

Focus Bulgaria and Back in the USSR

The best Bulgarian productions of the past two years and some of the top titles of Soviet cinema will be screened in the sections **Focus Bulgaria** and **Back in the USSR** at the 17th edition of the **Transilvania International Film Festival**. Both programs offer audiences remarkable discoveries, be it cult films of the 1980s or films recently recognized in international film festivals..

Focus Bulgaria proposes a selection made up of eight titles from the latest generation of Bulgarian auteurs, beginning with Stephan Komandarev's *Directions*, selected at Cannes 2017 in the Un Certain Regard section. Echoing Iranian cinema and Jim Jarmusch's cult film *Night on Earth*, this film offers an original perspective, imbued with sarcastic humor, on the dysfunctions of contemporary Bulgarian society—using night fares picked up by Sofia taxi drivers as its vehicle. Secrets and intimate details of private lives come to light in Ilian Djevelekov's *Omnipresent*, the story of a man obsessively spying his family, friends, and employees on hidden cameras. The film, which received the FIPRESCI Prize at the Sofia film festival and the Golden Rose for Best Film at Varna, demonstrates that small guilty pleasures can lead to disastrous situations.

In *Godless*, a nurse sells the identities of her elderly patients on the black market. Ralitzia Petrova's debut feature captures the last crumbs of humanity in a devastated, corrupt, and hopeless landscape, and received the Golden Leopard at the 2016 Locarno film festival. The recipient of the same award in the Cineasti del Presente section in 2017, *3/4* is an intimate study on family and on life's flaws and imperfections. Following the dysfunctional relationship between a father and his two children, the feature debut of Ilian Metev tells the delicately balanced story of one last summer spent in the family.

Rouzie Hassanova's *Radiogram* also deals with a father-child connection: set in the 1970s, when Western music was considered a threat by Eastern Bloc regimes, the story follows the adventures of a parent who wants to share the joys of rock-n-roll with his son. Inspired by the director's personal memories, the film received an audience award in Sofia this year. Konstantin Bojanov's *Light Thereafter* explores love and liberation through art by looking backwards at the initiation voyage of misunderstood young man in love with painting, looking for his idol, and

eventually finding himself. The film was awarded for best cinematography at the Golden Rose in Varna in 2017.

Two of the best Bulgarian documentaries of recent years, Tonislav Hristov's **The Good Postman** and Trzvetan Dragnev's **Village People**, deal with everyday life in contemporary rural communities. The former follows the politics of a border town in which the postman decides to run for office on a platform dealing with migrants and refugees. The latter looks tenderly at the fears, joys, hopes, and obsessions of ordinary people of no readily apparent importance.

Back in the USSR is an opportunity to see on a big screen newly restored digital copies of films that were box office successes in the 1980s not only in Romania, but in the entire socialist bloc. Sergey Solovev's **ASSA** (1987) is a historic rock manifesto that influenced entire generations. Anti-system stories combine with experimental sequences, an underground music sound track, and a grandiose promotion campaign turned this film into a box office juggernaut in the region—so much so that two years after the film premiered, the protagonists attracted an audience of 70,000 in the Luzhniki stadium in Moscow. Another year later, the USSR began falling apart.

Elem Klimov's 1985 **Come and See** is considered to be one of the most devastating works in the history of cinema. It took eight year for the production to be approved by the Soviet authorities—even though on the surface the subject is the resistance against German forces. The film was immensely successful in its time, and the recently restored digital version was awarded last year in Venice. Another Soviet cult film that enjoyed international recognition, as well as tremendous popularity in communist Romania, is Vladimir Menshov's **Moscow Does Not Believe In Tears**. Winner of the Best Foreign Film Oscar in 1981, it follows the dreams, wishes, and disappointments of three young workers.

Another film dear to even those among us who were very young in the 1980s is Eldar Riazanov's 1982 Cannes premiere **Station For Two**, a bitter-sweet love story between a railway station restaurant waitress, played by the legendary Lyudmila Gurchenko, and a pianist unjustly accused of a crime. And another nostalgic return to the early days of break dance is featured in Karen Shakhnazarov's 1986 **Courier**, a teen movie in which an unconventional young man gets a job as a courier after failing a university admission exam. The film speaks to the generation gap, the impending fall of the Soviet empire, and the waning of socialist values among the youngsters.

These five titles in the Back to the USSR section were all produced by the gigantic Mosfilm studio; they are joined in the section by a film produced by the Dovjenko studios, Roman Balayan's 1982

Flights in Dreams and in Reality, in which a 40th birthday throws the protagonist, masterfully interpreted by Oleg Yankovskiy, into a middle age crisis. A constant discomfort and discontent pushes him to do extravagant and only apparently amusing gestures that hurt those around him. This is precisely the reason the film became popular: it went against the idealized image of the Soviet man.

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