

17th Bratislava Film Festival Promises Profuse Programme Featuring Full-Fledged Film Fun

Those who decide to check out the upcoming 17th edition of Bratislava International Film Festival can again look forward to an ample portion of mind-nourishing motion pictures that reflect topical world developments in an unusual way. À la carte are fledgling filmmakers at the beginning of their creative career as well as established *étoiles de ciné* and winners of prestigious festivals whose new releases are impatiently awaited every year.

Ever since its inception, the Bratislava film festival strove to develop the identity of a young festival – an event whose mission is to discover new names of contemporary cinema that seem to be well on their way toward becoming future stars of the silver screen. Our triplet of international competitions deliberately directs the spotlight at filmmakers whose feature, documentary and short debuts or second films have managed to impress the world of cinema with a sense of urgency and invention. Besides, the festival's programme each year features regular and special sections, programmes dedicated to history of cinema and film literacy, retrospective events and tributes to prominent personas of world cinema.

The Fiction Competition scouts fledgling filmmakers at early stages of their careers. This year's selection of Nenad Dukić, Serbian film critic and curator of the section, comprises nine pictures. One of them is *Three Days in September* (*Tri dena vo septemvri*, 2015), a Macedonian-Kosovo coproduction by director Darijan Pejovski, an intimate drama with elements of thriller in which destiny brings together two completely different women, each on the run from her past. Together they seek refuge in a remote mountain chalet where one of them spent her childhood; however, there is something covert going on and the suspicion between the two women regarding their true intentions gradually builds up. A feature debut by Colombian director César Augusto Acevedo, *Land and Shade* (*La tierra y la sombra*, 2015), which received the "Camera d'Or" award in for the best debut film at the 2015 Cannes IFF, tells the story of an old farmer who returns to his land after many years and is forced to come to terms with his past mistakes. Chinese scriptwriter and director Pengfei Song comes to Bratislava with *Underground Fragrance* (2015), a love-story from the lowest storey of human existence. It features a young Southerner who ekes a living by salvaging and selling old furniture in the former air-raid shelter under Beijing, which accommodates many other foreigners like him. After an accident leaves him temporarily blind, he meets a young girl and they begin to claw their way out of their misery. The festival-goers can also look forward to two films from the most recent edition of San Sebastian Film Festival. The main prize, the Golden Seashell, was awarded to *Sparrows* (2015), a film that deals with the evergreen issues of adolescence, life changes and ability to cope with them. Icelandic director Rúnar Rúnarsson has promised to come to Bratislava to present his picture in person. A Prague-based Slovenian director Olmo Omerzu comes to the festival with *Family Film* (*Rodinný film*, 2015), a partly-Slovak coproduction that deals with complicated family relations.

The Documentary Competition that has been put together by the festival's new Programme Director Pavel Smejkal promises to present a wide range of genres, topics and creative language. Cinema buffs can already look forward to seeing a critically acclaimed feature-length debut by French director Anna Roussillon, *I Am the People* (*Je suis le peuple*, 2014), which follows the 2011 Egyptian revolution through the TV screen in a remote rural household, far away from Cairo's Tahrir Square. A film by Mexican debutante Betzabé García, *Kings of Nowhere* (*Los reyes del pueblo que no existe*, 2015), portrays the strange life of three families who refuse to leave their hometown, which is partly flooded six months out of every year; their reasons include uncertainty, stubbornness and – comfortable life!

One of the greatest festival hits of the past year is *Flotel Europa* (2015) by director Vladimir Tomić, a former refugee of the Bosnian War who arrived in Denmark in 1992 as a child and spent two years living

in a decommissioned ocean liner the Red Cross had turned into a provisional refugee centre. His disarmingly open and intimate diary of his childhood memories may be perceived as a contribution to the ongoing debate on the lot of refugees.

This year's Short Competition that was again put together by Dutch curator Erwin Houtenbrink will include a film by a Slovak director for the first time ever. Director Andrej Kolenčik made the selection with *Play!* (2014), a documentary that follows 8-year-old Dušan who spends his time with his gambling father in a casino but his imagination is immersed in TV cartoons. *Beach Week* (2015), an intriguing and mysterious film by American director David Raboy is about a group of friends who spend holiday in a rented beach house when they find out that one of them has gone missing. *The Pride of Strathmoor* (2014), an animation film by Icelandic director Einar Baldvin recreates entries from the diary of a Southern preacher of Strathmoor, a bitterly racist man, before a 1927 boxing match between a white champion and a black fighter to reflect on reasons behind the downfall of American South; the film mixes tragedy with horror, accentuated by riveting visualisations of racism and paranoia.

A new programme section entitled **Cinema Now** will from now present progressive pictures that have been awarded at important international festivals. One of them is *The Endless River* (2015), a film by South African director Oliver Hermanus on overcoming grief against the odds of mistrust and uncertainty. A French émigré whose family has been brutally murdered finds solace in the arms of a young native waitress who has lost her husband; trapped in the vicious circle of violence and bloodshed, the two forge an unlikely bond in hopes of overcoming their pain and loneliness, unaware of dark shadows that may connect their recent losses. Academy Award-winning scriptwriter Charlie Kaufman teamed up with Duke Johnson to direct an animated stop-motion tragicomedy, *Anomalisa* (2015), which took home Grand Special Jury Prize from this year's Venice IFF. At the centre of the film is a motivation speaker who is unhappy as he feels that everything around him is monotonous and mundane until he meets Lisa who brings the desperately yearned-for anomaly. The audience at Sundance Film Festival, for a change, greatly appreciated a funny, sassy, and bawdy romantic comedy by director Leslye Headland, *Sleeping with Other People* (2015), which tells a tale of romantic failures, serial infidelity, sex addiction, self-sabotage and ultimately love.

Another newly-introduced separate programme section, **Europa** will chart the waters of latest European film releases. In his second feature film, *Superworld* (*Superwelt*, 2015), Austrian actor and director Karl Markovics tells the story of an ordinary woman from the lower middle class whose life is suddenly visited by God. Bratislava cinemagoers are familiar with Markovics as the festival in 2011 presented his feature film debut, *Breathing* (*Atmen*, 2011). Next year, Slovak cinemas will present *Lída Baarová*, a new coproduction film by Czech director Filip Renč where Markovics rendered the character of Joseph Goebbels. Speaking of Nazi Germany, acclaimed German director Oliver Hirschbiegel in his latest motion picture, *13 Minutes* (*Elser*, 2015), ponders how quarter of an hour could have changed the course of world history, telling a true story of Georg Elser, an ordinary carpenter who planted a time-bomb behind Adolf Hitler's lectern in the Munich beer cellar on November 8, 1939. But the Führer left the building 13 minutes earlier than planned and thus unharmed. The picture skilfully examines Elser's motives for his drastic act as it reconstructs Germany's social and political context between 1933 and 1939 when the National-Socialist movement gradually took over the entire country and poisoned its social life. The **Europa** section will also feature the latest film by one of the most distinct representatives of the so-called Romanian new wave, director Rade Muntean whose film, *Tuesday, after Christmas* (*Martți, după Crăciun*), was screened at the Bratislava festival in 2010. His minimalistic drama, *One Floor Below* (*Un etaj mai jos*, 2015) is a story of an ordinary man, a pedantic and devoted father who faces a moral dilemma as he must choose between convenience and conscience. The picture premiered at this year's Cannes Film Festival as part of the "Un Certain Regard" section.



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Another filmmaker to return to Bratislava after several years is Croatian director and screenwriter Dalibor Matanić who in 2011 personally presented his shorts competition entry, *Mezzanine* (*Mezanin*). His latest film, *The High Sun* (*Zvizdan*, 2015), claimed Un Certain Regard Jury Prize at this year's Cannes IFF, which jumpstarted its extremely successful campaign at film festivals around the world. The story of forbidden love that struggles to defy religious prejudice and ethnic hatred takes place in three parts divided by ten-year intervals against the backdrop of the Balkan region's tragic recent history.

The finalists of the LUX Prize that has been awarded by the European Parliament since 2007 will be presented by the **Europa Special** programme section. Each of the three selected films addresses one pressing problem of modern Europe. On top of the list is obviously migration, an issue authentically depicted in *Mediterranea* (2015), a feature debut by Italian-American director Jonas Carpignano whose realistic atmosphere and documentary style pulls the viewer inexorably into the story of two friends who endure a sorrowful voyage across the Mediterranean to Italy with a bunch of African migrants in pursuit of a happier life but all they find is hostility and hatred. Another problem that continues to resonate in many European countries is economic crisis. The Bulgarian directorial tandem of Kristina Grozeva and Petar Valchanov chose this subject for their latest film, *The Lesson* (*Urok*, 2014), which revolves around a young teacher from a small Bulgarian town who is looking for a thief in her class so she can teach him a lesson about right and wrong. But when she gets trapped in devastating debts owed to loan sharks, finding the right and honest way out does not seem that easy anymore. Last but not least, the conflict between tradition and modernity is convincingly treated by Turkish director Deniz Gamze Ergüven in her feature debut, *Mustang* (2015), which premiered at this year's Cannes film festival as part of the "Quinzaine des Réalisateurs" independent section, taking home two awards. A story of five sisters' revolt against male domination in a remote Turkish village a thousand kilometres from Istanbul but a century from any notion of women's rights, the picture has been nominated for European Film Award in the Discovery category and will also represent France in vying for Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

One of the main themes of this year's festival edition is family and the way the concept is grasped by contemporary cinema. Pavel Smejkal who put together the **Family** section said: "Partly in the context of the public debate that took place in Slovakia over the past year, we were interested in the problems facing film families in different parts of the world. The leitmotiv of this thematic collection is relations between children and their parents."

The theme of family relations strongly resonates also in another special section, the **Retrospective of Slovak-American filmmaker Mišo Suchý**, as virtually all his films revolve around the issues of family, home and identity. During the Festival, Suchý will personally present the world premiere of his latest short film, *Prysia's Garden* (*Paraskina záhrada*), as the work in progress. Besides, the festival will also present some of his older pictures, for instance *Home Movie* (2002), *About Dogs and People* (*O psoch a ľuďoch*, 1993) or *I Have Come a Long Way* (*Džavas mange dlugone dromeha*, 1988).

The special section entitled **Nostalgia: VHS Stories** is intended for those who keep fond memories of the era of VHS tapes. For the sake of greater authenticity, the films will also be projected from original VHS videocassettes. Nostalgia junkies may look forward to spending nice and cosy moments with such action classics as *The Delta Force* (1986) or *Ninja III: The Domination* (1984). But the section will not stop at Chuck Norris or Lucinda Dickey; it will also examine the VHS phenomenon, especially through documentary *Chuck Norris vs Communism* (2015) by Romanian director Ilinca Calugareanu, which shows the power of cinema and its ability to change people's lives.



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Lexicon is a brand new programme section that has been designed for true cinema buffs as it will discuss particular technical and aesthetic phenomena of filmmaking. The section's curator Tomáš Hudák chose **aspect ratio** to be this year's topic as he wanted to draw attention to the issue of picture format and its frame, which ordinary cinemagoers tend to take for granted, and highlight inventive filmmakers who defied the ordinary as well as luminaries who capitalised fully from a certain type of frame. An example of the former is Gust Van den Berghe's latest film, *Lucifer* (2014), which was shot in the round picture format to express Paradise and complexity of our world. The main character, Lucifer, has been thrown down from Heaven; en route to Hell, he stops by in a small Mexican village, which is an earthly Paradise of sort and therefore an ideal environment for his experiments with the lives of local inhabitants. An example of the latter is William Wyler's classic epic historical drama about betrayal and revenge set in the times of Roman Empire, *Ben-Hur* (1959), which was shot with an extreme panoramic lens in order to bring out the spectacular mass scenes on the big screen. The film will be projected from a restored digital copy, which gives all cinema classic lovers a unique opportunity to see the motion picture with top quality sound and picture.

On the other hand, the Bratislava Film Festival has kept some traditional programme sections such as the **Focus** section that introduces the specifics of particular national cinemas. This year, the focus is on **Greece**; thanks to cooperation with the Greek Film Centre, festival-goers will have a chance to become more familiar with contemporary Greek cinema. In his unexpected festival hit, *The Lobster* (2015), director Yorgos Lanthimos who took home Jury Prize from this year's Cannes IFF mixes several genres to tell an unconventional love story. Director Alexis Alexiou in his latest film, *Wednesday 4:45* (*Tetarti 4:45*, 2015), examines the practical effects the global economic crisis has had on everyday lives of Greek people. The main character, Stelios, is the owner of a popular and seemingly prosperous live jazz club; however, he is constantly late with payments to a Romanian loan shark who threatens to take away his club and gives him last 32 hours to change his fortune.

Cinema is not just an art by adults for adults. The section **Junior: Contemporary Animation for Children** therefore tends to the needs of minor cinemagoers; in cooperation with Fest Anča, Slovakia's largest international festival of animated films, the Bratislava film festival will present the most interesting short animated films for children produced in past several years. Richard Phelan in his film, *Damned* (2011), discusses issues of wastefulness, environmental destruction and a chance for redemption through social responsibility. A film by Russian author Natalya Chernysheva, *Snowflake* (2012), shows that not everybody must know snow. Once upon a time, a small African boy receives a letter in which he finds a snowflake made out of paper. He likes it a lot and begins to wonder what real snow looks like.

Another section that is difficult to imagine lacking from the Bratislava Film Festival's programme is **Made in Slovakia**, which presents the most remarkable and/or interesting the "domestic" scene has produced over the past year. One of this year's headliners is *True Štúr* (2015), a documentary drama directed by Michal Baláž on investigating the circumstances of an untimely and unusual death of a prominent Slovak national revivalist, Ľudovít Štúr, which skilfully combines elements of feature and documentary film with visually attractive animations, presenting known historical facts in an original and humorous way. The section will also include *The Cleaner* (*Čistič*, 2015), drama with elements of thriller from director Peter Bebjak, and *Home Care* (*Domáci péče*, 2015), popular yet critically acclaimed Czech-Slovak coproduction from director Slávek Horák. As it has become a nice tradition, the section will also present films made by students of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica.

This year, the Bratislava Film Festival will bestow the **Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award** to **Mrs. Emília Vášáryová**, an exceptional artist and the first lady of Slovak cinema and theatre who will also



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become the newest holder of the memorial tile on the Film Walk of Fame in front of the P. O. Hviezdoslav Municipal Theatre. As part of the special gala that will be held in her honour on November 14, IFF Bratislava will proudly present *The Copper Tower* (*Medená veža*), a legendary 1970 film by director Martin Hollý, Jr.

The upcoming edition of the Bratislava IFF will kick off as part of a unique multinational cinema event. On Wednesday, November 11, Kino Mladosť will host a special projection of *Mediterranea* that will virtually interconnect cinema theatres in a number of European towns. Subsequently, cinemagoers across Europe will be able to use a Twitter wall to ask questions of director Jonas Carpignano who will be at the Bozar cinema in Brussels, which will be the main stage of the entire event.

17th Bratislava International Film Festival will take place from November 12 – 17 in Bratislava municipal cinemas - three cinema theatres of **Kino Lumière** as well as in **Kino Mladosť** and **Kino Nostalgia**. Another venue to check out festival screenings is **Gorila.sk Urban Space**, which will simultaneously accommodate the official festival lounge. Besides pleasant atmosphere, the lounge will offer special projections and host the festival's side events. As every year, the festival hinterland including Guest Service, Accreditation Centre and Press Centre will be at **Park Inn Danube Hotel**.

For latest updates on the programme of International Film Festival Bratislava, please visit our official website at www.iffbratislava.sk or our official Facebook account at www.facebook.com/bratislavaiff.

17th BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
November 12 – 17, 2015

Kino Lumière, Kino Mladosť, Kino Nostalgia, Gorila.sk Urban Space

Main organisers: **Partners Production, Ars Nova civic association**

The Festival is held under the auspices of Marek Maďarič, Minister of Culture of the Slovak Republic.

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Main Partners: **Slovenská elektrizačná prenosová sústava, Transpetrol**

Come and experience it!