition for their screening. Thanks to the Digital Audiovision project, we have started to issue Blu-rays in the SFI too. *Signum Laudis* by director Martin Hollý was the first one, then two titles in high demand – *Lady Winter* (Perinbaba) by Juraj Jakubisko and *The Fountain for Suzanne* (Fontána pre Zuzanu) by Dušan Rapoš. The SK PRES Blu-ray collection of ten films issued on the occasion of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union was received remarkably favourably, especially by foreigners; we issued 10,000 copies of the collection.

While recapitulating the period in question, it is also necessary to highlight Cinema Lumière which established itself among cinema-goers within the six years since it was re-opened, and last year it had a record attendance. How do you explain this success of the SFI cinema and what is behind it?

—— A huge amount of work was done in Cinema Lumière. The cinema gradually underwent planned renovation – the screening rooms and technological equipment were renovated. Today all four screening rooms are digitised and the cinema also has 35 mm projectors available; these are the sole ones in use on a daily basis in Slovakia. The overall programming has also been stabilised with a focus on European and Slovak cinema, which constitutes eighty percent of the programme. Nowadays, it is a repertoire cinema capable of screening twenty different films a day with excellent attendance figures. The attendance climbed over 100,000 viewers last year and the cinema gains a good response not only with general audiences, but also with the film community.

Do you think that you have managed to fulfil your idea of transforming the cinema into an arthouse cinema for film fans, with which you re-opened in 2011?

———— The position Cinema Lumière finds itself in today models my idea from the time we opened it. It has become the home venue for key festivals, such as Febiofest, Slovak Film Week and others, it affords the option to host various film showcases, the French, Italian, Polish and Goethe Institutes collaborate with us in organising film events which is a great opportunity for cinéphiles to see extraordinary films. We also have the unique repertoire series Music & Film which has been visited by more than 6,000 viewers since it came into existence and even foreign viewers attend these screenings. We organise premières, meetings with filmmakers, projections with Slovak archive films in the Filmothèque, we have the educational projects *Film Cabinet* (Filmový kabinet) and *Film Cabinet for Children* (Filmový kabinet deťom). We think that this is the way Cinema Lumière should profile itself in the future as well. It still has a long way to go and there is room for improvement, but I am happy that it has become an oasis for people who are interested in the audiovisual arts. It is a satisfaction to me with regard to the complicated circumstances under which we took over the cinema from the former lessee.

What are the current priorities of the SFI? The institution's mission has not changed but how are its priorities modified in the period of new media and technologies?

———— The SFI is the only memory and fund institution which has all its basic activities defined within the Audiovisual Act and its chief priority is protection of the audiovisual heritage. It fulfils its mission via two organisational units – the National Film Archive (NFA) and the National Cinematographic Centre (NCC) where we have managed to staff both the director's positions, which is also reflected in the relationship to the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP) and European Film Promotion (EFP) where Slovakia is represented by Rastislav Steranka, Director of the NCC. As for the future vision, I think that, in addition to making films available by means of cinemas or television licensing, the SFI will have to focus more on new opportunities, such as VOD platforms or various applications for downloading films into phones. It's good that we are prepared for it as we have almost one hundred feature films in HD quality. Dušan Hanák's complete works have been digitised and also Juraj Jakubisko's works, with the exception of two films – *Deserters and Pilgrims* (Zbehovia a pútnici) and *See You in Hell, My Friends* (Dovidenia v pekle, priatelia). Ideally, it would be good to have all the key works of Slovak cinema digitised, as technological progress is really prominent and the SFI has to react to it.

How do you perceive the SFI's position today compared with national film institutions in the V4 countries, as regards its activities but also international respect?

———— The fact that Slovak cinematography is very small plays a little into our hands, as hardly any of the V4 countries can boast of having most of their audiovisual heritage restored and digitised. Our cinematography only started to function on a large scale after 1945, which is why there are not so many films in our collections as in Prague, Warsaw or Budapest. I am very glad that our procedure within the Systematic Restoration and Rescue of the Audiovisual Heritage Project, where we have already managed to restore 80 percent of the materials in the total archive fund, serves as a role model for the archives in Prague and Budapest. They have visited us several times to familiarise themselves with this procedure, and they also visited the digitisation workplace which is comparable with the workplaces in the Bologna film archive,



„The completion of the digitisation workplace was a key event, it elevates the Institute to the position of a respected institution.“

which is considered as the acme in archive activities in Europe. We collaborate successfully with film archives from the neighbouring countries. It is only natural that we have the closest relationship with the NFA in Prague because we were part of the Czechoslovak Film Institute in the past. Recently, together with the archive in Prague, we digitised for instance the sound track of *The Shop on Main Street* (Obchod na korze) which we are going to issue on DVD and Blu-ray this year, and the Academy Award-winning director Jan Svěrák turned to us; we digitised the sound track of his film *The Elementary School* (Obecná škola) and we are now working on his other films. It is a positive feature that our institution is respected abroad and that others turn to us requesting not just collaboration but also expert direction.

Last year's most significant publishing event of the SFI was the issue of the first volume of the *History of Slovak Cinema* which is the result of the long-term work of its authors.

— The issue of this publication is unique; none of the neighbouring countries, when speaking about our territory, has a history of cinema conceived in this manner. The authors, Václav Macek and Jelena Paštěková, have come out with a supplemented issue after twenty years, extended by new studies, new perspectives, and the layout and illustrations, whether photographs or written archival documents, are attractive for readers and they have the effect of transforming this publication into a work we can be proud of. The first volume reflects the period of 1896 – 1969 and we would like to complete the second volume by the centenary of Slovak cinema that we should commemorate on the occasion of the first *Jánošík* by director Jaroslav Siakel in 1921.

Let's talk about contemporary Slovak cinema. We've already mentioned that the previous year was extremely successful for Slovak cinema. Especially, if we realise in what disillusioned state it was in the 1990s, when only two to three films were made in a number of years. Today, more than twenty films are made each year, the production is varied and, most importantly, audiences have started watching Slovak films again. This was confirmed by last year's attendance figures: over one million viewers at Slovak films. What do you attribute this audience interest to?

— The current situation did not arise overnight; it is the result of several key steps that were taken over the last decade. I think that the systematic step – the establishment of the Slovak Audiovisual Fund (AVF) did the most to contribute to the current success of Slovak film. Since 2010, the regular allocation of funds through the AVF independent expert commissions has started and, at the same time, the AVF's budget has been gradually increased. The existence of the AVF, but also of the Slovak Arts Council and the Council for the Support of the Culture of National Minorities, are fundamental measures taken by the Ministry of

Culture under Marek Madarič, including the adoption and validity of the Audiovisual Act. To date, no other Minister has taken such elementary systematic measures at the Ministry of Culture and we have to thank Marek Madarič for them. Changes in the public-service TV were also important, as the TV started to show more interest in Slovak audiovisual works and the independent producer environment which was enabled by the contract with the state. Slovak films have gradually come into RTVS broadcasting in the prime time on the first channel, which was not common previously. RTVS also actively enters into film projects and co-production TV series, such as *Maria Theresia* (Mária Terézia). A shift in the thinking of people in relation to Slovak film is therefore important.

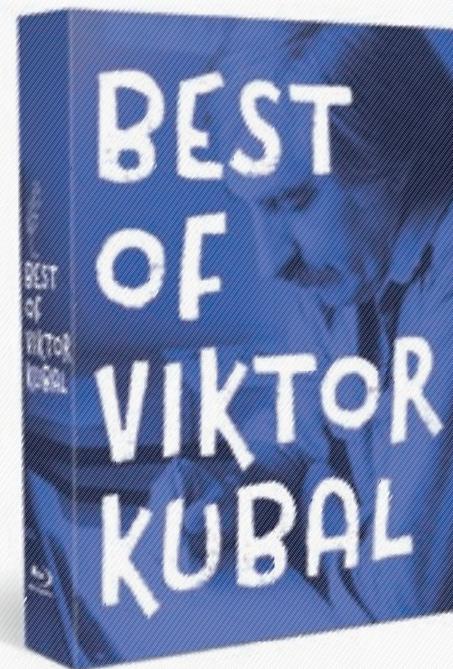
Also, the generation of filmmakers who have started to make their own films having gained experience in the international environment has changed.

— At the start of the millennium the incumbent generation of filmmakers culminated, which moved Slovak cinema forward. Young Slovak producers, many straight out of school, started to enter Czech co-productions, but also co-productions with Polish, Hungarian, Austrian and Italian filmmakers and they obtained various funds from the international MEDIA and Eurimages programmes. Slovak cinema developed not only with regard to the number of works produced, but also the heavy themes that we were familiar with in our cinematography in the past ceased to dominate and the genre spectrum was extended by way of crime stories through thrillers up to comedies. The young filmmakers are also capable of making films with political themes, such as in *Kidnapping* (Únos) or *The Lust for Power* (Mečiar), and they are able to capture the past and the present by means of highly realistic images which are really up to the European film standard in filmmaking terms. In this context, I like to mention *The Line* (Čiara) which is one of those films that rewrote the historical tables of attendance at Slovak films last year. That is also because producers and distributors have started to use standard marketing instruments and they present the film to the media when the script is under development. I think that the viewer would prefer to watch a film with Slovak actors taking place in a Slovak environment rather than an American film that might well have been a bit better made, or perhaps made to the same standard, but with themes that are unfamiliar to the viewer. ◀

— text: Zuzana Sotáková —

In the Sign of Anniversaries

2018 will be a year of anniversaries in the Slovak Film Institute's publishing plan. It will commemorate the 80th birthdays of three significant Slovak filmmakers, Juraj Jakubisko, Dušan Hanák and Elo Havetta, but also 55 years from the establishment of the Slovak Film Institute (SFI).



— “This year's audiovisual production of the Editorial Department will open with the issue of the DVD collection Best of Viktor Kubal which was already available on Blu-ray in 2017 and it consists of full-length animated films *Brigand Jurko* (Zbojník Jurko), *The Bloody Lady* (Krvavá pani) and a selection of short films made by animator Viktor Kubal,” states Marián Brázda, the Head of the SFI Editorial Department. The planned issue will be linked to the aforementioned anniversary of the three significant Slovak directors Jakubisko, Hanák and Havetta. “Three DVDs that have not previously been issued are included in the plan – *Infidelity in a Slovak Way* (Nevera po slovensky, dir. J. Jakubisko), *Simple Pleasures* (Tichá radosť) and *Private Lives* (Súkromné životy, both dir. D. Hanák). Elo Havetta's films *Celebration in the Botanical Garden* (Slávnosť v botanickej záhrade) and *Wild Lilies* (Lalie poľné) were already issued on DVD and now they will be prepared for issue on Blu-ray in 2019. The production in this area will be eventually complemented by *The Case of Barnabáš Kos* (Prípud Barnabáš Kos, dir. P. Solan) and *The Shop on Main Street* (Obchod na korze, dir. J. Kadár, E. Klos). Both will be prepared for simultaneous issue on DVD and Blu-ray,” outlines Brázda.

— As for publications, the Department plans to issue the Proceedings of the 18th Czecho-Slovak Filmmological Conference which was held in October last year under the title *Illusive and Anti-Illusive in Film*. In addition, various editorial activities will be carried out over the course of the year; these are related to the preparation of the second volume of *History of Slovak Cinema* carried out by a broad collective of authors under Václav Macek.

— “In addition to the aforementioned anniversaries, the SFI will commemorate another significant anniversary in 2018, namely 55 years since its establishment. In this context, several promotional materials are planned. Among others, for instance, two catalogues. One of them will summarise all the publications issued by the SFI over the entire period of a sort of new history of the Editorial Department (after 1999), the second will offer an overview of all Slovak films available on DCP for screening purposes,” continues Brázda. A set of postcards from the most significant Slovak films or a book with photographic portraits of the most important personalities of the Slovak film and audiovisual environment as such, created by photographer Miro Nôta, will also be produced for the promotion of Slovak cinema.

— The previous year was also strong as regards publication activities. “Not only because we managed to implement all the plans, essentially without making any considerable changes, but also in respect of the quality that we managed to achieve in the individual projects. If I were to highlight any specific publication activities from last year, it would be the already mentioned Blu-ray collection Best of Viktor Kubal and a 5-DVD collection with the documentary series *Female First* (Prvá) which was completed at the very end of the year. Both collections enjoyed a very positive reception and interest from the public immediately after being issued,” concludes Marián Brázda. ◀

This Is the Year of Hanák, Havetta and Jakubisko

The directors Dušan Hanák, Juraj Jakubisko and Elo Havetta are among the most significant filmmakers of Slovak cinema. They all studied at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague and all were born in the same year – 1938. Hence, this year marks their 80th birthday. However, Havetta only managed to make two full-length feature films before he died prematurely.



Pictures of the Old World — photo: archive of the SFI —



Dušan Hanák — photo: Miro Nôta —



Celebration in the Botanical Garden — photo: archive of the SFI —



Elo Havetta — photo: archive of the SFI —

DUŠAN HANÁK

— His last film *Paper Heads* (Papierové hlavy, 1995) frequently uses the term “to purge”. That is because it is a documentary about life under the totalitarian regime. Socialism tolerated only a grey mass which it hypnotised with slogans about brighter tomorrows and tried to break, even by force, those who protested or who had a problem in adapting. And the violence applied was often brutal. Dušan Hanák talks about all that in his film made six years after the fall of the Iron Curtain. In the film he brings into stark contrast the slogans of the regime and the sad testimonies of its tormented victims.

— Hanák himself was confronted with bans during his film career. Also because he often made films about people from the periphery or about an ordinary man who lived his everyday life with all his desires,

trials, tribulations and failings flashing through his life. The regime did not imagine exemplary film heroes, prospering within the safe arms of the socialist society, in this way. Instead, Hanák portrayed old people from remote corners of Slovakia who were imbued with a totally different type of beauty – the authentic inner beauty of a sorely tried but free man as depicted in the much-awarded full-length documentary *Pictures of the Old World* (Obrazy starého sveta, 1972). *Rosy Dreams* (Ružové sny, 1976), in turn, tells the poetic story of the young village postman Jakub who falls in love with the gypsy, Jolanka, but their naive ideas of cohabitation have ultimately to be abandoned. In *I Love, You Love* (Ja milujem, ty miluješ, 1980) he moves among the community of railway workers and focuses on the sad-funny character of a bachelor looking for a partner and drowning his sorrows in order to boost his mood and courage to live a life which he doesn't want to lose.

Hanák was awarded with the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1989 for this film.

— Dušan Hanák studied at FAMU in Prague and, prior to making his full-length debut *322* (1969), he made several short documentaries (e.g. *Artists/Artisti*, *Learning/Učenie*, *Old Shatterhand Came to See Us/Prišiel k nám Old Shatterhand*, *The Mass/Omša*) which attracted international acclaim. In addition to the aforementioned full-length feature films, he also made *Simple Pleasures* (Tichá radosť, 1985) and *Private Lives* (Súkromné životy, 1990). ◀

— text: Daniel Bernát —

time. In the 1960s, the period was ripe for film to seek out other paths in Slovakia also. The management constellation in Slovak Film was also conducive. Jakubisko, Havetta, Lubor Dohnal, Hanák, Igor Luther and several others proclaimed their programme. “Uher, Barabáš, Solan and Hollý strove to make engaged socially-critically focused works. However, the young generation display their buffoonery, their individual view of the world as they are loath to bear any responsibility for the profane concepts: world development, nicer future,” stated Lubor Dohnal.

— I had the opportunity to bring this generation to the world on the pages of newspapers. Juraj Jakubisko, the reader of his colourful dreams, Elo Havetta, the more silent introvert who encrypted his dreams in numerous silences and insinuations. The sceptical interpreter of life, Dušan Hanák, was the third distinctive personality of this generation.

— In a more communicative moment, Havetta

ELO HAVETTA

— He started making feature films at the age of 31; he made two full-length films (*Celebration in the Botanical Garden*/Slávnosť v botanickej záhrade, *Wild Lilies*/Ľalie poľné), several student films, he collaborated in the making of TV magazines. He died at the age of 37; however, he inherently belongs to the generation that changed the face of Slovak film. They introduced themselves along with Juraj Jakubisko, and the public started to perceive them as twins who wanted to make films differently from their predecessors. Both graduated from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague (UMPRUM) and the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU), they had a love of photography in common, they collaborated with Alfréd Radok, they presented themselves to the public at almost the same

confessed to being closer to Chytilová than to Forman, but in his beginnings (*Forecast: Zero*/Předpověď: nula and *34 Days of Absolute Calm*/34 dnů absolutního klidu) he was influenced by Schorm. At this time, every representative of this generation was searching for his own language: “Havetta is the Brueghel of Slovak film, Jakubisko is the Bosch,” was the way in which Václav Macek characterised them.

— After a short favourable period came setbacks in the 1970s – Havetta was beset by problems and insecurities, he shut himself away and was depressed by the obstacles he constantly found under his feet. In 1973 to 1975 he collaborated stimulatingly with the TV company on the magazines *Swallow* (Lastovička) and *Come In* (Ráče vstúpiť!), but on 3 February 1975 his work and his life's journey were closed forever. ◀

— text: Richard Blech —

JURAJ JAKUBISKO

The young generation of Slovak filmmakers came into cinema in an impressive manner in the late 1960s. Their debuts spelled out a future filled with promise and yet, at the same time, they were mature films. Actually, so mature that they can still be considered as breakthrough films even after so many years.

Jakubisko was the first member of the young generation to make his debut with the film *The Prime of Life* (Kristove roky, 1967). The film about the painter Juraj (it is no coincidence that the protagonist bears the same name as the director) attracted interest with its story and also with the way in which it was narrated. Juraj is not burdened by the past, he does not concern himself about the future, the present alone is important to him. His life is reminiscent of a game

the normalisation leaders decoded his film version of socialism as an image of theft eternally repeated. This film was followed by *Infidelity in a Slovak Way* (Nevera po slovensky) and in 1983 *The Millennial Bee* (Tisicročná včela), extremely popular with audiences, received its première. It is actually Jakubisko's and writer Jaroš's contribution to the history of magical realism and the author managed to develop this specific poetics, based on mingling the real with the surreal, mainly in the fairy-tales *Lady Winter* (Perinbaba, 1985) and *Freckled Max and the Ghosts* (Pehavý Max a strašidlá, 1987). However, poetics also found good use in *Ambiguous Report on the End of the World* (Nejasná zpráva o konci světa, 1997). In addition, Jakubisko likes to make stories taking place on the border between history and fiction, as confirmed by the films *Sitting on a Branch, I Am Fine* (Sedím na konári a je mi dobre, 1989), *It's Better*



Birdies, Orphans and Fools — photo: archive of the SFI —



Juraj Jakubisko — photo: archive of the SFI —

without rules and this sort of life attitude resonated with the majority of Jakubisko's generation. After *The Prime of Life* he made several films in quick succession: *Deserters and Pilgrims* (Zbehovia a pútnici, 1968), *Birdies, Orphans and Fools* (Vtáčkovia, siroty a blázni 1969) and also *See You in Hell, My Friends* (Dovidenia v pekle, priatelia) which, unfortunately, he was only permitted to complete in 1990.

His impressive start, however, was not allowed to continue in such a fascinating manner, as for years the strengthening normalisation period did not afford adequate opportunities to Jakubisko. Many of his colleagues emigrated or were banned from filmmaking and, just to make certain, Jakubisko was moved to short film. It was a cruel punishment and he was only partially pardoned by the establishment in 1979 when he was allowed to make the film *Build a House, Plant a Tree* (Postav dom, zasad' strom). Unfortunately, his work was again repressed as a result of this film as

to Be Rich and Healthy Than Poor and Sick (Lepšie byť bohatý a zdravý ako chudobný a chorý, 1992) or his most recent film to date, *Bathory* (2008). ◀

— text: Peter Michalovič —



Boxer a smrť
The Boxer and Death (1962)



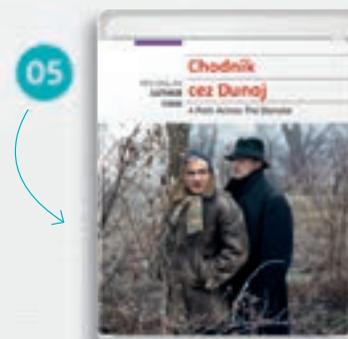
Slnko v sieti
The Sun in a Net (1962)



Vtáčkovia, siroty a blázni
Birdies, Orphans and Fools (1969)



Ja milujem, ty miluješ
I Love, You Love (1980)



Chodník cez Dunaj
A Path Across The Danube (1989)



Všetko čo mám rád
Everything I Like (1992)



Papierové hlavy
Paper Heads (1995)



Sila ľudskosti - Nicholas Winton
The Power of Good - Nicholas Winton (2002)



Slepé lásky
Blind Loves (2008)



Pokoj v duši
Soul at Peace (2009)

Blu-ray kolekcia Blu-ray collection

Slovenský film Slovak Film

