



Leading lady Seána Kerslake, like director Darren Thornton, has a background in theatre



7/7 2016  
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# THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT SEÁNA

SEÁNA KERSLAKE MAY MORE BE LIKE HER DATE FOR MAD MARY CHARACTER THAN SHE LETS ON

Kateřina Kadlecová

Irish acting phenomenon Seána Kerslake's standout performance in Darren Thornton's feature debut *A Date for Mad Mary* is turning heads at KVIFF, where the film saw its world premiere, heralding a highly promising future for the 25-year old Irish actress. Seána opened up about the mystique of feminine relationships such as those explored in the film, the challenges of being in Mary's headspace and what she has in common with the character she played.

**How was it when you got the role in *A Date for Mad Mary*?**

It was brilliant. I was delighted because it had been a long time in the works, a couple of years, because it was on and off, looking for funds and all those kind of things. Mary is a great character to play because she gets to do so many things. There's a lot to her, you know, so I got to dip into a lot of different parts of being a human being. I think she's quite hu-

morous, in her own way. I got to dip into her anger, her confusion, and all that. It was a lot of fun, but it was hard to play, as I was saying at the (KVIFF opening screening) Q&A, because she's quite a lonely character and she's a very angry character. When you're trying to get into her headspace, it's hard to be around other people, because if you're in that angry, lonely headspace, it's hard to interact with people – without, you know, getting into trouble. It was a weird one, you're just trying to keep it to set because you can't really walk around the Dublin city center in that headspace or on a night out in Mary's headspace because you just end up in trouble.

**How long were you shooting *Mary*?**

I think we shot the movie over six weeks, half in Dublin and half in a place called Drogheda. It was like two different shoots. It was quite a short time, so we didn't really have time to lay back and enjoy, to fully take it in. It was like, 'Next scene! Next scene!' It was very fast-

paced. But the editing process was a long process, just to get it right, especially because it was Darren's first feature film.

**The film is full of the feminine mystique and how the girls' friendships, jealousies and loves are actually much deeper than when it comes to women and men afterwards...**

Yeah, there was a lot to draw on. I cannot speak from a male point of view, but I know as a woman you do have those friendships. And sometimes you can be in toxic relationships with friends that you stay with longer than you would put up with if it was between a man and a woman. It fascinates me, female relationships, how they work and how attached you become, you know?

**How was the chemistry between Charlene and Mary? Did you get along in fact?**

Me and Charleigh (Bailey) still speak every day, and we're always on WhatsApp, so we talk all the time, but

I didn't know Charleigh (well) before... And Tara Lee, who plays Jess, I didn't know at all. So, when we got (the parts), we were trying to figure each other out, and it kind of worked for the film. Because for a long time Jess and Mary are sniffing each other out as well; they are like dogs... And then they kind of click. I think that's how me and Tara worked; we were trying to figure it out, and then we found it, the chemistry was good.

**What did you get from the story? What does it mean to you?**

I suppose it's hard to answer because we shot it so long ago. But I learnt a lot about myself as an actor. I think in every job you learn something new, but on this I learned what I need as an actor. The way I couldn't always stay in Mary's head, so sometimes I figured it out that, oh, I do need five minutes here you have to ask for that and not be afraid to ask for that.

It was a privilege to be given a character that explores so many aspects of being a human and there was a lot of free-

dom and I was saying last night in the Q&A, I got to say things that you wouldn't be allowed to say, I was allowed to be really blunt and really rude, that was kind of fun to play up to that sometimes. I got to lash out and act out, but it was quite hard sometimes to be that stropky teenager. You sometimes almost want to give her a shake and say, 'Come on, cheer up!' But she kind of does in the end. She's in a happier place.

**What do you have in common? You are about the same age. You are tough girls who box... Anything else?**

I think there are small aspects (in Mary) that are me. Maybe we are more alike than I'm letting on, maybe we are quite alike. Maybe she's just given more freedom to be her exposed self. Obviously, as human beings as we go around the world we do put up guards and fronts, we have to act a certain way in certain situations whereas she's given total freedom, and I was given total freedom which was a joy, just take it all away and just be. ■

## SEE YOU THERE

LAUFHEY  
GUÐJÓNSDÓTTIR

PITCH & FEEDBACK  
EXPERT / ICELANDIC  
FILM CENTRE DIRECTOR

*Tempestad* is the second feature documentary by Tatiana Huezo, who's from El Salvador but grew up and works in Mexico. In two parallel parts, *Tempestad* subtly tells the stories of two women, innocent victims of social chaos, who end up paying for the crimes of others. It's a strong story, beautifully crafted by weaving lyrical images and soundtrack in a very creative way; a powerful film. *Paterson* by Jim Jarmusch shows a slice of ordinary life and the daily routine of a bus driver (Adam Driver) who writes poems in his spare time. It's a character study that is full of warmth; a playful film poem but still with some serious undertones. It's visually rich – with lot of patterns and twins (you'll see). A true delight. (HG)

*Tempestad* screens today at 12:30pm (Small Hall). *Paterson* screens today at 2pm (Grand Hall). ■



## KVIFF IS ON THE A-LIST (AND YOU'RE NOT?)

For filmmakers (and their agents, if they're lucky enough to have one), it's a full-time job keeping up with all the festival possibilities for getting your work out to the world. Many require submission fees, and top fests compete with each other and can get just a wee bit territorial – meaning that a helmer must choose one (e.g. your favorite A-lister, KVIFF) to submit their fabulous creation to, then sit back, and watch in horror as deadlines slip by for their backup options.

Canny folks at orgs such as Filmfestivals.com and Filmfreeway.com know that information is power and have created databases of thousands of fests worldwide organized geographically, by rankings, specialization, fees... These are here to help filmmakers fig-



ure out where and how to submit and track the most interesting new showcases, listing what they consider the top 4,000-6,000 best for helmers on the rise (e.g. Future Frames at KVIFF). But it's gotten so problematic that Sundance founder Robert Redford recently said there are just too many fests.

Within the fest universe there's also a hierarchy; since 1933 a group of French cinephiles (redundancy alert) set out to sort the wheat from the chaff and founded FIAPF (Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films), which recognizes and licenses fests for quality and artistic integrity. Based in Paris, this org remains the main accrediting body worldwide and designates just a few slots for its top tier – the A category for competitive, non-specialized fests. These include the gold ring of venues at which to screen: KVIFF, of course, plus Cannes, Berlin, Venice, San Sebastian, Moscow, Montreal, Shanghai, and Tokyo. But choose carefully: you can't screen at more than one (at least in official competition). (WT) ■



## OFFICIAL SELECTION

### WE'RE STILL TOGETHER – OR WHERE GUARDIAN ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD



Director Jesse Klein's intense exploration of male weakness hits the screens at KVIFF

#### Michael Stein

The opening lines of Official Selection contender *We're Still Together* by Canadian director Jesse Klein are "Chris, look, it's okay, right. I'm your friend and you know why I'm your friend because I'm going to tell you what no one wants to tell you and it's good for you. You're disgusting. I just really care about you man, that's it." These words are being whispered into the fat, scared-looking main character's ears, played with a sensitivity that is as nerve-racking as it is heart-wrenching by Jesse Camacho. They are being whispered by a bully who proceeds to throw him on the ground and torment him.

It appears this vicious and incessant bullying will go on forever when Chris's guardian angel, Bobby, shows up and saves him. In fact, Bobby will turn out to be far from angelic himself, and will end up telling Chris almost exactly the same thing the bully says in the film's opening at the film's

emotional climax, a parallel that its director says was highly intentional.

Bobby is played with an intensity that sometimes spills over the edge by the director's brother, Joey Klein, and the close relationship between director and actor was a key motivation in the creation of the character, which Klein wrote specifically with his brother in mind. "I do feel in a lot of ways that Bobby's character is the most unique part of the film," Klein says. "So I saw aspects of his personality and his ability as an actor that I felt had been unexplored by other directors."

In fact, both main characters – and their contrasting, nearly opposite manner of dealing with the pain in their life – were developed by Klein with a specific idea in mind. "The film is very much about how male failure manifests itself differently. Chris has kind of a timid shame that he retreats from and Bobby has an over-exuberant aggression, but not only towards the bully on the

street and people in his life but towards himself and his own problems."

"For Joe, it was on the one hand that I saw his ability and I saw something in him that I saw could bring this role to life and also I really wanted to make this character. I do think something he does hasn't been seen yet." Klein likened the performance to Al Pacino's in the 1973 Palme d'Or winning film *Scarecrow* as a buoyant but destructive character constantly bouncing between joy and despair.

For Klein, what gave the film its true character was the collaborative process between him and the small and tight-knit cast and crew. "Leading up to the shoot it was very collaborative. Because when you're making a film, I have an idea, but the most important thing is not that; it's giving that idea to other people and making it theirs. In the weeks leading up to the film, it went from 'Jesse has an idea about Bobby' to 'Joey's going to be Bobby.'" ■

## OFFICIAL SELECTION

### NOT THE TIME OF MY LIFE – CAREENING AROUND THE SOFA



Six characters in search of an escape fling themselves into a dance of brutal honesty

#### Will Tizard

Celebrated Hungarian film stylist Szabolcs Hajdu has reinvented himself once again with a multi-level story of two families caught in a sometimes excruciating, often touching, and occasionally hilarious interplay in an apartment they are forced to share.

With well-timed dialogue that balances naturalistic qualities with revelations of inner lives, Hajdu turns his camera on two married sisters with kids, Eszter and Ernella, the latter of whom appears on the doorstep with husband Albert and daughter Laura one fateful night.

It turns out that their move to Scotland didn't work out as planned, so here they are for an indefinite length of time, quickly driving the already quarrelsome residents of the apartment batty. In Hajdu's hands what sounds like the formula for a TV sitcom becomes something far, far richer, with distinctive characters and issues – and certainly characters *with* issues – at play

from the outset. The writer-director, who also acts, won critical and audience attention with his feature debut *Sticky Matters* (2000), the mannered follow-up *Tamara* (2004), and the search for redemption *While Palms* (2007), which screened at Cannes' Directors' Fortnight and won a KVIFF East of the West special mention.

But it was his haunting, noirish *Bibliothèque Pascal* (2010) that set Hajdu apart as a filmmaker with a passion for stunning, sensual imagery and for shady, fascinating characters.

In *It's Not the Time of My Life*, Hajdu, who is known for shape-shifting from film to film, launches us immediately into a Fellini-esque cavalcade of dialogue, kinetic characters revolving around a bohemian-style apartment, and overlapping situations and relationships. Such as when one little boy bashes everything within reach, and his longsuffering mother confesses to dinner guests that she has no clue what's wrong with him, while her husband prattles on

about the healing quality of Bach fugues with little interest whether anyone else is listening.

The tone is set for an obstacle course of a domestic journey through a kind of comic hell. "Why are we still together?" Eszter asks her boozy, criticizing husband. "I don't know," he answers. And off we go.

Hajdu's work in *Not the Time* has been compared to the groundbreaking films of John Cassavetes, in which (as the rebellious father of American indie producer once said) when scenes begin, it always seems as if you've walked into the middle of a conversation.

One of Hungary's most unique modern directors, Hajdu has managed to capture this elusive quality. But beyond its feats of timing, hinted at early on by that embrace of Bach and orchestrated with deft directorial skill as he shifts audience attention in and out of parallel, unrelated conversations, it's the lives and conflicts of Hajdu's characters that also fall into complex rhythms and arpeggios. ■

## FACES



Daniel Kwan



Daniel Scheinert



Michael Shannon



Joshua Marston

Keep an eye out for **Joshua Marston**, the director of the *Complete Unknown*, which is screening in the Official Selection – Out of Competition section. He arrives today along

with Oscar-nominated actor **Michael Shannon** who plays an onlooker obsessed with Rachel Weisz. Meanwhile, "Daniels," as *Swiss Army Man* co-directors **Daniel Kwan** and **Daniel**

**Scheinert** credit themselves in their film, will hold a KVIFF Talk on July 8. Also, today screenwriter **Saela Davis** is bringing *The Fits* to screen in the Variety Critic's Choice section. (HG) ■

## EVENTS

Two key events for film folk take place today at the Industry Pool: starting at 11 am is **Barrandov Studio's** presentation of upcoming projects, and from 3:30pm, there's a three-hour long panel *Frank: A Comedy Scriptwriting Analysis*, **MID-POINT Masterclass** hosted by **Martin Daniel**, who'll present the "sequence approach" that his father František ("Frank") Daniel pioneered, in a case study of the dramaturgy in the Lenny Abrahamson comedy starring Michael Fassbender. For a change of scenery, you can watch celebs play tennis at the Gejzír Park today (10am–6pm). (HG) ■

## KVIFF TALKS

Renowned film critic and theoretician **Kamil Fila** will discuss whether there is truly another Czech New Wave on the horizon as he looks at various distinctive films that have been made in KVIFF's home country in recent years. Guest speaker **Pavel Strnad**, co-founder of production company **Negativ**, will offer a producer's point of view. 1:30pm, Hotel Thermal Industry Pool. (HG) ■



## CRITIC'S CHOICE

PAUL KATZENBERGER, FILM JOURNALIST, SÜDDEUTSCHE.DE

Writer-director Kirill Serebrennikov, best known internationally for his 2012 Venice competition entrant *Betrayer*, has pursued themes of insanity, twisted sexual desire, state repression and torn families. All of that comes deftly together in his adaptation of German playwright Marius von Mayenburg's controversial *Martyr* about a fundamen-



#### THE STUDENT

Director: Kirill Serebrennikov  
Russia, 2016, 118min  
July 7, 7pm, Pupp Cinema

talist religious student. *The Student*, which marked Serebrennikov's debut at Cannes, is set in Russia. It's

a crushing, satirical look at a country run by regressive reactionaries and hypocrites.



#### BEASTS OF NO NATION

Director: Cary Joji Fukunaga  
USA, 2015, 133min  
July 7, 10pm, Pupp Cinema

matic and sadistic warlord who becomes a dubious father figure to the ragtag young rebels. But for

all its fatalism, *Beasts of No Nation* doesn't end without a glimmer of hope for humankind.



#### COURTED

Director: Christian Vincent  
France, 2015, 98min  
July 7, 4pm, Národní dům

finds his warmhearted side when confronted with a juror (Sidse Babbett Knudsen from *Borgen*)

whom he once loved. This film reminds us that it's never too late to take another path in life. ■



# MAITLAND ON *TOWER* & TEXAS

Veronika Bednářová

Keith Maitland's fascinating docu on the first widely publicized school shooting in U.S. history, *Tower*, recounts the horrific 1966 day a gunman ascended the bell tower at the University of Texas in Austin and began picking people off, eventually gunning down 49 people and killing 16. The director discusses his motives, research and the decision to employ rotoscope animation to give an unexpected dimension to the film, with Sarah Wilson also contributing photography.

**Are you originally from Texas?**

I grew up in Texas. I wasn't born there, but I moved there when I was 12 years old, so I'd heard about the shooting, which happened before I was born. So I'd heard about it but I didn't have many details.

When I went to the university in Austin, I expected to learn about it as an important part of its history – and there was no information. As a matter of fact, when you take a tour on the first day of school, people ask about it on the tour and the guide always says they're not allowed to talk about that.

**So it was swept under the rug.**

Swept under the rug, yes. I think it's an important piece of history and a great opportunity to learn about humanity. And the fact that it wasn't explored at all left all that behind. So that's where my curiosity was



Photo: Petr Houšek

*The director spent years researching what was kept silent*

born. I interviewed dozens and dozens of people and I researched for about six years off and on.

During that time, I was reading everything that existed from 1966, talking to people who were there, learning all the behind-the-scenes information while also looking for people whose stories really resonated from that day... And I worked to discover footage shot that day. Because the shooting was so long – it lasted for over an hour and a half – there was enough time for news cameramen to arrive on campus.

So they had filmed newsreel footage on 16mm film. A certain amount of it was available publicly; I tried finding material that hadn't been made available. But I also knew I wanted

it to be a very human story and very personal.

**And how did you decide to go with such interesting animation (rotoscope)?**

The idea of the animation – that's a very slow and expensive process. But I knew it would alter the way people saw that experience. It would completely change the expectation of the audience.

In most cases like this with a shooting or a terrorist action or a bombing, most people see it on the news and shake their heads and feel bad and then focus on something else.

I wanted to change the way people saw this event by forcing them to really immerse themselves in it, to become a part of it. ■

# THE MAGNIFICENT TWELVE



Photo: KVIFF

*Keith Maitland's rotoscope film is an in-depth look into a tragically seminal American massacre*

By Will Tizard

Documentaries offer original and engaging ideas on screen, and KVIFF's collection reflects the most diverse and informative work around from the past year.

With 12 feature-length entries created by filmmakers from some 20 countries, the range of issues, subjects and characters explored could hardly be richer, from an exploration of the first "mediatized school massacre" in the US, *Tower* – Keith Maitland's account of the 1966 University of Texas shooting in Austin – to *Normal Autistic Film*, a work by Czech docu master Miroslav Janek that looks at how the world appears to people with this mysterious disorder.

In another docu centered on a life-changing medical issue, *On Call*, director Alice Diop considers the plight of refugees in Europe who are given badly needed medical examinations and treatment by a French physician in suburban

Paris. *Transit Havana*, the German-Dutch film by Daniel Abma, meanwhile, explores a rather different treatment: sex change operations performed for five Cuban patients by visiting plastic surgeons.

Another provocative social issue, racism, is taken on by Tomáš Bojar and Rozálie Kohoutová in *FC Roma*, the section's Czech entry, which chronicles prejudice faced by a Romani (or, pejoratively, "Gypsy") football club.

From operating rooms to love stories, this docu collection is out to show audiences new angles on subjects they thought they knew all about, such as *LoveTrue*, the new work by Alma Har'el, the Israeli director of *Bombay Beach* (2011), which won accolades far and wide for its provocative style in exploring the lives of people in a marginalized American desert town.

Several of this year's entries focus on tradition and ritual, such as *Ama-San* by Cláudia Varejão, a lyrical look at Japanese pearl

divers who continue an art and trade centuries old. *The Last Summer* by Leire Apellaniz, meanwhile, considers the passion of a film projectionist in Spain who is clinging to celluloid in a world now almost wholly converted to digital projection.

Vitaly Mansky's *Close Relations*, meanwhile, is a German – Latvian – Estonian – Ukrainian film that delves into a cultural versus national roots, as the director weighs the roles of relationships of the Russian and Ukrainian sides of his own family. And *Solar*, an Argentine film by Manuel Abramovich, explores the traditions of New Age pop culture by means of a controversy over an inspirational book written by a 10-year-old boy.

Other docus fascinate with their form and style, such as *All These Sleepless Nights*, a Polish-UK film by Michał Marczak that breaks the boundaries of conventional documentary in its account of two ram-bunctious Warsaw youths. ■

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# HORIZONS: PALMS, BEARS AND HIDDEN GEMS

A RICH SIDEBAR BRINGS NEW FILMS FROM ALMODÓVAR, DOLAN AND JARMUSCH

Hana Gomoláková

Compared to other A-level film festivals such as Sundance, Berlin, Cannes or Venice, KVIFF prides itself on being a festival for the audience – and this year the programmers created extra room for repeated screenings of awarded films from around the globe. “The number of films has been steady at around 25–30,” KVIFF artistic director Karel Och says, with the latter number reached this year, nearly twice as much as in some other sections.

The list of must-see films includes Xavier Dolan’s nightmarishly intense family drama *It’s Only the End of the World*, which won the 27-year-old director, already praised as one of Canada’s best directors, the grand prix and ecumenical jury prize at Cannes this year. The programmers brought a record number of films from the Riviera in 2016, including Jim Jarmusch’s low-key, fresh-from-the-oven existential film *Paterson*. Jarmusch cast Adam Driver, who excelled as Kylo Ren in the latest *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, as a down-to-earth bus driver and poet named Paterson who lives in an industrial city in New Jersey of the same name.

The stars of Pedro Almodóvar’s latest female-centered melodrama, *Julieta*, Emma Suárez and Adriana Ugarte, have confessed at KVIFF this week that the director pushed them to new levels. Filmmaker Cary Joji Fukunaga, who also engaged with crowds at the festival here in 2008 when he presented his debut *Sin Nombre*, went on to film a period drama adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. His latest film is



Adam Driver excels as the bus-driving poet in Paterson

*Beasts of No Nation*, a story of African child soldiers, the filming of which almost cost the director his life.

Felix van Groeningen, curator of the Future Frames section showcasing short films by emerging European talents, brought his new film, *Belgica*, a wild ride depicting two brothers running a bar and navigating Belgium’s nightlife. Also returning to KVIFF is young Polish filmmaker Tomasz Wasilewski, with his third film, *United States of Love*. The director has been closely watched by the programmers here since his debut, *In a Bedroom*, and now he’s back at KVIFF via the Berlinale, where *United States* was awarded a Silver Bear for best script.

KVIFF will also screen this year’s Golden Bear winner, Italian documentary

maker Gianfranco Rosi’s *Fire at Sea*, depicting life on the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa in the midst of the ongoing refugee crisis. His previous films used observational, visually powerful depictions of ordinary people’s struggles and have made him an award-winning presence at Venice.

Hidden gems lurk in the section as well, such as Maren Ade’s *Toni Erdmann*. The 162-minute long father-daughter study goes beyond depicting a failed family connection, in creating new narrative depths, story twists (not to mention extending the time audiences usually want to spend with characters). Cristian Mungiu, the Romanian New Wave director of *4 months, 3 weeks, 2 days*, filmed the nerve-racking psycho-

logical drama *Graduation*, and contemplates the example set by the older generation in Romania. The Cannes jury has now awarded Mungiu his third best director award.

For a change of pace and break from psychological dramas, KVIFF showcases another Palme d’Or nominee, Bruno Dumont, and his eccentric period comedy *Slack Bay*, circling around a mystery murder on a northern French beach circa 1910, with an abundance of laughs guaranteed.

*Slack Bay* and other titles were already bought for distribution in Czech cinemas. “This year specifically we present a very high number of films which have a distribution premiere here,” Och says. “These 11 films are a sign that the local arthouse distribution has reached a satisfactory level, also thanks to the KVIFF Distribution label.” This brand was founded together with Aerofilms and Czech public television (ČT) and was launched last year with Paolo Sorrentino’s audience hit *Youth*.

Among the films not headed to Czech cinemas that Och says affected him deeply are Ira Sachs’ subtle but intense drama *Little Men*, which tests the bond of two teenage boys; Claudio Caligari’s Italian dark horse for the Academy Award, *Don’t Be Bad!*; and the documentary *Life, Animated*, Roger Ross Williams’ Sundance audience hit recounting how Disney films provided a communication tool for an autistic boy. Och also recommends a new film by New Zealand director Taika Waititi, *The Hunt for Wilderpeople*. The director’s previous vampire mockumentary, *What*

*We Do in the Shadows*, was an audience hit in the KVIFF Midnight Movies section.

“It was quite a different thing to get *The Hunt for the Wilderpeople*,” Och says. “We received a last-minute confirmation of this film, so you won’t even find it in the catalogue. It belongs to a group of films bought by one of the biggest Hollywood studios, so negotiating a festival screening is a bit more complicated since festivals in the summer specifically don’t fall within the distribution strategy of these moguls.”



United States of Love director Tomasz Wasilewski

## WILLING AND ABLE ACTORS ROCK

Michael Stein

Two films screening at this year’s KVIFF reflect a growing inclination towards having disabled characters actually be played by disabled actors (or even non-actors), rather than unquestioningly have so-called able-bodied actors take their roles. And if these films are any indication, the results are quite promising.

For his dark comedy thriller *Kills on Wheels*, Hungarian director Attila Till insisted on using disabled people to play the two young occupants of a Budapest center who come under the wing of a bitter former fireman, Rupaszov, who was paralyzed in an accident and has decided to offer his services – to a Serbian mafia boss.



Tramontane’s Vatche Boulghourjian

“I would always rather use a good amateur than a bad actor,” Till says with a laugh. As it turns out, it isn’t only Zoltán and Adám who are non-actors in the cast. The sinister mafia boss is played by Dusan Vitanovics, a practising neurosurgeon, while the twins who repair wheelchairs at the center and carry out a perilous mission at one point in the film, actually work repairing wheelchairs at a center for disabled people. “They also repair bicycles,” Till says. “I bike a lot in Budapest, so I often go to them to get my bike fixed.”

In the Lebanese film *Tramontane*, a blind singer is forced to navigate his own and his country’s past when he is prevented from getting the travel passport he needs to join his chorus on its trip to Europe. Director Vatche Boulghourjian cast Barakat Jabbour, whom he describes as “embodying” the role of Rabi, a musical prodigy and someone with an eagerness to perform.

“My intention from the outset was to cast a blind actor for the lead role. I wanted the experience of blindness to be portrayed by a blind actor, to capture the complexities of daily existence with blindness,” he says. For Boulghourjian, finding the right actor to play his main character

was a much longer process than it was for Till, a process that began with months of searching through the communities of blind men and women in Lebanon.

But finding Jabbour was just the beginning, according to Boulghourjian: “In the years that followed, composer Cynthia Zaven and I bonded with Barakat. We regularly attended his performances at venues in and around Beirut, we spent days together at his school with his friends, we took long drives together throughout the country, we spent time with his family in their village in the far north of Lebanon,” he says.

“Barakat and Cynthia would choose songs that he would perform live in the film and work on the interpretations. During this period, we recorded screen tests, trying to devise approaches to acting, and spent many hours of playing music. We learned from each other.”

For Till, there was likewise a long period of preparation before filming: “We rehearsed for one and a half years. Sometimes I rehearsed just with the actors, sometimes just with Zoltán and Adám.” For *Kills on Wheels*, the preparation wasn’t only getting disabled non-actors to learn the craft but also to get the highly acclaimed actor Szabolcs



Kills on Wheels star Szabolcs Thuróczy (seated) with director Attila Till

Thuróczy, who plays Rupaszov, and who has not only appeared in all of Till’s films to date but also in award-winning films such as *White God*, to learn how to fit in with his two co-actors.

“I spent a lot of time at centers for disabled people in Budapest, and that’s where Szabolcs went, signing up for three months and working with a nurse to help him use a wheelchair properly, to learn how to get himself back up into the chair without using his legs.”

And what becomes clear is that the thread that runs through both *Kills on Wheels* and *Tramontane*

the work of all actors involved, able-bodied and disabled, is an intense dedication to their preparation, something which is all the more remarkable because when it’s done effectively, it won’t be noticed but merely give their performance its authenticity.

“*Tramontane* was Barakat’s first experience in acting and he took his work extremely seriously. Indeed, he had memorized the entire screenplay – including, descriptions and the dialogue of other characters,” Boulghourjian says. “Such commitment brought great insight to the role and life to the story.” ■

## PEOPLE NEXT DOOR

The title above is the name of a new KVIFF thematic section devoted to the ideal of Czech group Walking People (**Chodící lidé**). Promoted by the **Sirius Foundation**, the project aims to engage public attitudes towards people with disabilities, and the 6 films in the sidebar defy views of what it means to be disabled. (*Kills on Wheels*, an honorary 7th, is in East of the West).

In the hit comedy *The Intouchables* (France), a rich quadriplegic and a young ex-con make an unlikely duo, while the humor of *Art of Negative Thinking* (Norway) is darker still; it’s about a husband’s sardonic revolt against his wife’s over-attentiveness after he’s had a life-changing accident. *Come As You Are* (Belgium) is a fictitious take on trips to a wheelchair-accessible Spanish brothel and sanctioned sex workers for disabled folks.

*Run If You Can* (Germany), by a veteran KVIFF-er, is a love triangle between a teen boy in a wheelchair, the girl he’s obsessed with, and his new assistant (a friend). The docu in the sidebar, *Murderball* (USA), examines rival rugby teams on both sides of the 49th parallel, while Vietnam war classic *Coming Home* stars Jon Voight as a disabled veteran opposite Jane Fonda. (MS) ■

## DAILIES

1/ For the very first time, the **Eurimages Lab Project Award** has been given at KVIFF to the most promising film project. From left to right: Lubomír Konečný (Barrandov Studio), Karin Schockweiler (Film Fund Luxembourg), Marek Hart (Soundsquare), Ivo Marák (UPP), Bojan Vuletić and Nenad Dukić (Requiem for Mrs J.), Roberto Olla (Eurimages), Hugo Rosák (KVIFF)

2/ Portuguese director Cláudia Varejão, at the premiere of her film *Ama-San*

