

Five Czech films to world-premiere within the Venice IFF 2022

The prestigious Orizzonti Competition of the 79th Venice International Film Festival will introduce in world premiere two Czech co-production dramas. Both Slovak-Czech-German *Victim* by Michal Blaško and Romanian-French-Greek-Bulgarian-Czech *To the North* by Mihai Mincan have been supported by the Czech Film Fund. While Venice's sidebar Giornate degli Autori will host world premiere of Czech drama *Ordinary Failures* by Cristina Grosan, Venice Immersive selection includes short animated VR documentary *Darkening* by Ondřej Moravec. Digitally restored *The Ear (1969)* by Karel Kachyňa will enrich this year's Venice Classics.

Victim | Orizzonti Competition

The debut feature by Slovak director Michal Blaško, *Victim*, will celebrate world premiere in Venice's Orizzonti Competition, dedicated to films that represent the latest aesthetic and expressive trends. A suspenseful drama, set in the small Czech town, tells a story of a Ukrainian immigrant Irina who is seeking justice in a racist society, torn between family and the search for the truth. When Irina's son is attacked, the whole city stands up in solidarity with her family and condemns their Roma neighbors, who allegedly committed the crime. But soon another truth starts to emerge...

Slovak-Czech-German co-operation is produced by nutprodukcia with Jakub Viktorín acting as the main producer with Czech nutprodukce (producer Pavla Janoušková Kubečková) by his side and German Electric Sheep (producer Naomi Levari) as co-producer. Important characters of the film are portrayed by Czech actors Igor Chmela and Viktor Zavadil, the DOP of the film is talented Czech cinematographer Adam Mach.

Czech Film Fund supported *Victim* for development, production and also in the incentives programme altogether with EUR 404 000. *Victim's* filmmakers also benefited from the support of Slovak Audiovisual Fund, MOIN Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein, German Federal Film Fund, Creative Europe MEDIA, Eurimages, South Moravian Film Fund, Ústí Region and Pilsen Region.

As a project in the making, the film took part in the C EU Soon showcase of the MIA market in Rome last year and it was also awarded at the Eastern Promises market's Works in Progress presentation, taking place in the frame of the KVIFF 2021. *Victim's* director Michal Blaško entered the international field with student film *Atlantis, 2003*, which was selected for Cannes' Cinéfondation in 2017 and later on honored with the Magnesia Award for Best Student film within the Czech Lion Awards.

To the North | Orizzonti Competition

Another promising talent, this time from Romania – Miha Mincan, will premiere his fiction feature debut *To the North* in Orizzonti Competition. A psychological drama, based on a true story, will take the audience back to 1996, to the open sea. During his shift on a transatlantic ship's deck, Joel, a religious Filipino sailor, discovers Dumitru, a Romanian stowaway hidden between some containers. If he is spotted by the Taiwanese officers running the vessel, Dumitru is at risk to be thrown overboard. Joel decides to hide him, as a sign of his gratitude towards God. Soon, a dangerous cat

and mouse game begins. When his crew, his own friends, even God itself start to turn their backs on him, Joel learns that he has to face his cruel destiny alone.

To the North was made as a co-production between Romania, France, Greece, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic. The main producers, Radu Stancu & Ioana Lascăr of deFilm Production, co-worked with Cyriac Auriol of Remora Films (FR), Konstantinos Vassilaros of StudioBauhaus (GR), Pavlina Angelova & Nikolay Todorov of Screening Emotions (BG) and Mikuláš Novotný of Prague's based company Background Films. The film was also made in association with Arte/Cofinova 17, Avanpost Media, Best Friend Forever, Fulgurance Films and Czech studio Magiclab.

The Czech Film Fund backed *To the North* in the minority co-production scheme with EUR 112 000. The film was also supported by Creative Europe – MEDIA, Romanian Film Centre, Bulgarian National Film Center, Région Île-de-France, Ekome – National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication, Wavemaker Romania, Greek Film Centre, Ert S.A., Romanian Television, CNC – Centre National du cinema et de l'image animée, Angoa, Sedica and Sacem.

Mincan's last two documentary films *The Man Who Would Be Free* (2019) and *Emigrant Blues: a Road Movie in 2 ½ Chapters* (2019) were both nominated for best documentary film award at the Gopo Awards – Romania's national film prizes.

Czech cinema has recently been visible in Venice's Orizzonti Competition. Last year, Slovak-Czech-Ukrainian drama *107 Mothers* won Orizzonti's prestigious best screenplay award, while Romanian-Czech-Latvian *Miracle* also world-premiered in the section. In 2019, the competition hosted world premiere of Czech animated short SH_T HAPPENS by Dávid Štumpf and Michaela Mihályi.

Ordinary Failures | Giornate degli Autori

Another talented filmmaker with Romanian roots is making her first appearance in Venice this year. Czech-based director Cristina Grosan will world-premiere her second feature ***Ordinary Failures*** in the Giornate degli Autori section – an independent sidebar of the festival, promoted by the associations of Italian film directors and authors.

A psychological drama with sci-fi elements focuses on three women – a misfit teenager, an anxious mother, and a recent widow who all see their day interrupted by a mysterious natural phenomenon. As their world descends into chaos, the three women struggle to find their place in life.

Ordinary Failures is a joint venture between Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia. The main producer of the film is Marek Novák of Xova Film. Co-producers include Judit Stalter of Laokoon Filmgroup (HU), Marica Stocchi of Rosamont (IT), Monika Lošťáková, Zuzana Jankovičová of Super film (SK). The film was also co-produced by Czech Television (creative producer Alena Müllerová).

The Czech Film Fund supported the project in early script, development and production stages – altogether with the amount of EUR 438 000. The project was also supported in the production incentives programme. Other sources of funding include Eurimages, National Film Institute Hungary, Ministero della Cultura (MiC), ARTE G.E.I.E., Slovak Audiovisual Fund, Prague Film Fund, Friuli Venezia Giulia Audiovisual Fund, Pilsen Region, Regione Lazio and Filmová nadace (Film Foundation). The project was developed within the EAVE Producers Workshop, took part in our Czech Film Springboard programme in 2019, and it was also presented and awarded within When East Meets West co-production market year later.

Ordinary Failures marks a return of a majority Czech film to the Giornate degli Autori section after almost 15 years, as the last film to be presented there was *A Country Teacher* by Bohdan Sláma in 2008. The only other representant in the section in the last years was a minority co-production *Il Palazzo*, made in Italian-Czech co-production, which premiered in Special Events last year.

Darkening | Venice Immersive

The selection of projects for Venice Immersive, the Extended Reality (XR) section of the Venice IFF, includes Czech-German VR short ***Darkening*** by Ondřej Moravec. Moravec, both director and protagonist of the film, uses virtual reality for his 3D CGI animated documentary to address depression and the ways to cope with it. He guides the audience through diverse landscapes associating the story of his struggle with depression since puberty. Spectators share his feelings during the first depressive episodes at a family trip in his childhood, at university when striving for perfect results, at work in his everyday fights with the depressive “darkening”.

Czech-German co-production is led by Hana Blaha Šílarová of Frames Films, who joined forces with Felix Gaedtke & Gayatri Parameswaran of NowHere Media (DE) and Robin Pultera of Brainz Immersive (CZ). The Czech Film Fund backed the project, which was in the making presented at the IDFA Forum or the Sheffield DocFest Pitching Forum, for both development and production, altogether with EUR 244 000. The film was also backed by Unity for Humanity, Medienboard Berlin Brandenburg and Nadační fond Filmtalent Zlín

The Ear | Venice Classics

Národní filmový archiv, Prague will present another digitally restored classic at the Venice IFF. The Venice Classics section, which was announced earlier this month, will host the world premiere of Karel Kachyna's psychological drama ***The Ear*** (part of the Czechoslovak New Wave). The film about the danger power in higher spheres of communist régime, made in 1969, was banned until its premiere in Cannes Film Festival in 1990. *The Ear* is the story of a married couple set against the background of the repression of 1950s communist Czechoslovakia. It takes place during a single night. A sharp exchange of opinions between the couple leads to a quarrel and eventually reconciliation in the morning light the following day.

Biennale has recently been regularly including Czechoslovak films in its line-up. Within this year's Classici fuori Mostra, Venice's showcase of restored films, festival introduced Karel Steklý's *The Strike*, which won the festival back in 1947. Three years ago premiered in Venice Classics digitally restored version of *Extase* by Karel Machatý (who won best director award for *Extase* at the festival in 1934), and in 2017, the festival paid the tribute to Miloš Forman's *Black Peter* (1963).

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