



PARAGRAFF

interview

MICHAEL STEWART

member of Astra Film Festival's jury,
director of Open City Docs Fest,
doctor in social anthropology

sy of becoming a nun, a really, really good film. And in this festival, as well, there is a young Romanian director, who now lives in Germany (n.r. Șerban Tătaru), and made a film called "Anatomy of a Departure" which is also very intelligent and well made, I highly recommend it.



You wrote an essay about Romanian documentaries, recently. Could you please tell me more about that?

Well, it was really a survey of some of the trends in Romanian documentary film and challenges that people... that individuals have tasted and cement or not been able to cement, so it was more of a survey looking at how Romanian documentaries have emerged in the past 20 years. In some ways Romania is something between cases, because in cases like Hungary there's a complete collapse of documentary films, there is no good documentary made at all, there is an NGO that funds awful activists' films, very boring and there are no featured documentary made. In Poland, there are two great film schools, and every year they produce ten really good student documentaries... 10-15, there is a really serious film production in Poland, and Romania is kind of in between. The film training is starting; there is a documentary film movement here but not as big as in Poland and not as bad as in Hungary, which is disastrous.

Maybe you can tell us something about Romania, about Sibiu, because you've been here many times. What brings you back every time?

Oh, it's always my friend Mr. Budrala who always brings me back to Sibiu, but it is a really enjoyable festival to come to. You see interesting films but you always meet very interesting people; this time was the director of South-African film festival that I've met here, but there are other people, good friends I've made, coming here in past few years. I don't get to see Sibiu during the festival, I just move between hotel, the foyer and the cinema, but in the summer I often come here with my children, on vacation.

Corina David

Romania is on the right track

in the documentary film industry

You are a part of Astra Film Festival's jury for 20 years. What nice memories you keep in mind from all those years?

Mostly, the first thing that I keep in mind is the great films; there are great films that you don't get to see otherwise in Britain or elsewhere. And secondly, the whole spirit of festival which is Dumitru's spirit, with music and lots of opportunities for talking and having fun together. I also remember particular events, like the screening of his film in Jina, to the villagers, in a very different social environment, so those are the things that I remember most.

What is the most important change you have noticed at the festival over the years?

In the first couple of years it was a much smaller event, more Eastern European oriented. But quite quickly it became a much more international festival, with many more younger people and the big difference now is that is a really huge festival, with many international people coming from all over the world, with an extremely international jury, especially this year, and a bigger program, so the whole thing is a big cultural event.

Which part of Astra Film Festival inspired you to create the Open City Docs Festival in London?

The whole way it's done inspired me to do it, what I saw was a lot of fun, a lot of fun for Dumitru and it was a lot of fun for the people who came, and who learned a lot by coming. And since London didn't have it properly organized documentary film festival that's why I thought that it is space to do it, and I've seen for 20 years how you might do that. It's the mixed up way that Dumitru combines films with discussions, with music and with all the other cultural events that make this thing a festival, as opposed to just 50 screenings over a few days.

What do you think about Romanian documentaries?

It's very hard in Romania to make films because there isn't enough money, because the Ministry of Culture doesn't support this kind of activity and there was no tradition of making this sort of films before 1990. When there is money is very hard to make films for international market and to tell quite simple stories of good deeds and bad deeds. Films that don't do well in Romania don't do well on the international market by simplifying the stories they're telling about, especially communism and post-communism. So it's very hard for filmmakers to make complicated rich documentary films which are trying to capture the truth of what's really happening in social



situations, because there is so little support and because there isn't a proper documentary fund and there are no structures in Romania promoting documentary films. It also means that on the international market for selling documentaries, Romanian documentaries don't really reach out in the same way that... I mean, in other countries there are struc-

tures/organizations which promote the films of their countries. Czech Republic or Germany publish brochures with all documentary films produced in their countries, to help export those films and there is nothing like that in Romania, so it is very hard.

Do you have a favorite Romanian documentary director?

My favorite Romanian documentary film director is my old friend, Dumitru Budrala, and his film, because of the headshot, might be the best Romanian documentary film. I like the films made in this kind of fairytale observation style. But there are also young filmmakers who are making very striking films. I liked "Crulic" very much as well (n.r.

"Crulic - The Path to Beyond", director Anca Damian), the animated documentary from last year, and equally, but I don't remember the director's name now (n.r. Anca Hirte), I like the woman who made "Teodora the Sinner", which somebody described it as "Christian pornography". I don't think so, I consider it a very beautiful film about the ecsta-

interview
LUCIJA PARAC
 ZagrebDox producer

AFF played an important part in the growth of Romanian documentary



What is the difference between a festival producer and a festival director?

Festival director plans, oversees, has a vision and strategy of the growth and development of the festival and a producer creates and brings all those ideas to life. But it's the team work that makes a festival great.

Can you tell us something about ZagrebDox?

ZagrebDox is an international annual documentary film festival taking place in Zagreb, Croatia, in late February / early March. Launched in 2005, the festival is intended to provide audiences and experts insight into recent documentary films, stimulate national documentary production and boost international and regional cooperation in co-productions. ZagrebDox is a specialized festival that presents the best creative documentary films with an imaginary form and choice of topics that make it unique in Croatia and Europe. Our next edition, the 10th edition, is going to take place in Zagreb from February 23rd to March 2nd, 2014.

How much time in a year to you spend organizing the ZagrebDox?

We spend all year around organizing the Festival. Almost immediately after one edition has been completed, we start to work on the next one. There are so many films, so many ideas for each new year and a lot to do to make each festival edition better.

Do you actually get to see any of the films, or are you too busy?

Everybody who works in the festival organization is busy but it is due to the great number of films that we are screening. I try to see as many of them as possible, but I see most of them after the festival when I take some time to do that.

Do you have a passion for documentaries? Do you prefer documentaries to fiction?

I absolutely have a passion for documentaries. That is the reason I'm working at a documentary festival. For me, documentaries have a certain depth and I find it to be a great way to enter into different worlds and discover new emotions and truths. I have always preferred documentaries to fiction, perhaps mostly



because of the insight they provide into different, and at the same time actual, aspects of life and the variety of topics they cover.

Did you ever think of making a documentary yourself?

Not yet but maybe someday. You never know.

How do you find the situation with Romanian documentaries?

I think Romanian documentaries are very interesting. Over the past years I have seen many incredible Romanian documentaries and I'm sure that Astra Film Festival has played an important role in the development and increasing popularity of Romanian documentaries.

Have you been to AFF before?

No. This is my first time and I'm so happy to be here.

Is there a film that left a permanent impact on you? Why?

There are so many of them. It is hard to pick one. Many spoke to me in a special way, made me realize new things and even changed my point of view. For me, that is the greatest thing when it comes to films.

by Mihai Kolcsár



AFF
 2013
 photo
 gallery



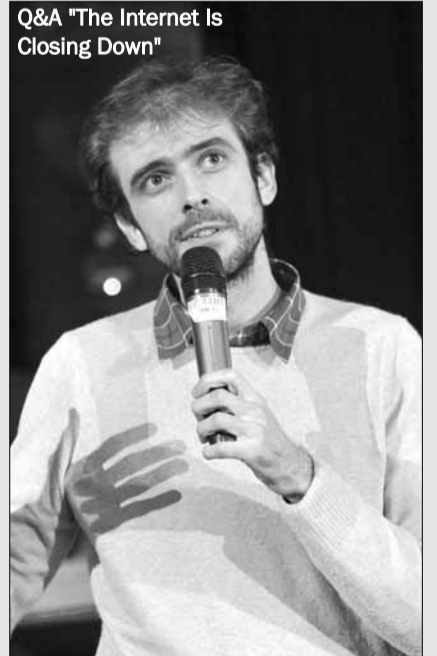
Valentina Miu, Head of Media Desk Romania, talking about the CREATIVE EUROPE programme for documentary filmmaking



Alexandru Solomon Masterclass



Q&A "The Internet Is Closing Down"



The curtain is drawn over Astra Film Festival 20!



The first prize at the closing ceremony of Astra Film Festival in Sibiu, the award for the Best Debut, was given by Catalina Bucur, representing news channel Digi24, to the 16 years old Elena Borcea, whose film "My family, briefly" is as promising as can be, giving us hope that the family of Romanian documentary filmmakers has just been enriched by one of the most powerful of voices. On stage, Elena was overcome with emotion, and thus provided one of the most memorable moments of the edition. Taking part in Astra Film Festival was the coolest thing she has ever done, she said, and we can't help but agree with her: a festival can hardly get any cooler than Astra!

Sanziana Pop, director of Formula AS, rivaled Elena as far as emotions are concerned. The special award for Romanian documentary marks a long lasting friendship between the publication and the festival, which began as "love at first sight", Mrs. Pop mentioned. She added that only Dumitru Budrala, "an exceptionally gifted professional", could turn this cultural project into what it is today: a trademark event in Sibiu, Romania and Europe. The award went to "The Tanase Dossier" by Ionut Teianu.

The Best Image award was given by CineLabs Romania to Mihai Andrei Leaha, Iulia Hossu and Andrei Crisan ("Valley of the Sighs"). The Best Documentary in the Student section award was given to Elke Margarete Lehrenkraus and her "Clinical Romance". The award was given by the Romanian Cultural Institute.

The Eco Cinematograff award went to Nijos Dayandas and his "Little Land", while Best Romanian Documentary was received by Anca Hirte and her "In Mayor's Name". The director could not be present on the festival stage, but we had with us her protagonist: Anca Hirte's mother, whose speech was dedicated to the special place of the festival in the European cultural scene and the services it renders to Romania.

Best Documentary in Central and Eastern Europe went to "Anatomy of the Departure" by Serban Oliver Tataru, while Best International Documentary was given by HBO Romania to Biene Pilavci and her "Dancing Alone". The grand prize was handed by Emil Hurezeanu, who started his speech with a declaration of love for the city of Sibiu, and director Cristi Puiu, to Marc Schmidt and "Matthew's Laws". The festival was closed by Dumitru Budrala, the director of the festival, with a heartwarming speech. A lively party followed in the foyer of Thalia Hall and afterwards at Casa de Cultura a Sindicatelor.

It was the end of AFF 20. Long live Astra Film Festival 21!

Mihai Kolcsár

Kristin Brähler, volunteer in the festival team

Youth from all over the world come to the Astra Film Festival.

I have been an intern here for three months. I like "Hello Stranger". I met the director and then I saw him on the screen. I didn't expect him to be like this, it was fun.



Brief conversation

PÉTER ECKSTEIN-KOVÁCS

First of all, how many times have you been to the festival?

I can't be sure, but if this is the 20th edition, I've been coming here maybe 18 years... Around that. I'm also this persevering thanks to my wife, who makes documentary films and who I'm sure feels very close to this festival; in conclusion when I come here I'm a kind of companion who is also able to get a bit of the atmosphere and of course of the films!

How do you think the festival has evolved throughout all these years? Have there been any changes?

It's crystal-clear that the festival has grown and once it's grown more and more, it's managed to maintain a very high standard. That is to say it hasn't seen any low points. And that is owing to the organizers who have always known how to host events here.

What do you think of their endeavour? Would you like to address them a few words?

I have great appreciation for them and there's lots of work and sweat that goes into it so that we can enjoy this very laid back, cool atmosphere. But the most important aspect is always the line-up.

What do you think is the relevance of documentary film nowadays, given the current context?

Documentary film may or may not be socially or politically focused, but it's invariably something unlike Hollywood and it's important that we're talking about a genre which can be made with a camera you got from the mall on sale. Each and every one of us can potentially be equipped to become a documentary filmmaker.

What are your expectations from a documentary film? Would you rather learn more about different places or contexts around the world, or are you more interested in the manner in which a film is made?

When I watch films I stop being a politician! (laughs) Anything can be moving. Even if the film recalls times past, most documentary filmmakers provide the public with correct and current information, which is appealing and important!

Diana Voinea, Cătălin Olaru



Thomas Ciulei Masterclass



Cătălin Sturza at the conference "Romania under scrutiny. Documentary cinema in Romania in the last 20 years"



Olivier Magis at the Q&A that followed the screening of "Ion"



"Cantice-n cerc" concert



talking with

LESSEDI OLUKO MOCHE

member of the jury at AFF

Encounters Cape Town and Astra Sibiu, the beginning of a beautiful friendship

What is your relationship with AFF?

My relationship with AFF is such that we were invited as a festival, I run the Encounters documentary film festival in South Africa, it's based in Cape Town but it happens both in Cape Town and Johannesburg, two of the three major cities in South Africa, so I got an e-mail from the festival director at Astra to invite me to come to Romania for the 20th anniversary and I was like "Oh, my goodness, that would be so fantastic" and I had already been thinking about Eastern Europe, you know? But just like kind of milling it in my mind and trying to find a way to interact with it a lot more. So I got an email, we mailed back and forth and then he said "I'd like to invite you to sit on the jury" and I thought that would actually be a better way to really interact with the content coming out of Central and Eastern Europe. So that's our relationship now, it's the beginning of what I hope will be a longer relationship. I think the two festivals and the two countries probably have a lot more in common historically and ideologically than given credit for. So I'm really looking forward to being able to explore the relationship further.

And what do you think about the films you've seen here?

I've actually been very impressed with the Eastern and Central European student films, about the young voices coming out of the region. And one of the things that sticks out for me - and I'll tell you why it's important - is how young filmmakers are actually interacting with life 20 years after the fall of communism. That came out quite strongly in a lot of the films. Their parents would have been born in countries that don't exist anymore, so it's how they interpret that life and how they find visual ways to express what this new type of freedom looks like in their society. So it's been great to watch films like that, of a personal nature, more than a societal nature. I'm not sure if that's just what's happening in the region, but this is my experience of the films on the jury. This is interesting for me and fascinating for me because it's a similar thing to a lot of South Africans are also coming to grips with 'cause it's 20 years after the end of Apartheid. So there's almost this kind of parallel conversations that are happening in these two corners of the world. And young people are really interrogating and they're able to do it with a lot less pain attached to it, with a certain level of detachment but still love.

What do you base your assessment of the productions in the competition on? What kind of criteria do you involve in your decision making process?

The criteria I could probably say was threefold in a way: there's the story, the story structure and how the content is presented, there's the cinematic aspect of it, so how was the camera used as a tool, because the camera can only really do what a director makes it do and the third was the voice of the filmmaker in the whole film. So loosely it was those three.

And you're a programmer yourself...

Yeah... our festival şlaughşţ... I'm the festival director, I'm the programmer, I'm the fundraiser. I'm the allrounder for now. But another thing that's been great about Astra - because all of that is really because of resources (ideally there should be a programmer and we have had programmers in the past kind of come in and out, but it's all based on the finances that we have) - is that I've met a whole lot of people and we can get into kind of a co-curating. So I have a selection committee at Encounters who preselect the films and give me the short list which I then look through.



And what about the selection there? When picking the films are you more issue-oriented or... ?

Well first of all, Encounters was created to increase the currency of documentary in the region, because at the time - 16 years ago - documentary was really more like infomercials if you will, you know and straight for television. So it was created to increase the currency of documentary as an art form. So we try and get documentaries that are artistic in nature, whatever the content is, so it's about how cinematic it is, how visually appealing. We look at all the different sub-genres within the main genre, but we don't focus on one topic. What usually happens is, depending on what's being spoken about - cause it's the filmmakers who tell us what are the most pressing issues happening in their society -, then you're able to kind of curate around stuff that's happening. So we have about 40 to 50% of South African and African content and the rest of it is international. So with the international documentaries we usually program five to seven really big documentaries in the world, so you know, the Oscar nominated ones, the ones at Sundance, so we do that. And the rest of it is just kind of trying to develop voices of filmmakers and allowing them a platform to do that. But we show everything, I mean the festival in the past has been met with certain kinds of protests. You know, we had Leila Khaled from Palestine, we show films from Israel. Ours is also to engage, to get the audience to engage with what's happening in their societies.

In your past experiences with being part of jury, have you ever awarded a film based only on its topic, maybe a hot topic?

Yesss... I mean... Every documentary is about the topic at the end of the day because it's about real life. So that's why I'm kind of hesitant to say yes. So it's always about the topic and how the topic then is translated, right? But not necessarily about the topic because of the words that are being spoken. But how does the topic make you reflect and does the topic kind of transcend its own space, so that it's universal. So the answer is yes. *(laughs)*

Would you say that documentary film has gained popularity lately? Seeing how you've had a certain degree of experience with that, how do you feel it's changed during the past few years?

Ok. Documentary has increased in popularity as a genre; I think there are a number of factors that are involved in it: one is accessibility - documentaries are more accessible to make and to watch. And this has to do with digital technology giving filmmakers more access and the net allowing you to access to watch documentaries. And it's also I think increased because for the younger generations there are more celebrities making documentaries, so like

Charlize Theron, Prince Harry has made a documentary, you know... Also it seem like a more accessible way to interact with each other and the world and what's fantastic is that more young people are interacting with the genre. Maybe ten years ago you would've had to have gone to film school, to have gotten a broadcaster attached to it, to have gotten distribution... But with all the alternate ways of distribution, just because it's more accessible, I do believe is gaining popularity.

Do you think that being in a position of choosing the films that get to screen in a festival, do you think that you have the power to send a message out to the world? More so than a single director would?

Power is a very tricky word. It kind of feels like it's absolute in its essence. So I wouldn't say that that's the function of being able to select what actually gets shown to audiences. Now, to be a filmmaker, to be a good filmmaker, you have to watch a lot of films, so in my mind there's no difference in terms of what you have access to as far as being a filmmaker or being a programmer goes. And the choices of what gets shown to the world are actually driven by the filmmaker. So even though it appears that we on this side are the ones who are selecting what goes out there, it's the filmmakers that dictate to us what's important and what goes out there. At least that's how I interface with it.

But do you think that being in this position of picking the films that go out there, you maybe run the risk of making your decisions very personal?

You do... And you know, whether you're a festival director, or sitting on a jury, your experiences and your person come into the mix of it all. Which is probably why I think it's the most important in this industry in particular to ensure that the practitioners within the industry do travel around the world so that as much as possible you're able to internally break down the prejudices that you have so it doesn't filter into your selection and your work, that you interface with the world in a particular way that you understand culture in a particular way, that you understand politics in a particular way. And I think the danger only comes in the absence of that, in the absence of you personally having an understanding of your situation in the global context. So yeah, your personal does get into it. I've sat on juries where you're haggling over a particular film and eventually it's like "Ok, how do you feel about the film and explain why it moves you in a particular way". Because that's what we're trying to do, we're trying to find links. If I watch a story about you and your siblings, I should be able to think about my own siblings and it doesn't matter where you come from in the world, it doesn't matter what you're speaking. So it's a difficult one, but we're people. I know that when I'm watching stuff, if it doesn't speak to me visually, if the content doesn't seem to be going anywhere, if the story is not structured in any particular way, then you sit down and you show it to other people so you don't also absolutely make the decisions, otherwise then it's your personal festival, right?

One of the most discussed documentary films of the past year has been "The Act of Killing", which is showing at Astra Film Festival. Have you seen it?

"The Act of Killing", yes! And I watched the director's cut. I mean "The Act of Killing" is really like a bent in the documentary genre in a way that actually just gets into your mind. At some point you're sitting in the cinema and you felt like you're being assaulted in a way, which was fantastic! It's a great way to not just tell a story that we all hear, we all know, but feel it in yourselves, in your skin!

by Diana Voinea and Teodora Lascu

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