

20 years of Slovakia  
10 directors  
1 film

# SLOVAKIA 2.0

HERZ

ŠULÍK

KEREKES

LIOVÁ

SUCHÝ

RUDAVSKÝ

GRÓFOVÁ

KRIŠTÚFEK

JELOK

ČÁKANYOVÁ

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WITH FINANCIAL SUPPORT:



# ZORA JAUROVÁ & MÁTYÁS PRIKLER:

## Explain to the Martians what is Slovakia

19.9.2010 0:58

*Prikler Mátyás*

thank you for calling me your fb friend. only that, sadly, we do not know each other in person. Though i know you, of course, from the media. so it is like being called a friend by monica bellucci.

19.9.2010 8:11

*Zora Jaurová*

:)) but i have heard of you...!

19.9.2010 8:23

*Zora Jaurová*

a lot of good things

19.9.2010 14:57

*Prikler Mátyás*

then we are even

► **Have you met because of the film project Slovakia 2.0 where you both are producers?**

*Zora Jaurová (Z):* We met through Facebook. I was in Košice, Mátyás was in Cannes. I read about him in a newspaper and Facebook offered him as a friend. So I added him. He seemed interesting. I seldom add strangers.

*Mátyás Prikler (M):* That happened in September 2010 and we only met in person in September 2011 at Divadelná Nitra. Suddenly during a lunch there stood Zora in her red-and-black dress with leg wrapped in red gaze.

*Z:* I had tendinitis, because I was running too much.

*M:* It was an amusing encounter, because we were on the second name basis on Facebook, but we started addressing each other by the first name from the very first live encounter.

► **What was the subsequent path to your joint film project?**

*M:* When I was finishing the film Thank You, Fine, I came up with an idea of a short-story film about the twenty years of Slovakia. I thought that a. the project would not be a traditional

film, b. this Jaurová woman was an interesting person, and c. I would like to work with her.

### ► **Why did you choose her?**

*M:* I tend to choose my working partners intuitively. It happened once that I met a cameraman and told him: “Come, let’s do a film together.” And he asked whether I had seen any of his films. I replied: “No, but I like you and want to work with you.” I realised that the only thing I can do is choose people and build a team.

### ► **How did you respond to Mátyás’ offer to become the producer?**

*M:* I do remember!

*Z:* And I don’t.

*M:* You said: “I don’t know how to make films.” And I replied: “Never mind.”

*Z:* I did all kinds of things in life, but I do not think I can do everything. First I did not have the feeling that I could actually be a film producer.

### ► **What convinced you?**

*Z:* I liked the idea of Slovakia – 20 years of independence, the theme of identity. It is something I dealt with in the previous projects, not just the artistic ones, but also marketing and theoretical. Moreover, Mátyás approached me when I finished in Košice. I was free and exploring a number of offers. I like to do things that no one has done before. I like to work across fields. This was exactly that.

### ► **How does your production team work?**

*M:* I don’t like working alone. Zora once said that the principle of dramaturgy is for the director not to be alone to do everything. When you are directing, you always have a lot of partners. First, it is the scriptwriters, then the cameraman, then

the editor. It is like experiencing three marriages in a single film. It is similar in case of production.

*Z:* Professionally I came from the theatre context. Yet a dramaturge in theatre can have various roles, depending of the type of director he or she works with. The point is that the two work on a performance and are able to have a conversation. That is how it works in our project.

*M:* What I like most about our cooperation is that I say A, Zora says B and we end up together with Z. Each of us brings in their own opinion, idea and together we move forward to the best possible decisions which we would hardly reach alone.

### ► **What was the concept of the film Slovakia 2.0?**

*Z:* The idea of a short-story film Slovakia 2.0 is simple. We were clear about it from the outset. Nevertheless, a short-story film can be made in all kinds of ways. There are projects where films directly follow from each other, have a bridging line of an idea or a specific element. Our concept was different from the very beginning. The only thing that connects the films is the overriding theme, the length and that it is an original perspective of ten directors on the same period of our history.

### ► **Did you also agree on the choice of directors?**

*M:* Some names were clear from the start, whilst others we came up gradually. Our intention was to put together a diverse and representative collection of directors. It can be argued that others should have been included, but then we had to be pragmatic. Those who were in a middle of making a film at the time, had no space for this project. Alas, they could not be included.

### ► **Can your selection be deemed as representative across generations of Slovak cinematography?**

**Z:** We certainly tried to achieve that. Ultimately though, it is always our subjective choice that was affected by the films we like and consider interesting.

**M:** None of us would play God and say that we chose the only ten best directors.

► **Is Slovakia 2.0 a showcase of the twenty years of independent Slovakia and of two decades of Slovak cinematography?**

**Z:** It certainly is. Our aim was to make a film about Slovakia, but also to show what Slovak cinematography is about. That is why we included in the project such diverse range of filmmakers.

**M:** In case of every film it is unfair to write about it as of a film by this or that director. Even in case of Slovakia 2.0 we mention ten names of directors and two names of producers. Yet there were a vast number of others who were involved in the films – DOP's, scriptwriters, sound technicians, editors, composers, actors, and many others who are equally a significant part of Slovak cinematography.

► **When you approached the director with the topic of the twenty years of Slovakia, how was it received?**

**M:** I should perhaps say that the film emerged practically through the opposite logic as is common with films in Europe, when a director comes up with an idea of a film and only then he or she seeks a producer. Slovakia 2.0 is actually a producers' film: we came up with the idea of the project and presented an offer to ten directors. None of them woke up suddenly with a thought of making a 10-minute film about the 20-year old Slovakia. Those were thus quite interesting conversations.

► **Did you have to lead the directors to the themes?**

**Z:** Some were first a bit confused. Some might have even thought that we wanted them to make some promo-film about Slovakia.

**M:** Yet largely they felt honoured that we approached them and we are honoured that they accepted our invitation.

► **Did you give them a free hand in making the films?**

**M:** Yes, that was the idea from the very beginning: let everyone do what they want so that these are authors' films. Just a couple of matters were predefined: the exact length and the submission deadline.

► **Mátyás, you are a director and Zora is a dramaturge. To what degree did you interfere with the directors' creative process?**

**M:** Since there were ten directors and we either already had or have developed a different relationship with each over the course of shooting, we probably also meant different things to each of them. To some we were a cash machine, to others casting directors, to others we were script consultants, psychologists, pub friends and, for Peter Kerekes, all of the above! They represent ten different cases.

**Z:** We acted more creatively whenever it was needed and required by an author. Yet I think we had with each some form of creative dialogue.

► **Mátyás, did you not want to shoot one of the short stories?**

**M:** No. It was one of the few things that I knew from the outset of the project.

► **Why not?**

**M:** Do you want the official, the funny or the real answer?

► **All of them.**

*M:* We told ourselves that when one of the ten directors drops out, I would be the stand-by director and would quickly shoot something. The funny answer is that the film Thank You, Fine is over two hours long. It is also about the twenty years of Slovakia. So I would not want to do a 10-minute long film about the same thing. Yet the fundamental reason was that I did not want to find myself in a schizophrenic situation of being one of the ten directors and at the same time one of the two producers.

► **Which themes do you see as standing out most visibly in the ten short-stories?**

*Z:* Interestingly enough, a number of directors first perceived the project as a political film. It is understandable, because our lives over the past twenty years were closely affected by politics. In the end, however, the films turned out to be quite personal legacies. It is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the project. For instance, the Juraj Herz film is a fiction using authentic material from his own life where he plays himself. Mišo Suchý made the most intimate confession about his family. Other films show similar traces. Subjective perspective prevails and nobody went for a very political film. It suggests a certain trend or state of Slovak cinematography.

► **Although the directors' perspectives on Slovakia are personal, is the film a reflexion of the society, of our reality?**

*M:* It certainly reflects a significant part of reality. When we discussed the assignment, we would tell the directors: "Explain in ten minutes what is Slovakia." They gave it further thought and told them: "Tell the Martians what is Slovakia." So we shall see what the Martians and the audiences say about the result.

► **What is Slovakia to you?**

*Z:* It is the vantage point of my life and of

everything what I think about the world. It is not the only vantage point and perhaps not even the fundamental one, but it is certainly the one that has defined me as I am.

*M:* It is a foundation. Vantage point – that is good! It affects you somehow. You do not deal with it at home, but you do so as soon as you go abroad. It is the first thing that defines you. People ask you everywhere you go: "Where do you come from?" "Slovakia." It is a stamp.

► **Peter Krišťufek said that, had he not lived in Slovakia but elsewhere, he would be unlikely to make films and write books. Is Slovakia a motivation for you?**

*Z:* I do not live in Slovakia because I was born here, but because I chose to live here, even I had opportunities to live abroad. I have two sisters, one lives in Kiev and the other one in Stockholm. Theirs was a different choice. I also like the fact that this is a new state. That certainly brings along a lot of awful things and frustrations. Paradoxically, though, one can do things that might be unthinkable in the traditional, well-functioning countries. The same might be true about this film.

► **How so?**

*Z:* If we lived in a country with advanced cinematography, two producers like us would be unlikely to be given a chance to make such a film.

*M:* Just imagine someone in Germany or France having graduated in film directing, receiving the diploma, founding a production company and turning up, in mere two years, at the Audiovisual Fund with Zora Jaurová to say: "I studied film directing, I have a company that is two years old. Zora has done no film so far; I have done one, low-budget. Would you kindly give us half a million Euros and we will make you a film about twenty years of Slovakia." That would hardly get anywhere even in Austria or Hungary. Yet it was possible in Slovakia. And so we made the film.



*Zora Jaurová* (\*1973, Bratislava) studied theatre dramaturgy at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. She was Director of the Culture Contact Point and represented Slovakia at the Cultural Affairs Committee at the EU Council. She also served as Vice-President of Culture Action Europe. She is co-author of the project *Košice – Interface 2013* that won the Slovak bid for the 2013 European Capital of Culture. She currently works as producer, is an expert on culture policy and creative industry. She is the President of the Creative Industry Forum and is member of the the top-expert panel at the European Creative Industries Alliance.

*Mátýás Prikler* (\*1982, Bratislava) completed his studies in film directing in 2009 at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava under the tutelage of Stanislav Párnický. In 2005– 2006 he studied at the Film Academy in Budapest. His graduation film *Thank You, Fine* competed at the IFF in Cannes. The feature-length film carrying the same title was premiered internationally at the IFF Rotterdam. He established and runs a production company MPhilms. In addition to the film *Slovakia 2.0* he is producer of *Children* directed by Jaro Vojtek and co-producer of a film *Mirage* by Hungarian director Szabolcs Hajdu.

# JURAJ HERZ:

## I have not forgotten my Slovak

*He is among the legends of Czechoslovak cinematography. He entered the world of film over half a century ago as a talented and original film-maker who moves with equal confidence and grace across genres, from psychological drama, through comedy and tragic grotesque, to compelling story with mysterious atmosphere. Director Juraj Herz returned to his native city of Kežmarok for his film Honorary Citizen. It is with delight that he recalls the pranks of his youth.*

### ► How did you receive the invitation to make a film for the project Slovakia 2.0?

I left Slovakia when I was twenty. Ever since then I was coming back essentially as a foreigner. I was a bit frightened, when I received the invitation, as I was wondering what I could come up with for the film. Then I remembered how much fun I had when my native Kežmarok awarded me the Honorary Citizenship and I realised that it could be turned to a satire.

### ► Why?

Because I was actually expelled from Kežmarok. I was told at school that they would give me my final report, but I had to promise to leave Kežmarok for they never wanted to see me there again.

### ► What did you do to earn this?

I was a terrible student, an awful fighter. Moreover I had some strange drive to keep entertaining the entire group at school. And so I was amusing my classmates to the detriment of the professors who were not that thrilled about me. My school report on conduct was poor, I was getting Bs and Cs for behaviour. That is why I was surprised and even amused when my native city honoured me.

### ► What were your sentiments when coming back to Kežmarok?

My great-grandparents were born there, as

were my grandparents, parents; one of my two brothers lives there. I consider Kežmarok to be my native city and coming back was like returning home. Even the pharmacy that is now in the museum is the one in which I used to run as a boy and where my father worked as a pharmacist.

### ► Is Kežmarok a synonym to what Slovakia means to you?

Yes, along with Bratislava. I spent four years there at the Arts and Crafts College – by the way, they were also happy to see the back of me.

### ► Do you like to think of your life in Slovakia?

Certainly, for I spent my youth here. We were even hungry then, I had very little money, but we used to go dancing every evening; waiters knew us, let us in through the kitchen so that we did not have to pay the entrance fee. Those were the days!

### ► When you left for Prague to study puppetry, did you stop being trouble?

No. Inevitably I ended up in a quarrel with all my professors, particularly the Head of the Department. I was cheeky. He sent me a telegram asking me to come to Prague at once to start rehearsing. It was before Christmas and I replied: "I shall come to Prague on 6 January and will start rehearsing in March." As I did not turn up, I received a written reprimand from the Dean. I hung it on the wall above my bed in the dormitory. The Head of the Department noticed

it and got upset that I was making fun of it. He thus decided to prevent me from going on a trip to Romania which I so longed for.

### ► **How did the story end?**

They tried to assign the play to other students, but no one took it. It was a difficult Japanese play. The Head of the Department came to me saying: "You can do it, but it will not be your graduation piece!" I directed it and then it was me to come to him. He told me that it was an exceptionally good work and I could graduate with it, but had to first write a thesis. I replied: "I will not!" And I did not. For twenty years I kept receiving a note from the university: "Mr. Herz, do write a few lines and you will receive the Master's degree." I kept replying: "I do not want to be a Master. My father was Master of Pharmacy and he is the only Master I recognise." And so I did not graduate from the school.

### ► **Today you are being adopted by Slovaks, Czechs and Germans. Which is the right option?**

Slovaks are right in saying that I am a Slovak director, because I was born here. The Czechs are right when they argue that I am a Czech director, because it is where I learned directing. And the Germans are right when they say I am theirs, for I make German films and have lived there. When I open my wallet, in the left pocket I have my Czech ID card and in the other one

I have my German ID. I only had to give up my Slovak citizenship, for the Slovak law prevented me from having it.

### ► **What constitutes your identity?**

I suspect my identity transpires in the ten minutes of my film. Even though sometimes I make mistakes in my Slovak, I have not forgotten the language in the sixty years I have been living abroad.

### ► **You spent a significant part of your life in Czechoslovakia. How did you view the split of the federation?**

I was totally devastated. I was so concerned about it and was unhappy about it for months and months.

### ► **What saddened you so much about it?**

I always thought of us as one state. We were Czechoslovakia. People spoke two languages; we worked together, lived together. There were no differences between us. Yet when Vladimír Mečiar started to talk of the split, tensions arose. I was very saddened.

### ► **How do you view the two countries now, twenty years on?**

It is alright the way it is. The most important thing is that there are no more borders and we can live wherever we want.



◀ **Juraj Herz** (\*1934, Kežmarok) studied at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague to complete his studies in direction and acting at the Department of Puppetry in 1958. As assistant director he worked on the Oscar-winning film *The Shop on the Main Street*, in which is also acted. In 1987 he emigrated to Germany where he made films and series for German, Austrian, French and American television companies. His cult films include *The Cremator* (1968), *Sweet Amusements of Past Summer* (1969) and *Oil Lamps* (1971). His works earned him innumerable domestic and international awards, including festival prizes at Karlovy Vary, Monte Carlo and Chicago.

# MARTIN ŠULÍK:

## The passing of Václav Havel marked an end of an era

*With time passing, he sees the split of the Czecho-Slovak federation as a good step. He considers the major problem in Slovakia to be the absence of justice and equality for all. Director Martin Šulík is also saddened by the passivity of the people and the resigned state of the elites.*

### ▶ **Do we need another Havel? Would we benefit from one at times of the crisis of economy and values?**

I do not know whether it is Havel whom we need. I would not overstate his role. The society is such a complex system that it cannot depend on views of a single person, no matter how successful a playwright he would be.

### ▶ **Have the ideals that Havel epitomised been fulfilled?**

Havel was the bearer of the values that were at the start of the societal changes in 1989. Truth and love were to win, though ultimately the fight was about political power. There were debates about equality in law, about justice, tolerance and the need for solidarity. None of the ideals has been yet fulfilled. Our film President's funeral is a statement that the passing of Václav Havel, in reality and symbolically, has marked an end of an era which we shall remember as a wasted opportunity.

### ▶ **Were we prepared to split from the Czechs and to run our own country twenty years ago?**

No, we were not. A number of Slovaks did not even want the split. Ultimately the split proved to be a good test. We had to stop pitying ourselves that we were administered from Prague and that we could not implement our vision for Slovakia. We had to assume responsibility for ourselves literally overnight. We passed the test in some aspects, in others we failed. Yet we lost in the Czechs a well-placed

mirror that would have enabled us to confront ourselves. I think we sometimes miss it.

### ▶ **Where have we succeeded?**

For instance, 1990 saw the opening of the Film Faculty at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. In the two decades the school raised a new generation of film-makers. A number of them are recognised abroad.

### ▶ **In what have we failed?**

We have not fulfilled ideas about the social nature of the society. We lack a concrete application of justice and equality for all. That is the core problem in Slovakia which demoralises the entire society.

### ▶ **Do you think people face a crisis of values?**

Slovakia lacks a real vision for the society. For instance education and the school system is allegedly the priority for each government. Yet students keep increasingly dropping in tests. There are no textbooks, teachers are not sufficiently appraised, schools are underfunded. Even though we have more university students than ever before, I do not think we are any wiser. It is one thing to talk about values, yet their implementation is another thing. The latter is a matter of day-to-day laborious effort full of conflicts.

### ▶ **Who should shape the vision for the society?**

The implementation of the guiding values is

a complex challenge that requires consensus among a number of social strata. Arts, film and the media should be part of the process. The television was never an opinion-maker to the degree it is today. Nevertheless, television seems unable to utilise its strength. State licences have been given even to broadcasters who had long resigned on any effort to cultivate public conscience. It is sad when the Minister of Culture receives no support as he points out that the television broadcasting is vulgar and devalues human dignity. The silent bystanders include even those who ought to care about such matters – artists, writers, journalists. We are tolerant about the flaws in culture. It is bound to come back to us like a boomerang.

### ► Why are the elites silent?

They are perhaps silent because they have repeatedly experienced disappointment and have thus resigned. They lost hope that they could change anything. Everyday scandals keep proving that it is someone else who decides about our lives. The lawyers working for the financial groups keep writing laws for the ministries. Tenders are being publicised on billboards and a privatisation deal carried out in a private flat in Bratislava is broadcasted live on the radio. A lot of people have withdrawn to privacy. They think that it makes more sense to focus on their work than to be civically active or to comment on common issues. The silence of the elites might be a sign that we do not actually have them.

### ► Can films change public opinion?

A few decades ago some films brought about political changes across Europe. Wajda's *Man of Marble* anticipated the emergence of Solidarity in Poland, Abuladze's *Repentance* affected the way of thinking in the Soviet Union during perestroika. Last year the documentary film *Crooks* forced the Czech government to adopt a law against dubious dealers. I am convinced that films can indeed shape public conscience.

### ► Is that what you stir your students towards?

We do, though it is to no avail. Once they graduate they start having families and need to provide for them. They hop on the carousel of the televised family series. It means working in tough conditions, under major time pressure. In a few years they resign on doing anything original and on reflecting the life of the society. They shoot copies of Western formats. In a sense they do shape public conscience.

### ► Is it not true, however, that a film which can change things only reaches those people who are already aware of the problems?

A good film does find its audience. The producer Čestmír Kopecký has a theory that it is not important how many people see a film, but what type of people view it. If seen by the right people, a film can inspire them to a creative deed.



◀ **Martin Šulík** (\*1962, Žilina) studied film and television directing at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. His debut as director came in 1991 with the film *Tenderness*. His films *The Garden* and *Landscape* are part of the golden archive of the Czech and Slovak cinematography. *The Garden* (1995) has earned five Czech Lions. Šulík has been also successful at festivals in Mannheim, Cottbus, Bologna, Turin, Saint Etienne, and Belfort. *Landscape* (2000) has been submitted by the Slovak Film and Television Academy for the Oscar nominations. His latest film is *Gypsy* (2011). He is lecturer at the Film Faculty, Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava.

# PETER KEREKES:

## We shall reach democracy in about 200 years

*He never wanted to make political films. Still, he made this one. Director Peter Kerekes thinks that Slovakia lacks sufficient tradition and an ability to govern itself. He would like to live in a country with a minimum of corruption, advanced social security and good schools, but is too lazy to move and does not like Scandinavian winters. That is why he decided to bring the Scandinavian political system to Slovakia.*

### ▶ How did you come up with the (film) idea of inviting the Finnish army to occupy Slovakia?

It was a joke. I once said in a pub that a country that cannot democratically help its development and to reach a degree of normality, has only one option: to invite the assistance of a foreign army. That was when I returned from a month-long stay in Finland. I was thrilled about the country. I thought that, if Finnish administrators, inspectors and judges were deployed in Slovakia, our country would at last embark on the path to democracy.

### ▶ Do you think of us as capable of running a democratic state?

Twenty years ago Slovakia was unprepared to govern itself. With the current pace we are likely to reach democracy in about 200 years. People are not used to bear responsibility for their own decisions; we have no continuity of governance, institutions, no respect for authorities.

### ▶ Do we lack elites?

We have capable people in every field. The problem, however, is that they shy away from public engagement. It is always the elites that can ignite excitement in people.

### ▶ What is the key to democracy?

The Finnish and British models work because

these countries always had strong elites; the people elected mayors among those whom they respected. The elected officials then had to be careful not to lose the respect of their voters, else they would be replaced. Such tradition is absent here, even at a local level. We do not have a normal mayor in our town, as no one normal is willing to take the job.

### ▶ Why?

Public life and politics are awfully irreverent. It was obvious during the Presidential elections. One could not choose anyone to give a vote to with a clear conscience. All politicians in Slovakia are linked today to some interest groups. Who would want to deal with that?

### ▶ Is everything ideal in Finland?

They certainly have troubles at times. Yet Finland is interesting in that people control each other and the level of corruption is low. At the same time the control does not work to a degree of a police state. The public controls your public activities, but not your privacy.

### ▶ How is it in Slovakia?

It is exactly the opposite. Everyone in Slovakia puts their nose into your private life, while public controversies leave people unconcerned, except for some minute media upset. We deal with personal affairs of politicians, we focus on the President of the Supreme Court dancing at balls.

On the contrary, it seems marginal to us how much money do politicians misappropriate, how many corruption affairs they ended up in, how many wrong decisions they made.

▶ **So where are we heading to?**

I think it is the time that will decide about our future. The elections for the regional self-government in Banská Bystrica have shown that the classical politics is losing, the state structure no longer enjoy public trust. Thus all kinds of madmen get into the leading posts. Now we have the last chance for the intelligent and responsible people to join forces and create counterbalance to the others. They will either awaken or we shall keep wandering through the various government crossroads and crises.

▶ **Should artists interfere with politics?**

Everyone should interfere with politics, because politics is a public affair! Those who have something to say to politics and enjoy respect in their field should mobilise themselves.

▶ **Is your film the Second Chance a political attempt?**

It is indeed, though I never wanted to make political films.

▶ **Can your film change anything?**

The film is unlikely to change anything. It is actually an anecdote to make people think about

our situation. At best it can trigger a discussion.

▶ **Do you think the film will cause some agitation?**

To be honest, I do not think it will agitate those whom it is addressed to. The Prime Minister, the Government Ministers, the official structures do not care about what I say in the film. They know that the film will be well-received by a small portion of the public which is not their target group anyway.

▶ **Have you ever thought of leaving Slovakia?**

I first thought of it in 1998 prior the troubled elections. I completed by graduation film and received excellent offers from the Czech Television. That was even without me having had any reputation in the film industry. It was all just based on my script. I was delighted, because at the time the Slovak world of cinematography and the compromised Slovak Television was killed. I was reading a book by Ivan Klíma My Golden Trades then. The story is set in the communist era when Klíma had to do all kinds of jobs in order not to be put in jail as a social parasite. He described how he was helping archaeologists as a hired labourer. As he dug out some bones he realised that the bones did not belong to those who had emigrated, but to those who remained and to their enemies. His words and the literature forced me to tell myself that we were going nowhere. It was the last drop that decided that we would stay.



◀ ***Peter Kerekes** (\*1973, Košice) studied directing at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and is now lecturer at the Film and Television Faculty. His graduation documentary *The Ladomír Horrors and Other Legends* earned him prizes at local and international festivals. His feature-length debut *66 Seasons* (2003) received prizes for best documentary on international film festivals in Jihlava, Tel Aviv, Syracuse. His documentary *Cooking History* (2008) received nomination for the European Film Award, the European Oscar, and received the price from the prestigious HotDocs festival in Toronto.*

# ZUZANA LIOVÁ:

## The sense of futility has won

*When asked what was it that last pleased her in Slovakia, she replies that it was a trip to the Salesian House in the Tatra mountains. She is quick to add that, what did not please her, were sheep cheese pierogi made there from a precooked frozen pack. Director Zuzana Liová can promptly list the minuses of Slovakia, but gives a longer thought to the pluses.*

### ► **What are the pluses and minuses of Slovakia?**

Pluses? Probably that we live in relative freedom and, in comparison with the lives of our grandparents, we are better off materialistically.

### ► **And minuses?**

We grew used to the fact that one can lie and steal without anyone being punished. The politicians give into the power hunger instead of the desire to help. Mutual respect among people is disappearing; we are not kind to each other, we focus on money – perhaps because most people do not have enough money, and those who have enough, want more. I often hear: “Who gives you anything for free today?” The communist way of thinking continues to prevail in a sense that we still want to rely on someone else. The fact the Slovaks are envious is also a frequently repeated truth.

### ► **Is it specific for Slovakia?**

Some things might be specific, as they are derived from our mentality. Yet the corruption is a problem that pains other countries.

### ► **Have we ‘inherited’ the minuses from the previous regime and, though we have been living in democracy for a quarter of a century, are we turning back to communism?**

Regrettably, our generation has inherited the rules of the communist system. We were raised

in it from childhood: you have to obey authority, the state will look after everyone, there is no need to attract attention to oneself, no need to have an opinion. The rules suddenly lost validity. I remember the sense of chaos that arose when it all ended. It is actually not easy to accept freedom and responsibility. Our children will be different, affected by a different, perhaps better system which, however, has also its own faults. Perhaps the mix in which we live makes Slovakia what it is.

### ► **What was the leitmotif for your film *No Fragrance*?**

I had a number of motifs. Yet the one that won was about the sense of futility related to unemployment. I was guided by the fact that a simple man is virtually of interest to no one. He is part of a mass. I chose in the mass an inconspicuous simple woman. She was made redundant after having worked thirty years in a factory. I was trying to observe what she was possibly thinking during her last day on the job. Is she afraid of the future? Does she feel burnt out? Does she think of herself as being thrown out like a useless item? Is she afraid of the void that came about? Will all that she was doing and what was useful before, not missed by anyone? I was interested in whether, at that moment, she might paradoxically sense some freedom.

### ► **Is this sense of uselessness a collective sentiment?**

The interview with women who had been made redundant by the company made it clear that

they did feel useless, not needed. They are fifty years old and no one will employ them. They will end up in a job centre just as yet another item for the administrators.

► **What would help such people?**

That is probably a matter of individual circumstances. Some would be content to be able to work at the conveyor belt on three shifts. They simply want security which is often promised by the politicians who fail to keep their promises. Others take it as a challenge, attend number of professional training courses offered by job centres. Some might even open their own business. Yet our system does not make it easy for them. Eventually they leave for Austria to work as carers for the elderly. And what about our pensioners, do they not need carers, too?

► **The independent Slovakia has marked its twentieth anniversary. How do you see the current 20-year olds?**

They come across as totally different from my generation at that age. They are far more self-confident. They do not need to know a lot to be content with themselves. They do not go into the depth of things, they do not want to be burdened and to work on themselves. They are less worried, more playful and so perhaps also happier. Yet our students enrolled script writing often address the issue of unemployment of

young graduates. Here we go again back to the sense of futility and uncertainty about the future.

► **Is there such thing as Slovak film?**

There are films that reflect a sense of space which we have here, within which we manoeuvre.

► **Yet there is a talk about a 'wave', about a 'generation' ...**

Yes, our generation of directors creates a message about what life here is about.

► **Why then you 'all' make depressive films? Is it the image of our times?**

When international tourists arrive, they say we do not smile much, we do not enjoy life that much. In that sense the films might be the reflexion of the times. To me, however, the films we make are not depressive. They rather force us to think. Some are disturbing, they identify problems. My films always bring hope in the end.

► **The Czechs also make a lot of serious and sad films, but also a lot of comedies. Is it a feature of Slovak film that we cannot laugh at where and how we live?**

Perhaps it will be the current generation of the 20-somethings who will bring a humorous reflexion of our world. Don't you think so?



◀ **Zuzana Liová** (\*1977, Žilina) studied dramaturgy and screenwriting at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava where she completed her PhD in 2008. Her debut as a screenwriter and TV director came in 2005 with the film *Silence*. 2007 brought her the Krzysztof Kieslowski TVP Award for screenwriting at the Cannes. Her feature-length film debut for cinemas, *The House*, was premiered at the FORUM section at the 2011 IFF Berlinale. A year later she received the Grand Prix in the New voices/New visions category at the Palm Springs.

# MIŠO SUCHÝ:

## One foot in Bratislava, the other one in Syracuse

*In 1988 he left for America because of love. His wife Lidka in American, as are his sons. His sons' grandparents are Slovaks and Ukrainians. The older Myko will play lacrosse this summer for the Slovak national team. Grandfather Michal from Bratislava insists that his younger grandson Marko learns to play Slovak folk songs. Although director Mišo Suchý spent most of his life in America and speaks Slovak with an American accent, he does not have US passport.*

▶ **Your film *Návraty/Returns*, which is a free sequence to *Home movie: a diary for my American-born son*, reveals your perennial search for home and identity. Who are you then?**

Identity means to me a spider-web that ties a person to places and people. I live with a sense of standing in two places at once, with one foot in Bratislava and with the other one in Syracuse. Recently, when I went to buy some coffee, I had an interesting experience. We had a lot of snow last winter, almost half a metre. There was a girl in a shop, just in sandals, dressed in a silk dress and wearing burka. She was asking the shopkeeper how to get to the mosque. I offered to give her a lift, as the mosque is near the school where I work. She told me: "You are not an American, are you?" I asked her what made her think so. She replied: "Because you are willing to give me a ride." I try not to categorise: a Slovak, a Ukrainian, or an American... I prefer seeking that what brings us together rather than what divides us.

▶ **Still, are you more a Slovak or an American?**

My wife Lidka is an American, as are our sons Myko and Marko. Their grandparents are Slovaks and Ukrainians. The older, Myko, will play lacrosse for the Slovak national team this year. Grandpa Michael wants the younger one, Marko, to learn to play Slovak folk songs on saxophone. Myko studied in Lviv in Ukraine last year where he learned to write his name in the

Cyrillic alphabet. Marko and Lidka visited the Carpathian mountains in Ukraine from where they headed to Bratislava. We live in Syracuse, New York state. So, make your choice.

▶ **Although you have been living in America longer than in Slovakia, do you still feel to be part of the Slovak context?**

Lidka's parents escaped the Stalinist terror in Ukraine to save their lives. It was through them that I realised that, in order to live in America, you do not have to give up who you are or who you want to be. They had never forgotten where they came from. They were Ukrainians as well as Americans. And I am a Slovak and an American. What I like about America is that one thing does not preclude another.

▶ **How do your sons perceive their identity?**

I am trying to make our sons know their terra firma across the big puddle. Yet it is up to them what they will find close to their hearts. I am always happy when they feel it right. I have a lovely experience from a few years ago when we visited Marek Šulík in Vishtuk. We were barbecuing some bacon in the garden. When we prayed in the evening, Myko said: "Dear Lord, thank you for having invented bacon." When Slovakia recently lost the hockey match to the USA, we were very sad. Our sons are Americans, but it does not prevent them from thinking of themselves as Slovaks or Ukrainians. While our neighbours travel to Cape Cod for the summer, we trot off to Bratislava or Kryvorinyya.

### ► How is it coming back home?

When Ukraine gained independence in the 1990s, my father-in-law set off back home. He was about eighty then and it was for the first time he went back since he had emigrated. I asked him: "Pa, are you looking forward to Ukraine?" And he replied: "Mišo, I am not going there for vacation." When I tell my colleagues that I am going to Slovakia, they reply in excitement: "That's great!" Yet it is not that exciting – for I am not going there on vacation!

### ► What do you miss in America about Slovakia?

My parents, relatives, friends with whom I grew up. When I worked on the Home Movie, I wanted it to be edited by one of my American students.

It did not work out in the end. I travelled to Slovakia and someone recommended Marek Šulík to me. When we sat together in the editing room, I suddenly realised that I did not have to explain anything to Marek, because he used to eat the same bread as I did.

### ► Do you send out a report about Slovakia through your films?

My films are about my parents, my relatives and my feelings. If I can, I come to Slovakia once a year, sometimes twice. Suddenly I see the country around as in a film stop-trick. What used to be the pub Riviéra is now a bank. Where I used to play as a child are now blocks of flats. A lot has changed, whilst a lot remains the same. That is how I see Slovakia; it is an inner and outer perspective.



◄ *Mišo Suchý* (\*1965, Bratislava) studied documentary production at the Academy of Performing Arts. At the age of 22 he left for the United States. He lectures at the Syracuse University in New York State. His films were presented at a number of major festivals, including Paris, New York and Chicago. In 1997 he published a book of photographs and memoirs *When I was and Wasn't Home*. His photographs were published in *GEO* and the *National Geographic*. His films and photographs are included in public collections at the International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester v New York and the Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava.

# ONDREJ RUDAVSKÝ:

## We lack self-confidence

*His art shows traces of Slovak folklore, though he has been living in America for nearly thirty years. He emigrated aged twenty also because he saw the communists destroying his father's sculptures with dynamite. Ondrej Rudavský is nowadays one of the most successful Slovak artists worldwide. He makes films, photography, sculptures and paints.*

► **Your film is a showcase of history of Slovakia. How does the film conclude? In reality?**

The film has a neutral ending, as if a new film were about to begin, one that no one sees, an eye looks at the audience. The ending of the film depends on us. We are the ones to create reality. Everyone keeps on complaining and criticising. I know that it is hard to start from oneself, but we all are responsible for the way we will live here.

► **You call for a change, want to make people think about our country, about themselves.**

This might come across as simplistic, but in California, when one crosses a road, cars immediately stop. Here, on the contrary, when a mother with a child is crossing the road, no one stops. It is just a metaphor. Yet I have a sense as if we were constantly waiting for someone else to do the job or that things would happen by themselves. As if we were unwilling to assume responsibility for our actions.

► **Is such thinking a legacy of communism?**

Yes, to a point. I also think, however, that Slovaks are a bit tense, they smile little. Even when I emigrated, I was mostly helped by people of other nationalities. As if the Slovaks were envious of anyone being successful. They start suffering from inferiority complex, give into jealousy. I do not understand it and constantly wonder where I come from.

► **What is the root cause of it?**

It is perhaps that we in Slovakia lost the ability to delight in small things. I know that the economic situation is uneasy, but it is the same abroad. Is it a matter of our culture? Or is it because we were historically always subjects to someone else or something else? I noticed, for instance, that people abroad do not lack self-confidence, but I still have a problem to be self-confident. I do not believe in myself. I think the fear in us springs from the old fear that we and our parents had during communism.

► **After nearly thirty years of life between Slovakia and America, do you think of yourself more as a Slovak or an American?**

I take the planet as my home and do not dwell about it any further. I do not think it important to categorise oneself. It does not matter whether I am here or elsewhere. There are good and bad people everywhere.

► **What does Slovakia mean to you?**

I was born here and lived here during communism. Then I emigrated, thus somewhat tearing myself away from this context. Yet it remains one of my homelands. I like coming back here.

► **What was the last drop that made you emigrate?**

I grew up in a family of artists. I saw how difficult

it was to be an artist and work freely after August 1968. I did not want to live in anything like that. When I saw how they blew up my father's sculptures with dynamite and how he was persecuted for years, my sister and I decided with to emigrate.

▶ **You escaped from Slovakia in 1986. When did you first come back?**

It was not until 1992, prior to the split of Czechoslovakia. When I emigrated, I lived with a sense that I could never come back, that I would never see my parents, friends, Slovakia. It was the strange psychology of emigrants – that it is forever. Suddenly an opportunity arose. It was a shock again! I realised that I had to change my setting that it is possible. I had to erase the point when I first thought that I could no longer come back. It was confusing.

▶ **How did you perceive the split of Czechoslovakia?**

I was sorry and surprised. I remember that during the revolution we used to meet with other emigrants, the Moravians, Czechs and experienced together the fall of communism. Then came the split. It was a strange feeling that things were to be different.

▶ **Is Slovakia reflected in your works?**

It is funny, for I thought that it was only marginally reflected. Yet increasingly I hear people say that they seem to notice traces of

Slovak lace in my sculptures, or the geometric pattern of the decorations on wooden trunks in my films and other symbols of Slovak folk art.

▶ **Do you bring these folk symbols into your works subconsciously?**

I spent my entire childhood touring Slovak villages, because my father was collecting wooden trunks and antiques. Perhaps it got ingrained in me.

▶ **How is emigration reflected in your work?**

Emigration is an escape; mentally you can never come back from it. It is a path to a new space. That is why new spaces, ethereal and distant worlds started penetrating my works.

▶ **Do you have any underlying theme?**

It is a penetration or a spiral pointing to light. It is a starting point from somewhere that seems to have no way out at a given moment. Yet you know it is there and one day you will find it.

▶ **Your film *The Rules of the Game* steps aside from the theme and your works.**

Yes, suddenly I had to get back to Earth from space. I reviewed history of Slovakia. It is not, however, just a film about Slovakia. I like to look at things from universal perspective. Always and everywhere there is a bunch of people who manipulate the world, who impose the engineered visions upon their human subjects.



◀ *Ondrej Rudavský (\*1966, Bratislava) studied illustration and graphic design at the Arts and Crafts College, and spent a year at the Animation and Experimental Film Production at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. In 1986, aged 20, he emigrated to the USA. His films earned lot of awards, including and nominations for the American Grammy and the main MTV Award for a clip Kiko and The Levander Moon for a music group Los Lobos. He has made music videoclips for singer Moby and a group Dead Can Dance. His works were presented at prestigious film festivals, including the Sundance Film Festival, New York Film Festival and in exhibition halls such as the Museum of Modern Art/New York.*

# IVETA GRÓFOVÁ:

## We live in a pandemonium of values

*She says that 20 years ago we were unprepared for our own state. Yet at the same time she senses relief that we are past the worst. What director Iveta Grófová misses above all in Slovakia is justice.*

### ▶ Can the notion of Slovakia be explained?

A likely general answer would be that Slovakia is a country founded in 1993, with five million people and the size of 49 thousand square kilometres...

### ▶ And how would you explain it?

Slovakia means something different to everyone, as it is a very personal notion, a matter of one's own relationship with the country.

### ▶ What is your relationship with Slovakia?

Slovakia to me means for instance memories, because I have spent most of my life here. That defines who I am.

### ▶ What does Slovakia mean to the protagonist of your film *Discoboy*?

Whilst I have no right to speak for him, the interviews which we made with him suggest that Slovakia to him means a major struggle. It seems that he would no longer be able to live without the struggle. I think he puts it quite clearly in the film.

### ▶ Whilst the film is a personal look on his life, how does it reflect the twenty years of independent Slovakia?

I see a significant parallel between his life since about 1993 and that of Slovakia. It seems that, in a number of aspects, he has been through similar developments as Slovakia. He started standing on his own in the 1990s;

he had a dream of having his own dance club and pursued it stubbornly. He experienced, similarly to Slovakia at its foundation, the era of business-mafia in the 1990s. That was what pushed him to a decision to give up the fight he had been experiencing here, because he was concerned about the safety of his family and left Slovakia. The need to constantly fight for something, however, has become a part of him over the years. That is perhaps why he often introduces his dance clubs on the Czech-German border by saying: "Welcome to my Slovak kingdom!"

### ▶ Your protagonist points in the film at some 'public secrets' of Slovakia, such as racketeering practices, or police walking hand-in-hand with the mafia. Why did he decide to speak up?

The film was motivated by his inner need to articulate his experiences that are contradictory in terms of morals. He wanted to come to terms with the path. This offers yet another parallel between him and Slovakia which is also gradually coming to recognise the need to come to terms with the process of its foundations and the subsequent developments. The film might have some healing effect for the country. I believe that is also why this entire project has been made: because of the need to reflect what has happened in Slovakia over the past twenty years.

### ▶ Were we prepared to have our own state twenty years ago?

We certainly were not. Yet after the two decades I sense some relief that we are past

the worst. The question remains whether such development is actually natural and determined, whether the development in Slovakia would have been the same had we decided to part from the Czechs ten years later or even today.

▶ **What are the incomplete tasks we still face?**

There is quite a bit of them. The first thing to come to mind is that we should at last bring justice to this country. I know that no country is ideal in this respect. Yet it would be a very good step for the state and the statesmen to start respecting the law at last. It is time!

▶ **What is your wish for Slovakia?**

I wish the Slovaks keep changing for the better. The prevalent mentality that I sense here continues to carry a lot of baggage from the past. I do not only think of the former communist regime, but also all that came afterwards.

▶ **What is it we need for the change?**

People find it quite hard to find values to lean on that would not be questioned. The pandemonium of values reigns here. I think,

for instance, that justice should be such a core value in which we would be able to believe. Yet first we need to have a fair state, only then can we expect people to be the same. We cannot have any illusions that the impulse for a proper conduct is just a matter of some special personal moral compass. We all vest a lot of determination in devising survival strategies where fairness is derived from how the social rules are set.

▶ **Does film have the power to change how the society works?**

Things change already with the mere fact that someone decides to make a film. Though I am increasingly puzzled when a film speaks very honestly and plausibly about our reality, with the intention to widen the horizons of what is going on here, it somehow misses the target. People who are sufficiently sensitive to grasp the morale understand it even without the film. Those who are not sensitive won't understand it even if they see the film ten times over. Yet I disagree with anyone who says that there is no point in making films that reflect our times and the society. Just the mere fact that films can be made, that some energy is set in motion, is a mirror of the reality that things do change and there is a need to deal with them.



◀ *Iveta Grófová (\*1980, Trenčín) graduated from the Studio of Animation Production and the Studio of Documentary Production at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. Her first feature-length debut *Made in Ash* was internationally premiered at the IFF Karlovy Vary in 2012. The Slovak Film and Television Academy chose the film as the national nomination for the Oscars. It was presented at a number of festivals abroad and received the first price in the *Made in Slovakia* section at IFF Bratislava.*

# PETER KRIŠTÚFEK:

## No one is a prophet at home

*Had Slovakia been an orderly and content country, he would have never thought of writing books and making films. He saw the independence of Slovakia as an interesting experiment that proved to be right, he believes. Director Peter Krišťufek would not want to live anywhere else.*

### ▶ Do we have anything specific in Slovakia that cannot be found elsewhere?

Slovakia is a very special country, particularly given its location, and the fact that large nations passed through in the past and we somehow had to come to terms with it, even genetically. Perhaps that's why there is no pure-bred Slovak.

### ▶ Where are your roots?

I was trying to work out my family tree. My ancestors were largely common Slovaks from villages and valleys somewhere near Detva or Trenčín. Yet I suspect I have other than Slovak elements in my blood, expect they had not been reflected in the birth registry. We Slovaks are such a mixture of all kinds, yet we remained proud and stubborn – though I do not think of either as a virtue. That is why we fight for things that are silly; we should not be proud of them.

### ▶ Why is that?

Slovakia is a country full of valleys and mountain peaks. For generations we lived nested in tiny villages, afraid to look to the other side, across the hill. We learned nothing new, because we were afraid of it. People from other valleys were enemies, because they were strangers. That strongly affected our common mentality. We thus like to form small groups, narrow circles. We have a habit to claim that each one of us is the very best Slovak, it is just my own family that is good and I am the wisest of all. We hate everyone else; we think of them as stupid and incompetent. That is our national feature.

### ▶ Do you have your own experience with it?

I think Slovaks have a problem with their identity. That is also why we are unable to appreciate our culture. When someone does something exceptional, the others declare it nonsense. It is typical! I never thought that I would experience the cliché that one is no prophet at home. Sadly, it happens to me a lot.

### ▶ Have you ever thought of leaving the country?

I never wanted to move from Slovakia, though there are countries that appeal to me. I enjoy a lot of things here, yet there is also a lot that makes me upset. It is where I draw inspiration, often choosing Slovak themes.

### ▶ Do you find the difficult nature of Slovakia motivating?

Had Slovakia been an orderly and content country, or if I lived in something similar elsewhere, I would have never thought of writing books and making films. I would hardly manage to go on without Slovakia.

### ▶ In your film **The only known photograph of God** you address the clash of generations, the departing and the emerging ones. You do not belong to either generation. Where about are you on the timeline?

I spent half of my life under communism. The regime change came as I was starting to think about the world and developing my views. The

1990s were fascinating, frenzied, filled with hope. I am thus someone who stands on one foot in the old world and on the other in the new one. At the same time I am very interested in history, be it family or Slovak history. I came to realise that I am increasingly turning to what was there before.

► **Have we matured in the twenty years of independence to have our own state?**

I like to plunge myself in media res without knowing what the future holds in store. Therefore I considered the emergence of the Slovak Republic in the year 1993 to be an inspiration, an interesting experiment that proved right.

► **Are we doing well here?**

We are fine in terms of material security, though it is true that I look at it from the perspective of someone living in Bratislava. When touring the country, one can be shocked at times by how people live. Still, we are better off than our ancestors. People often fail to understand that there are only a few things we need in life. Starving would be a problem. Yet there is nothing wrong with a more modest lifestyle.

► **What do we have to offer to the world?**

Culture. First of all, however, we have to start

being more respectful about Slovak books, films, fine arts. The arts scene is experiencing interesting development. Yet we can only take it abroad once we stop being frustrated by someone being better, more successful and clever. Quite on the contrary – it is this what we ought to be proud of and in how we can help the others. The world will learn about us if we stop underestimating publicity.

► **Can we speak of Slovak film as of a notion today?**

The 1990s were poor. There was just Martin Šulík to make what can be iconically called Slovak film. Documentary film-makers then took over with flagships such of Jaro Vojtek and Peter Kerekes. They define Slovak film, because they make films that could not emerge anywhere else. The problem, however, is feature films that cost a lot of money. For instance, as director I should make one film every two years, but there are no funds for it. Film is like sports: if I practice only once in time, I cannot be as good as those who practice regularly.

► **What is the hard currency of Slovak film-makers?**

We are not too cynical not to be unable to look into human psychology, human suffering and interpersonal relations. And we do have emotions.



◀ ***Peter Krištúfek** (\*1973, Bratislava) studied film and television directing at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. Psychological drama *Visible World* (2011) was his feature cinematographic debut. The film received positive reviews in the *Variety* magazine. He is author of ten books and three-time finalist of the Anasoft Litera award. His first novel *The Whisperer* (2008) was nominated on behalf of Slovakia for the *Prix du livre Européen*. An excerpt from the novel was published in the American anthology *Best European fiction 2010*. His third novel, *The House of the Deaf* (2012) came out in translation in the UK.*

# VIERA ČÁKANYOVÁ:

## We hardly see beyond the tip of our nose

*As filmmaker she is not fascinated by stories of individuals that are emotionally strong and heart-catching. Director Viera Čákanyová wants to offer her audiences a wider perspective in order to inspire them to new ideas.*

► **Your film is about an American who has given up his nationality and moved to Slovakia, because he thinks of the latter as an insignificant country that cannot hurt anyone. Is that all we have to offer to foreigners?**

I do not know whether Michael's opinion speaks for the minority of expatriates who live here. His is a specific case. It is always a personal matter what we are looking for. It is interesting that we stand culturally somewhere between the West and the East.

► **In which ways does Slovakia differ from other countries?**

I like the diversity in Slovakia. It is the intersection of different geographical features, unlike The Netherlands that is one vast pancake. We have high mountains as well as plains. This is also reflected in the people and their lives. People up North, in Orava, have a different lifestyle than those down South along the Danubian Plain. Even the weather is different.

► **What are people in Slovakia like?**

Answers to such questions tend to end up in generalisations by suggesting that we are such and such, the Hungarians are this and that, and the Poles are yet that and that. The more one travels internationally and the more people we encounter, the lesser the need to oversimplify (this tends to come from those who are stressed by the complex reality and need to somehow calm themselves). We can, however,

speaking about some historical experience, about our constant need to adapt to others. We can talk about that we are so tiny on the map that we cannot affect anything geopolitically or culturally, or how all this is reflected in our so called dove-like mentality.

► **What do you find specific about Slovakia?**

It is above all the language, even if because it is only spoken by five million people worldwide! We can pose a philosophical question about what was first: thinking or language? Yet we ought to realise that it is the language that structures our world, how we form sentences and ultimately how we think.

► **Can you see yourself living and working in a different country?**

I thought about it more a few years ago. A filmmaker in a foreign country can offer local audiences an interesting and worthy perspective from the outside – exotic, humorous or absurd. Yet the well gets soon exhausted. If one wishes to pass on a more profound message, he has to immerse deeper into the daily reality in a given country, and particularly to learn the language in order to understand the nuances. That is quite a lengthy process.

► **What do you like most to depict in film?**

I am not that fascinated by a story in a sense of choosing a particular character or a situation that is emotionally strong, and then offer a linear narrative. I prefer seeking the context that is

not immediately obvious. I enjoy keeping certain detachment from the characters, playing with a form, focusing on details and seeing things more in reality than as a linear structure. I want to offer my audiences a wider perspective that can inspire them to new ideas and approaches.

▶ **What does it specifically mean in your film Ruplicapra?**

It means that Slovaks can look at themselves from the perspective of someone who is somewhat odd, even nasty at times, but is not stupid; who happens to come from a superpower, a country that is culturally and politically incomparably more influential than Slovakia. Such person looks around without our Slovak sentiment and uses a language that is lingua franca.

▶ **What is it that he shows us?**

He points out the provinciality and pretentiousness that are deeply ingrained in us. We hardly see beyond the tip of our nose, we wage petty wars; we are xenophobic and not generous enough. It is ridiculous. What saves it all is just the nature and animals.

▶ **The film Slovakia 2.0 is also a picture of two decades of Slovak film. How would you define it?**

Argh, it will inevitably be an oversimplification. I think we lack distance and analytical view of reality. The dominant stories are those that are told through specific human stories and subjective individual testimonies: how I see the reality, how I feel. We are experts on DHS (deep human stories)! And it works, for people want to be moved. The question is, however, what is the morale of it all.

▶ **You have also experienced the Czech film context. Do the Czechs approach topics differently?**

It remains a question whether the Slovak mentality is different than the Czech with the effect on different approach to topics. By way of generalisation again, Czechs can be more ironic, sarcastic; they see things from a greater distance and are not that drawn into emotions as we are. They try more to reflect the societal developments, which is something we lack.

▶ **Do the arts, the film have an ambition to change the world?**

It would be good for people to enter film industry with such an ambition. Yet there are only few of those and even that is no guarantee of that a film would be of high quality and penetrating. At least, though, it is a better motivation than any.



◀ *Viera Čákanyová* (\*1980, Bratislava) studied screen writing at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and documentary production at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Her student films *Under Under Ground* (2006), *Piraña* (2007), *100 Days* (2009), *Alda* (2009) were presented at European student film festivals and received a number of prizes. She also works as dramaturge in independent film projects, and makes documentaries for non-profit organisations and the television.

# MIRO JELOK:

## Director should be the first to decapitate himself

*His does not like a film that preaches and moralises. Director Miro Jelok says that he did not attempt to make a film about Slovakia, but about the Slovaks.*

### ► What is Slovakia?

I might be able to give you an answer after a glass of wine, but not now.

### ► How was it then to make a film to such an assignment?

I was not attempting to make a film about Slovakia, but about Slovaks and their gradual normalisation. Then I came across a man who is alone and one of the few who go against the stream the way he lives, acts and thinks. He simply did not give into the normalisation.

### ► What kind of man is he?

He is pure, perhaps somewhat naive, but beautiful. He is an observer; as if he were from another world.

### ► What then are the other Slovaks like – the majority?

I would rather not generalise. What I respect about Tomáš, of whom I made the film, is that he does not care at all what the others think of him. He can differentiate all that is seemingly impossible to distinguish. It is as if he lived the other way round, though it is quite the contrary.

### ► Yet can one live like that, outside the society, its pace and the overarching themes?

I believe everything is possible; or perhaps not.

### ► What is your message, the morale of your

### ► film Shhh!?

Reflexion.

### ► In addition to your protagonist, the film opens a number of political and social themes. We have problems in Slovakia with corruption, unemployment, social issues. What is it that troubles you most?

Almost everything and virtually nothing troubles me. I do think, though, that it is all about our lack of self-mockery. If people – no matter in which field, be it political or social – were able to view themselves critically and at the same time with a bit of self-mockery, such questions would not arise.

### ► Do we thus have a detached view of ourselves?

If one wants to criticise something, they have to begin with themselves. If they want to make a pun on someone or laugh at something, they ought to allow to be mocked themselves and experience self-mockery. As long as one is not critical and sarcastic about themselves in particular, they are not really entitled to deliver a verdict be it in film or, definitely, in life. I do not like films that preach, when ideological mess decides who is good and who is bad, for it has no critical doubt. A director should be the first to step on a platform and decapitate himself. Only that will free his hands to play with different themes and decapitate the others.

### ► Whose heads are you cutting off in the film?

Whoever needs to be cut just now!

▶ **Is your film criticism of the society?**

It is hard to tell what would not be criticism.

▶ **In which way?**

In every way.

▶ **The film Slovakia 2.0 speaks about 20 years of independent Slovakia. Is life better than it was prior to its foundation?**

Life was good then and is good now, and will be good later, for life ought to be lived well at

all times.

▶ **The media have recently published statistics that life has never been better than it is now...**

You can only sleep in a bed you make for yourself. I am happy to sleep even on the floor.

▶ **If a project Slovakia 4.0 is made in 20 years, what would your film be like in it?**

One thing is certain: it would be fun if my film looks similar to the one I just made because nothing would have changed. We would blush in embarrassment.



◀ **Miro Jelok** (\*1987, Zvolen) studied screenwriting and dramaturgy at the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. He is currently enrolled in the final year at the Studio of Documentary Production. He is the youngest director in the film Slovakia 2.0.



#### ▲ ČESTNÝ OBČAN – HONORARY CITIZEN

**réžia/directed by:** Juraj Herz, **scenár/written by:** Juraj Herz, Juraj Rayman, **kamera/director of photography:** Dodo Šimončič ASK, **strih/edited by:** Jan Svoboda, **zvuk/sound:** Dušan Kozák, **scéna a kostýmy/production and costume designer:** Erika Gadus, **produkcia/production manager:** Katarína Krnáčová, **účinkujú/cast:** Juraj Herz, Rudolf Herz, Ladislav Herz, Mikuláš Macala, Éva Bandor, Slavomíra Fulínová, Ján Kožuch, Anton Šulík, Albin Medúz, Jozef Tkáč, Peter Plačko, Igor Šajtlava



#### ▲ POHREB PREZIDENTA – PRESIDENT'S FUNERAL

**réžia/directed by:** Martin Šulík, **scenár/written by:** Marek Leščák, Martin Šulík, **kamera/director of photography:** Martin Štrba, **strih/edited by:** Marek Šulík, **zvuk/sound:** Dušan Kozák, **scéna a kostýmy/production and costume designer:** František Lipták, **produkcia/production manager:** Simona Hrušovská, **účinkujú/cast:** Emil Kosír, Viera Pavlíková, Milan Vojtela, Jana Segešová, Ondrej Hraška, Mária Strompachová



### ▲ DRUHÝ POKUS – SECOND CHANCE

**réžia/directed by:** Peter Kerekes, **scenár/written by:** Peter Kerekes, **kamera/director of photography:** Noro Hudec ASK, **strih/edited by:** Alexandra Gojdičová, **zvuk/sound:** Dušan Kozák, **produkcia/production manager:** Martina Agricolová, **účinkujú/cast:** Peter Kerekes, Edita Chrenková, Robert Kaliňák, Erkki Tuomioja



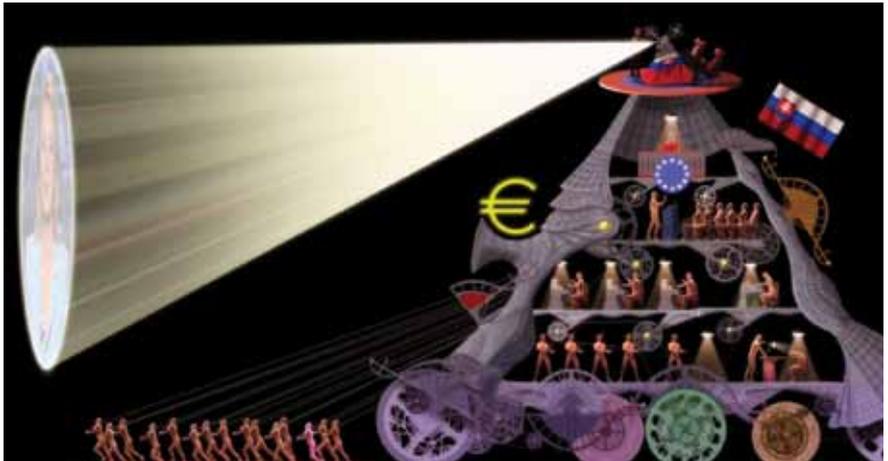
### ▲ BEZ VÔNE – NO FRAGRANCE

**réžia/directed by:** Zuzana Liová, **scenár/written by:** Zuzana Liová, **kamera/director of photography:** Jan Baset Strážezský, **strih/edited by:** Alexandra Gojdičová, **hudba/music:** Miroslav Tóth, **zvuk/sound:** Tobiáš Potočný, **scéna/production designer:** Viera Dandová, **kostýmy/costume designer:** Katarína Hollá, **produkcia/production manager:** Oli J. Hromkovičová, **účinkujú/cast:** Ingrid Ištóková, Anna Warchalová, Beata Meszárošová, Attila Mokos, Zuzana Moravcová, Roman Poláčik, Michal Soltész, Margita Hut'tová, Iveta Kožková, Miroslava Michalková, Beáta Švarová, Laura Kovalová, Ivan Sandecký, Adrián Košťál



### ▲ NÁVRATY/RETURNS

**réžia/directed by:** Mišo Suchý, **scenár/written by:** Mišo Suchý, **kamera/director of photography:** Mišo Suchý, **strih/edited by:** Marek Šulík, **hudba/music:** Martin Burlas, **zvuk/sound:** Dušan Kozák, **produkcia/production manager:** Oli J. Hromkovičová, Mišo Suchý, **účinkujú/cast:** Michal, Anna, Mišo, Myko & Marko Suchý



### ▲ PRAVIDLÁ HRY – RULES OF THE GAME

**réžia/directed by:** Ondrej Rudavský, **scenár/written by:** Ondrej Rudavský, Juraj Raýman, **animácia/animation:** Ondrej Rudavský, **strih/edited by:** Ondrej Rudavský, **hudba/music:** Slavomír Solovíc, Pavol Hubinák, **zvuk/sound:** Pavol Hubinák, **produkcia/production manager:** Katarína Krnáčová



#### ▲ DISCOBOJ – DISCOBOJ

**réžia/directed by:** Iveta Grófová, **scenár/written by:** Iveta Grófová, **kamera/director of photography:** Viera Bačíková, **strih/edited by:** František Kráhenbiel, **hudba/music:** Matej Hlaváč, Ondrej Konvička, **zvuk/sound:** Matej Hlaváč, **produkcia/production manager:** Albert Malinovský, **účinkujú/cast:** František Argaláš, Petr Holoubek, Martin Hlubuček, Karel Budík, Bohumil Stránsky, Daniel Tobolík, Jaromír Stanko, Michal Veselský



#### ▲ JEDINÁ ZNÁMA FOTOGRAFIA BOHA – THE ONLY KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF GOD

**réžia/directed by:** Peter Krištúfek, **scenár/written by:** Peter Krištúfek, **kamera/director of photography:** Martin Štrba, **strih/edited by:** Maroš Šlapeta, **hudba/music:** Peter Krištúfek, **zvuk/sound:** Dušan Kozák, **scéna /production designer:** Pavol Andraško, **kostýmy/costume designer:** Katarína Štrbová Bieliková, **produkcia/production manager:** Simona Hrušovská, **účinkujú/cast:** Milan Lasica, Emília Vášáryová, Róbert Jakab, Zuzana Šebová, Simon Fico, Juliána Oľhová, Andrej Sisák, Adam Zelman, Dušan Kozák



▲ **RUPICAPRA**

**réžia/directed by:** Viera Čákanyová, **scenár/written by:** Viera Čákanyová, **kamera/director of photography:** Šimon Dvořáček, **strih/edited by:** Alexandra Gojdičová, **zvuk/sound:** Tobiáš Potočný, **produkcia/production manager:** Katarína Krnáčová, **účinkujú/cast:** Mike Gogulski, Katarína Václaviková, Milana Jutková, Mária Perelisová, Edgar Laburda



▲ **PSSST! – SHHH!**

**réžia/directed by:** Miro Jelok, **scenár/written by:** Miro Jelok, **kamera/director of photography:** Juraj Mravec, **strih/edited by:** Peter Morávek, **hudba/music:** Miroslav Tóth, **zvuk/sound:** Jakub Cvach, **produkcia/production manager:** Simona Hrušovská, **účinkujú/cast:** Tomáš Krčméry, Katarína Trešťanská, Lýdia Harachová, Ružena Mužíková, Ingrid Vajdová



▲ Making of: ČESTNÝ OBČAN – HONORARY CITIZEN



▲ Making of: JEDINÁ ZNÁMA FOTOGRAFIA BOHA – THE ONLY KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF GOD



▲ Making of: RUPICAPRA



▲ Making of: BEZVÔNE – NO FRAGRANCE



▲ Making of: PSSST! – SHHH!



▲ Making of: DISCOBOJ – DISCOBOY

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