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PARAGRAFF

ASTRA FILM
Festival

15-21 OCTOBER 2012

The apogee of Astra Film Sibiu's twelfth edition was its Awards Ceremony, gotten under way on the rhythms of Anton Pann, the Romanian music band. Out of the over a thousand documentaries entered for consideration this year, 44 made it into the official competition, eight of those being awarded, including an ex aequo award in the Student category. The jury, consisting of Luciano Barisone (director of the International Documentary Film Festival Visions du Réel, Nyon, since 2011), Sorin Botoșeanu (dean of the Film Faculty of the I.L. Caragiale University of Cinematography and Theatrical Arts, Bucharest), Hanka Kastelicová (executive producer of the Documentary Film department, HBO Europe), René Kubášek (director of the Czech Centre, Bucharest), Cristian Nițulescu (member of CA SRTV and management adviser for TVR3, former executive producer for the news department of the Romanian Television Society), Christophe Pomez (theatre and cinema adviser for the French Ministry of Culture, currently director of the Cluj Napoca branch of the French Institute in Romania), Cristi Puiu (director and screenwriter) and Michael Stewart (social anthropologist and director of the London Open City Documentary Film Festival), distributed the awards, explaining their decision for each of the winning films.



Grand Prize

"Phnom Penh lullaby", Pawel Kloc

Jury's motivation: "The film captures the conflict in a strange couple's private existence and draws a portrait of a complex man who is caught between realism and naivety and whose genuine desire for love clashes with a society corrupted by mass prostitution. The filmmaker shares with his protagonists an uncomfortable situation, keeping just the right distance from them and leaving the audience with the sad sense of life's disappointing truth. The Jury was really impressed by this intense and painful journey to the end of the night."



Acceptance speech: "Thank you very much, the Jury already said everything... but I want to thank the festival for inviting me, for the wonderful experience, the audience and all the people, all my friends that helped me make the film, they really worked for free... I don't know what else to say, I am overwhelmed..."

Student Section

"My Kosher Shifts", Iris Zaki

Jury's motivation: "It is in the simplicity of the technical procedure – a camera set at the reception desk of a hotel – that the director, Iris Zaki, brings to us these slices of life and of her meeting with the other. At this hotel desk the most trivial conversations are mixed up with the most revelatory. With an assured montage, the director produces a fine, intense regard on religion and life."



Acceptance speech: "I don't have a lot to say, just that I really appreciate this prize and being here. I am very honored, I love this festival, it's one of the best and I'm really excited and happy, thank you very much."

Student Section

"The Last Street", Rasmus Sievers, Marina Monsonis

Jury's motivation: "Moments of gentle poetry in an ambience that mixes nostalgia for the past and a renewed desire to bring fraternity back to life – Rasmus Sievers and Marina Monsonis have authored a documentary profoundly in touch with humanity."



Since co-director Marina Monsonis could not be present, the prize was accepted only by Rasmus Sievers: "Thank you very much, this prize also goes to Marina...who is not here with us, but she dedicated the film to the very nice people of this street in Barceloneta, who were kind enough to let us into their worlds and without whom the film wouldn't have existed. I am very pleased with this award, it is a very big encouragement, after about five years of production time and about one year of rejections at festivals, it encourages us to go on."

Eco CinematogrAFF Section

"Gone Wild", Dan Cureau

Jury's motivation: "The film offers a deep anthropological experience and in a gentle way shows the greatly contested fragility of our ecosystem. A very cinematographic movie with unforgettable scenery of the Danube Delta, a wilderness and evoking the fragility of a place where humans are subordinate, confronted by the power of the nature"



Acceptance speech: "It is customary on such occasions to give thanks to people. In my case, I would like to thank the horses. And since I don't know how to say 'thank you' in their language, I will only take a bow, as I saw them doing among themselves. They made us, the humans, feel and rediscover freedom and the taste of the wild life. I believe that this is prize means a second chance for the horses who are the most beautiful and poetic expression of freedom".

Romania Section

"Common Ground", Anne Schiltz, Charlotte Grégoire

Jury's motivation: "For the ingenuity of the authors in dealing with a subject devoid of any glamour, in an act of restitution of the beauty and truthfulness contained in the inglorious moments of the life in a block of apartments, with the mundane gestures and smiles of the people close to us."



Acceptance speech: "What a lovely surprise! Charlotte and I were very pleased to

come to Sibiu to present our film to the Romanian public; our thanks go to the people in the bloc, they are the ones who made this film possible. Our thanks also go to the jury and the public here in Sibiu."

Special prize offered by Formula AS magazine

"Roșia Montană, town on the brink", Fabian Daub

Jury's motivation: "The national magazine Formula AS has been lobbying in the past 10 years to save Roșia Montana. For this reason, we are honoured to award a well accomplished and unbiased documentary that succeeds to keep the public opinion focused on this town, indeed on the brink."



Acceptance speech: "Yesterday I never even suspected I was going to receive this prize. I was very surprised by the public's reaction, they applauded for minutes after the screening! I think this says it all about this documentary. Thank you, Astra Film festival, for the occasion to have our first screening here in Sibiu."

International Section

"He Thinks He's The Best", Maria Kuhlberg

Jury's motivation: "The film urges the viewers to identify with the protagonists and look also to our own past and present relationships with the closest people of our personal universe."



Director Maria Kuhlberg could not be present, but she sent a video message in her place.

"When I got the message about this prize I was very happy, it was a big surprise, and I am sad I cannot be there, I am very scared of flying. My film is a message about how the early child experiences can affect us as adults and limit our possibilities to make the right choices and even unconsciously repeat our parents' mistakes."

"Romanian Realities" prize, offered by the Romanian public television

"Noosfera", Artchil Khetagouri, Ileana Stanculescu

Jury's motivation: "For the intrinsic humour of the approach, and for a universal reality, even if the story happens in Romania, for the subtle portraying of the characters, and in appreciation of a well-done directorial work, the jury gives this prize to Noosfera".



Acceptance speech: "I'd like to thank the Jury and Astra Film Festival for having us here; I also want to thank our characters, the professor and his three wives; all three of them are victims of his theories about the "noosphere", but they love him nevertheless".

interview

MICHAEL STEWART

jury member, categories:
Student and Eco CinematogrAFF**"We had only one prize awarded, but we could give three or four"**

There were a lot of movies entered into competition this year. Have you seen all of them?

I've seen all the Student films and I've seen all the Eco CinematogrAFF films, the two categories I was assigned.

How do they fare when compared to some of the films present at other festivals, like the London Open City Documentary Film Festival?

The Student films are fantastic. I mean they're really remarkable.

Aren't they though?

Yeah, there's a huge selection of really good films. Internationally. And we've only got one prize but we could easily, in my view, have awarded three or four prizes.

So it wasn't an easy decision to make.

No, it wasn't at all an easy decision. In the end there were some really good films which we weren't able to award prizes to. It was a real shame. In a way it's invidious to say this, but ecocinematography – it's an interesting idea, but the student films, I think in all of our views, were the more exciting ones.

I suppose in a sense the eco films are not as artistic as some of the others. Was the form, the way they presented the content that was found lacking?

What we tried to do there is pick a film which we thought had something cinematographic about it. That

was more than just an argument about ecology and used the cinema form to explore something a bit broader. Not just a campaigning film. There, the quality of the journalism is quite weak. People are basically pandering putting out stories with a strong ideological colouring, and not really good investigation. It's not true universally, but it is true for some of them. And that's often the case in these campaigning films. People don't investigate the other side of the story which is a real shame. But that's not true for the student films. Those have great research and in a way rather good journalism, considering that they are student films. That aspect of finding out what's really going on which in a way is really important in a documentary. It's no good if your documentary doesn't show something that's very true about the world. So getting it right is important. Take a film like "Stremț 89", the film about the revolution, which I think is the best documentary I've seen about the revolution. Some people commented about the style but I much prefer it in all kinds of ways. I thought that it really captures what it was like in Romania at the time – kind of chaos, people getting drunk, nearly shooting but thank God not shooting people, cause now they're still neighbours... but also a kind of change – after all, at the end of the day there was a revolution. Romania

after 1989 wasn't the same as before, and the film captures that. And that's based on some serious thinking by the film maker about what was really going on, on research in that broad sense. Each year is different, but the selection of films this year is particularly strong it seems to me. I mean it's a very good inter-



national selection as well, films which I know from elsewhere.

Right, cause some of the films that have been shown this week were also screened at the London Open City festival.

Some were, actually. Not all, for instance we didn't notice "Jerome Jerome", and I wish we had. But we did have "Solar Eclipse" – the Czech film based in Africa – a very nice amusing film. Important, interesting film. Each festival has its own rhythm and its own connection and networks. So most of these films I haven't seen before, but I was struck by their quality.

As a social anthropologist, did you find it interesting that a lot of the films start aimed at a certain issue, and always end up touching on the social, human side of the story? Like "Roșia Montană, Town on the Brink", supposedly about the ecological issue, or "Gone Wild", the one about the horses in Delta Dunării, ended up focusing on the people, the social dynamics, the effect on the respective communities.

Maybe, I mean especially if you're making a film more in a kind of observational style. It's sort of inevitable, even if you have a film about an issue. Like the Roșia Montană is a film dealing with an issue. But you end up, if you're any good as a film maker, exploring the human relationships. And exploring your theme through it, through its impact and the way it lives inside the individual lives. The film kind of leads you naturally in that direction, so in that sense you're right. And the film we just talked about, "Stremț 89" which is very much about the characteristic of those particular people in that particular place at that particular time. That is what documentary is very good at capturing.

Stremț 89, though, started out with the intent to focus on that subject. Others, however, start in a different direction but end up touching on the social issue.

That's true. And with some it's not even clear what the subject is, they're just explorations of the human condition. "My kosher shifts" is a nice example of that. There are others. "The last street", the student film. It's not really a

film about an issue. It's simply a kind of advocacy of a place and a time.

You've been at several editions of the local festival. How do you feel Astra Film Festival 2012 compares to its previous years, and to other similar festivals around Europe?

The great thing about this festival is that it's not an industry festival, it's not a commercial event, it's a celebration of film, where filmmakers can come together. It's very nice to see so many filmmakers here this year. It's always difficult to get filmmakers to come because they're busy, they haven't got lots of money. So, congratulations to the organizers for making the place so attractive. Petr Lom is here from Amsterdam, many of the students have turned up, and others. So that's really impressive. It's also impressive just to keep a festival like this in these very difficult economic circumstances. The festival has managed to maintain its size, its scale, and also all the peripheral events, the music, the workshops and so on. That's really striking. Also, the festival has only recently started charging entry, so you have to pay the tickets, and that's not reduced the audiences. That's good to see because a festival needs all kinds of ways to raise money. In a funny way it increases the value of the experience – it's saying people are willing to pay for this and this strategy succeeded.

So people no longer come out of curiosity, they come with a certain film in mind, something they want to see.

Exactly, so there's a kind of commitment from the audience. Of course over the 20 years the festival's been going on, it has totally transformed. The quality of the films, the types of discussions, the breadth of the audience, and the international audience who comes. It's not just filmmakers either, there are people who come here specifically because of the festival and that's really impressive.

MILTON STĂNESCU

Pawel Kloc

WINNER OF THE GRAND PRIZE OF THE ASTRA FILM FESTIVAL for the documentary "Phnom Penh Lullaby"

"I had no idea that they would give another award after the International section. I was completely taken by surprise, a hundred per cent. The awards were totally secret. And that's a good thing. I feel very honored that I got this award, and the motivation of the jury was the most beautiful description of my film that I've ever heard. Seriously. I'm very happy, especially because all the documentaries that I saw here, in Sibiu - and I saw about 10 of them so far - were really, really good."



Phnom Penh Lullaby

Directed by: Pawel Kloc; Poland, 2011

Competition: International

In the city of Phnom Penh, torn apart by poverty, misery and prostitution, two people - Ilan Shickman, a Israeli fortune teller who came to Cambodia in search of a better life and his lover, Saran, struggle to make ends meet like any regular family. They have two little girls, Marie and Jasmine, but, because they are too poor, they have to give the elder one away to a foster family. Their misery is amplified by a ravaging lack of affection that the two struggle very hard to cope with. There are certain barriers in the communication between them, but the most striking one is that they speak rudimentary English, a foreign language for both of

them that somehow becomes like a character in itself in the film. Immersed in their daily life, the camera follows this unusual family's sad process of decay, forced by nefarious circumstances to break apart.

Screened at *Visions du Réel* and *HotDoc*, among others, "Phnom Penh Lullaby" was awarded the "Silver Dragon" and the "Silver Horn" at the 2011 Krakow International Film Festival, for "using a rich language to portray an usual struggle for love and acceptance in the midst of tough living conditions".

ELIZA ZDRU

essential

Astra Film Festival facts
and figures

Three cinema halls, four competition sections, five sections hors-concours, seven masterclasses, nine documentaries for children – at the end of a marathon week, here are some facts and figures offering a complete image of what the twelfth edition of Astra Film festival meant.

- 46 documentary films have been selected for this year's hors-concours sections.

- 54 documentary films have been selected for the competition sections.



- filmmakers from 71 countries entered documentaries for the preselection which started at the beginning of the year.

- 83 films had their national or international premiere this year at Astra.

- 100 films, less than 10% of the total number of entries, have made the final selection.

- 150 volunteers helped this year the festival's organization team; 100 of them were from Sibiu, the others from different cities in Romania.

- the documentaries seen this week at Casa de Cultura added up to 300 hours of film.

- 1,172 films have been entered for the festival's preselection, at the beginning of the year.

- 6,000 children attended the projections of Astra Film Junior section.

- 50,000 people attend annually Astra Film Festival in Sibiu. We hope you were one of them.

inedit

Three unusual
happenings at Astra
Film Festival 2012

► The former senator Péter Eckstein-Kovács left Cluj, on Thursday afternoon, heading for Astra Film Sibiu. As he doesn't own a car, he tried to reach the festival by coach. But, as all the tickets have been already sold, and as Mr Kovács was not willing to miss the projection of the documentary "Roșia Montană: Town on the Brink", scheduled at 19.00, the former senator hitchhiked to Sibiu. And he made it to the theatre in time, to remain for the entire week-end at the festival.

► As the screenings scheduled during the AFF week lasted, sometimes, until midnight, only to restart at 10 in the morning, the administrator of Marshall hall decided that there's too much of a headache to go home, for the night. And it so happens that, one evening, he went to sleep on a coach hidden behind the panels in the lobby.

► Ondrej, a young anthropologist coming from Czechia, decided, with his wife – a cute, petit Japanese, also very fond of anthropological films – that they will save their money to buy tickets for the films, and cut the accommodation costs. And, no sooner said than done, Ondrej and his wife planted their tent in Dumbrava Sibiului, just outside the city, and slept there for the whole week. Each morning, the young couple returned downtown Sibiu by bus, trying to see as many films they could at AFF.

interview

RENÉ KUBÁŠEK

jury member, categories:
Student and Eco CinematogrAFF

"The sense for scene capturing, for powerful images – that's what I look for in the movies"

You're the director of the Czech Center in Bucharest, which has been associated with a lot of cultural events. How does the Astra Film Festival fit on that list?

First of all thank you, I'm glad to hear that people notice our efforts, but unfortunately, mainly because of the logistics and capacity of our center, we are having the majority of our events in Bucharest. But we are trying, more and more, to also go to other cities. That's why I'm really glad we are here in Sibiu, and not only with film, but also with the bands (Floex and DVA), and not only at Astra – we will be coming back soon with a special theater show on November 10th at Teatrul Radu Stanca.

You also have "Documentary Mondays" at the Center, so I imagine you must have seen a lot of documentaries.

I did, it's true, but you know, if you take culture as such, there are many things you can talk about. There's film, there's music, dance, theater, graphic art, design; but if there's one domain where the Czech Republic is really strong now it's documentary film. There are many documentary filmmakers, we have every year some 20 documentaries in the cinemas, so now we're, in a way, like a small documentary empire, and that's why we keep this program going on – with Czech documentaries, and we also had some Romanian documentaries, some premieres and previews, and it's really popular. It's always full and we try to have discussions after the films – and that's probably what is most attractive. And we give Staropramen beer as well after the show (he smiles)

How do you feel the films here compare to the films you usually show at "Documentary Mondays"?

Well, I have been in the jury for two of sections, Student and Eco Cinema, which means I haven't seen by far all the movies, like the International and Romanian categories or the non-competition ones. From what I've seen, though, considering that Eco is focused on a topic and Student has student films, the general level is quite high. We, the other members of the jury and I, had serious difficulties deciding on the movie to give the award to.



That's usually a good sign, right?

Definitely. Especially the student movies, those are very good.

I've heard that quite a few times.

Yeah. They're good not only for student movies, but in an absolute value.

Speaking of categories, those you have been assigned to must fit you like a glove. A lot of the student films focus on social issues, and Eco CinematogrAFF, well, the name is self explanatory.

Yes, topic wise, it was close to my heart. I found most films really interesting, if not necessarily for their imagery, at least because of the subjects.

Being a documentarian photographer, was that something that influenced the way you look at films?

Yeah, well. When I'm not a diplomat, as I am now, I tend to say I am a photographer. But by no means am I a proper photographer. It's my biggest hobby. Occasionally, when I have more free time, I have some

exhibitions. But I mostly don't have the time now. I do some photography every now and then but I'm not working on any projects right now, no documentary projects. No time, no capacity for that at the moment.

That's a shame. What do you think about photography, though, when compared to film making, as a documentary means of expression?

You're asking me as if I were a theoretician. My heart is obviously in photography and if it's film, I prefer the documentary film. And, somehow, I like the movies which are very sort of photographic. For example I like Wim Wenders. It often happens that I find out later on that film makers that I really appreciate actually started as photographers. So the two are very interrelated. You have many filmmakers who used to be photographers and vice versa. Subconsciously, I think the sense for scene capturing, for powerful images – that's what I look for in the movies.

One last question, perhaps a bit off topic. You worked with Vaclav Havel. That must have been amazing. What did you take from that experience?

Yeah, it was amazing and I was sort of a young guy, I was in my twenties, early twenties, and destiny gave me the opportunity to work for him quite closely and for quite many years. You know, it enriches you when you meet a person – and there aren't many like Havel – when you see a person that can actually stand straight even under very hard conditions. I thank God that I'm part of a generation who, by now, didn't have to make any hard decisions. I was never faced with a tough decision like the people who were in my country during the war, or during 1968, or during the communism, when it was like "Either you collaborate or your kids won't go to school". What to choose, you know? I was never faced with this and I don't know if I would be strong enough to act as Havel did, for example, but the fact that there are people who did this gives you strength and this is one of the things that was quite unique when working with him. You can put it there, in the article, I'm really proud of having worked with Havel, all Czechs in fact are proud of having him.

MILTON STĂNESCU



Astra Film Sibiu – Backstage

The logistics of AFF

„The facade of the festival under the eyes of the guests can see is one thing, but what's going on backstage is even more complex. Behind the scenes, there is a huge amount of work, not just now, when the festival is going on, but also beforehand. The preparations start the moment the previous edition ends. We have several days to rest, to recover, then we start over. There are unforeseen things happening, but cautions are taken in advance in order to avoid surprises. Once the festival becomes annual, life will be even more entrainer – we will practically have no time to take a breath.“ **Mircea Nan, coordinator of AFF logistics**

interview

DUMITRU BUDRALA festival Director

"The 2013 edition will be full of surprises"

Dumitru Budrala, the Astra Film Festival director, took the stage at the AFF Awards Ceremony to thank all the partners and supporters of the festival. During the party that followed, mr. Budrala also talked about the 2013 edition, one that will be special, as AFF will celebrate its 20th anniversary.

What are some of the conclusions, what do you take away from Astra Film Sibiu 2012?

First, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate all the awarded filmmakers. May they keep making quality films. We would like to thank all the directors, they are all winners in our eyes, seeing how, out of the some 1200 total films, each section selected about 10 titles. We would also like to extend our thanks to the sponsors, partners, festival supporters and volunteers. It has been a week that passed in the blink of an eye, a true marathon of documentary films during which, together, we had the opportunity to travel far and wide. All these would not have been possible without the golden Astra Film team. Next year we will be celebrating 20 years since the first edi-



tion, the 13th return of the Astra Film Festival, to which we would like to cordially invite you all. Thank you all for the joy you brought us by joining us this year.

This was the 12th edition – a nice even number. Next year, the 20th anniversary

– another round number. What's in plan for the 2013 edition?

Next year we'll have reached 20 years of documentary films at Astra Film Sibiu. For 2013, we have some very attractive, very pleasant things in mind. Some new, original, some more normal – but, anyway, different from the past editions. Things that will surprise.

The public loved the Roșia Montană documentary. The applause the film received when it received the special prize – it was in a way the public's favourite.

Naturally. The same thing happened some four years ago, when we had another screening of a film on the subject. Quite a few of the spectators were militants. The jury has other criteria in mind, too.

What about the Astra Film parties?

These aren't parties, they are socializing opportunities. Idea exchanges, maybe brainstorming... You can see the light on all the faces. People take a certain pleasure in coming here. The quality of the people showing up is, in general, a very good one. People with an eye for detail, for nuances.

An interview by CĂTĂLIN STURZA



What can you do with a plastic bottle?

The team behind Astra Film Junior received this year thousands of plastic bottles, which ended up in the recycling container, while their content (messages and drawings) was displayed in the foyer of Casa de Cultura. This happened on account of a drawing competition which was part of this year's edition of Astra Film Junior: elementary school pupils were asked to draw an image for the assignment "What does water mean to you?", while older pupils had to write creative messages prompting the reasonable use of water and suggesting methods to save it.

"Water" has been this year's recurring theme of the children's programme Astra Film Junior, which started in 2009.

The most meaningful messages and the best drawings have been awarded this Saturday within a ceremony where most of the participating children were present. The sponsors of the competition, Bucovina (mineral water) and Corint Junior (publishing house) have been generous and they offered four prizes for each grade of the elementary school and one prize for each grade of middle school. A special prize was received by a whole class of second graders who made together a very large drawing for the competition.

ROBERT BĂLAN



PARAGRAFF

THE NEWSPAPER OF
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Chief editor: Cristina Petrescu
Reporters: Cătălin Sturza, Robert Bălan, Laura Dumitrescu, Militon Stănescu, Eliza Zdru
Desktop publishing: Nicu Ilie
Photo: Sebastian Marcovici

vox pop

» "I'm here since Thursday, I have come to stay until the end of the festival. For me, this is the second edition I attend AFF. I have seen around 20 films until the Award Ceremony on Saturday. I'm a student in Cluj-Napoca and, on coming to Sibiu, I took a short holiday from the University. Until today, on top of my favourites list are two documentaries, "Metro" and the film about Roșia Montană. At the end of the "Roșia Montană: Town on the Brink" screening, the entire audience applauded, for five minutes, it was impressive."

» "I was at several films, I think that there were around 15, or 20, but, surprisingly, I haven't seen most of the awarded films yet. I liked very much "Mama Illegal", "Helping Mihaela" and "Gone Wild". And I loved the documentary about Roșia Montană, because it presents a very disputed issue. I was impressed by Fabian Daub, who tried to let both parties have their saying. I have lived in Chicago for the last twelve years and, each time I heard that

Astra Film would start in Sibiu, I wished I had been there. Now, through a fortunate coincidence, I am back in Sibiu and I've decided that coming here, daily, it's a must. Nevertheless, I don't feel it as a burden – being here every day. It is a very pleasant marathon."

» "I have chosen several films that are, somehow, closer to my heart. I have been born in the Republic of Moldova and, obviously, I closely followed the films approaching themes that were connected to my birthplace. I haven't been living in Sibiu for very long – I've come here after graduation. This year, I arrived for the first time at the festival and I was impressed by the diversity of topics and by the fact each film manages to present a very different side of human existence. I have a favourite film – "Mama Illegal". It is a film that deeply touched me. I have also noticed the audience's reactions, extremely emotional, and I'm happy I could also speak with one of the protagonists – with Grecu Aurica.