

PRESS BOOKLET

(EN)

A film by
Vadim Jendreyko



THE SONG OF OTHERS

A Search for Europe



www.thesongofothers.com



DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER VADIM JENDREYKO CINEMATOGRAPHY MARCUS WINTERBAUER, JONAS JÄGGY, VADIM JENDREYKO EDITING GILES GARDNER, VADIM JENDREYKO SOUND RECORDING PATRICK BESKER, MARIA MOLINA, MORITZ SPRINGER ORIGINAL SCORE AND SOUND DESIGN DANIEL ALMADA RESEARCH AND CO-WRITING ANNA GÖTTE LINE PRODUCER PASCAL MOHR ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS HENRI BUNDI, SUSANNE GUGENBERGER PRE-MIX AND SOUND MIX DANIEL ALMADA, DOMINIK AVENWEIDE, SOUND STUDIO TSL DIGITAL COLOURIST AND COMPOSITING HANNES RÜTTMANN, POSTINO POST-PRODUCTION COMMISSIONING EDITORS URS AUGSTBURGER SRG, SVEN WÄLTI SRG (NATIONAL COORDINATION), UDO BREMER ZDF/SAT WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF FEDERAL OFFICE OF CULTURE SWITZERLAND (FOC), SWISSIOS-FONDUS BASEL-STADT, SWISSIOS-FONDUS BASEL-LANDSCHAFT, ZÜRCHER FILMSTIFTUNG, FACHAUSCHUSS FILM UND MEDIENKUNST BS/BJ, SUJSSIMAGE, SUJSS PASSAGE ANTENNE, SRG SSR, S, FISCHER STIFTUNG, VOLKART STIFTUNG, GRENZGÄNGER PROGRAMM DER ROBERT BOSCH STIFTUNG, LITERARISCHES KOLLOQUIUM BERLIN, STIFTUNG EDITH MARYON IN CO-PRODUCTION SCHWEIZER RADIO UND FERNSEHEN UND SRG SSR IN COOPERATION WITH ZDF/SAT DISTRIBUTION SWITZERLAND VINCA FILM FILM PRODUCED BY © 2024 MIRA FILM

VINCA-FILM



THE SONG OF OTHERS

A SEARCH FOR EUROPE



SYNOPSIS

Is it completely inevitable that history, with all its nightmares, repeats itself, over and over again? Having grown up in an era when many countries in Europe were inspired by a spirit of new beginnings, when old patterns seemed to have been overcome and national borders were opening, the author found himself confronted with this existential question. In his cinematic essay "The Song of Others," he follows the traces of old fault lines across Europe.

The people he encounters along the way take him deeper, step by step into the question of how we deal with history and memory. And he meets people whose thoughts and actions pursue goals outside the boundaries of short-term utilitarian considerations.

In the film, these encounters are brought together in a chorus, pointing to paths into a future beyond the recurring nightmares that have shaped this continent for centuries.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

VADIM JENDREYKO

AS: What prompted your search for Europe?

VJ: I find it devastating that an entity, which whole generations have helped to build and which was supposed to secure fundamental democratic values in the aftermath of terrible wars, is being reduced to a tool for national self-interests. How is it possible that this unique historical opportunity, here in Europe, is being squandered? This concern was my motivation; it was the impetus for my search.

AS: Are you talking about the EU?

VJ: I view the EU as an attempt to transform historical experience into something constructive. A project for a better future. That was the intention, at the beginning, when former wartime enemies decided to engage in economic cooperation to secure peace. But for me, Europe is much more than that; it is a gathering of diverse and unique entities in a relatively small space.

AS: Could you elaborate on that?

VJ: My personal relationship with what I call 'Europe' is rooted in my childhood. Europe seemed like an inexhaustible treasure chest to me, accommodating people with the most diverse characteristics. Languages I didn't understand a single word of, foods that required courage to try. I grew up in Switzerland, at the tri-border area next to Germany and France. No matter which direction I headed in, there was always something different: other sounds, smells, atmospheres. There was more to discover than I could imagine, and I found it all incredibly enticing and welcoming. I knew: no matter what my name, my appearance, or thoughts, I had a place in this Europe.

AS: And has that changed?

VJ: Yes, fundamentally. Not much of that feeling remains today. It was a gradual process which also involved a change in my own perspectives over the years. But the atmosphere that I experienced in many places as a teenager really has changed. Many years ago, I saw some graffiti at a small train station in Liguria: "Non si balla più, non si canta più" (No more dancing, no more singing). That pretty much sums it up.

AS: So, was it a longing for a 'lost time' that drove you?

VJ: I would rather express it as a longing for time. People dance and sing when they have time. When they are not off chasing a purpose. And when they can live in peace! At the beginning of this project, I wondered if what Europe once meant to me was a naive projection, wishful thinking. But it was much more than that: the Europe of my childhood had been paid for dearly by the generation before us, it was a historical sigh of relief, following the war and persecution that had preceded it. I had simply had the privilege of growing up at a moment in history when any future seemed better than the past. And then suddenly, they came knocking again, these revenants from the past, in new garb. I think it's our responsibility now to strengthen what can protect us from the reopening of those abysses. Until recently, there were many witnesses to past atrocities who, like guardians, drew red lines that were not to be crossed. They had our backs, often without us being fully aware of it. Those people are now gone, and it's up to us.

AS: Who are the others singing the song?

VJ: The others are those with quiet voices, not celebrated in history books. People who advocate for others away from the public eye. They're the dissenters who invite us to see different perspectives. The title is a quote from the film. After the Bosnian War, after the four-year siege of Sarajevo, people came together and formed a choir. Members of different ethnic groups, who had just inflicted great suffering on each other, began to sing their songs together, including the songs of the others. Their love for music made it possible for atheists to passionately sing Christian psalms, Muslims to sing Orthodox songs, and so on. It's not about conforming to the other, but about learning to understand the other side better, and thereby understanding oneself better as well.

AS: How has the thematic development of the film evolved over time?

VJ: From the beginning, I wanted this film to be an enquiry, to expose myself to a process with a genuinely open outcome, and all the risks that entails. I wasn't interested in researching first and then retelling a completed process on film. Risks include, for example, filming something from a certain perspective, then having that perspective change over time and having to work with the material already shot. Or realizing I've hit a dead end and have to approach a question in a completely different way. That's why I chose a cineastic form that allowed for detours and dead ends. An essay, essentially. But that often wasn't easy for me...

AS: Why is that?

VJ: Well, embarking on a journey with great enthusiasm and not knowing where it ends sounds wonderful. But it feels quite different when you've been wandering around in the fog soaked to the bone for days, finding yourself at the same fork in the road for the fifth time... And stylistically, it has consequences too.

AS: Can you be more specific?

VJ: If I let the situation guide me, sometimes I can anticipate developments and movements, and I might manage an elegant, sometimes even magical swing. Wonderful. But sometimes I fall into a ditch and get stuck, everything shakes and jolts, and the light is too harsh but flat as well; and yet the scene is important in terms of content. This means quite a stretch in the editing for that part of me looking for those elegant, magical swings. On the other hand, it was important that the process of searching for and selecting a frame be visible and comprehensible. I didn't want to just present results.

AS: Back to the thematic development of the film over time...

VJ: At first, I was very concerned with how I could plausibly convey the urgency this film has for me. Together with Anna Götte, who was intensively involved in the creation of the film, we played through many scenarios on how we could bring across that central question: whether history, with all its nightmares, is bound to repeat itself over and over again. This starting point metamorphized completely over the course of the project, and our initial concern about conveying urgency seems almost absurd now in light of the new wars in and around Europe.

Another development was my personal orientation: At the beginning, I was searching in many different directions. Over time, I chose to follow certain leads. For example, I repeatedly ended up in former war zones. These places drew me in, even though I hadn't been consciously looking for them. And it was in these places, that I often encountered men who were trying to transform what other men before them had caused there. It often seemed to me as if the men I met there were drawn to these old wounds to heal them, just two or three generations after the perpetrators.

And important to me: a few years ago, I would have placed terms like 'history' or 'memory' squarely in the past. Today, I see both much more in connection with the future. That was a clear learning process for me. The Bosnian writer Dževad Karahasan, who also appears in the film, sums it up this way: The past is the soil in which the plant grows. The present and the future draw their nutrients from it. In the film, I explore the question as to how we can break out of the pattern of recurring nightmares. How we remember which stories are key to shaping our future.

AS: Which encounters have had a lasting impact on you?

VJ: It's still too early for me to answer that question. From my current perspective, I suppose I might say the choir. I mean that both concretely, in terms of the choir that appears in the film, with its wonderful character and vocal power and diversity. And metaphorically, in terms of the assembled protagonists in the film, each with their own peculiarities, who together also form a choir.

AS: What does Europe mean to you today?

VJ: An opportunity. And a great responsibility.

Interview conducted by Anaïs Steiner.

VOICES OF THE PROTAGONISTS



"If we want to make predictions for the future, we need to learn to understand the past. It's the only tool we have. Processes deep in the ground today are causing the landscape of tomorrow to change."

EVY NOMIKOU

Geologist. Volcanologist and professor at the University of Athens.

For Evi Nomikou, the island of Santorini, with its visible tectonic fault line, is an open book of Earth's history.

"Geology helps us understand that everything is connected. If we are disconnected, we don't see the consequences of our actions."



"With every grenade, every mine you remove, you potentially save a life. If not immediately, then maybe in ten years, or maybe in a hundred years [...]. You're removing a potential danger for a woman, for a child, for whoever."

DAAN VERFAILLIE

Member of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team of DOVO, a special unit of the Belgian Defense Forces.

"1.5 billion shells were fired a hundred years ago in World War I, of which about a third did not explode. So on November 11, 1918, there were about 500 million shells lying around here, somewhere in the ground..."



"If we all think the same way, in the same format, we run the risk of following fatal misconceptions to the end. Conversely, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to recognize a potentially better solution to a problem from someone who has a different perspective on things."

TOMASZ WESOŁOWSKI

Ornithologist at the University of Wrocław, has been studying the birds in the Białowieża Forest, Europe's last primeval forest, for over 30 years.



"Our choir Pontanima essentially emerged from the war. People of different religions and national origins came together... united by their shared love of music, which nourished the spirit of our choir."

ALMA GANZ

Conductor of the Pontanima Choir, Sarajevo.
Conductor, lecturer in pedagogy and music theory.

"We have always believed that our own beliefs should encourage us to reach out to others. To sing their songs. Singing as an invitation to get to know each other. Take a step towards the other, not to assimilate them, but to experience personal growth."



"The past nourishes the present and the future. Memory nourishes human thought, just as the soil nourishes its plants."

DŽEVAD KARAHASAN

Writer from Sarajevo. Playwright, essayist, dramaturg, and literary scholar.

During the Bosnian War, Sarajevo was besieged for four years by Serbian militias (1992–1996). During this time, the Vijećnica National Library was deliberately bombarded with phosphorus grenades and burned down, along with 2-3 million books and manuscripts. 20 years after its destruction, the building was renovated and is now used for representative purposes and can be rented for weddings and corporate events.

"This building has no memory today. Nothing here remembers the young people who studied and dreamed here – nothing. It's a place that only tourists visit. And in a world ruled by tourism, nobody is at home."

CAST & CREW

Protagonists in order of appearance

Róbert Molnár – mayor at the fence, Hungary

Luigi Rotolo, Guy Spenle, Michel Petitjean – volunteers, Hartmannswillerkopf

Daan Verfaillie – EOD team leader, Flanders

Evi Nomikou – geologist, Santorini

Tomasz Wesołowski – ornithologist in the forest, Białowieża

Jovan Divjak – the General, Sarajevo

Dževad Karahasan – writer in the Vijećnica, Sarajevo

Nermin Ibrulj – book restorer, Sarajevo

Alma Ganz – conductor, Sarajevo

Ronny Nygård – fisherman, Lofoten

Ingrid Sommerseth – archaeologist in the cave, Lofoten

Director

Vadim Jendreyko

Research and Co-Writing

Anna Götte

Camera

Marcus Winterbauer, Jonas Jäggy, Vadim Jendreyko

Sound Recording

Patrick Becker, Maria Molina, Moritz Springer

Editing

Gildes Gardner, Vadim Jendreyko

Original Score and Sound Design

Daniel Almada

Producer

Vadim Jendreyko

Associate Producer

Hercli Bundi, Susanne Guggenberger

Line Producer

Pascal Moor

Colorist and Digital Composition

Hannes Rüttimann

Production

Mira Film GmbH, Zürich

in Co-Production with

SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen und
SRG SSR

Commissioning Editors

Urs Augstburger, SRF

Sven Wälti, national coordinator, SRG SSR

in Cooperation with

Udo Bremer, ZDF/3sat

SUISSIMAGE

Succès Passage Antenne, SRG SSR

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BL

Volkart Stiftung

Grenzgänger Programm der Robert Bosch
Stiftung

Literarisches Colloquium Berlin

Distribution Switzerland

Vinca Film GmbH

Technical Details

Format 16:9

Length 136 min

Year 2024

Original Languages German, English, Greek, Bosnian, Flemish, Polish, French,
Chinese

Subtitles German, English

Country of Production Switzerland

VADIM JENDREYKO

Producer, writer, director

Vadim Jendreyko realises films as a director, author, producer and co-producer. He teaches on a project basis at film schools, works as a coach and is a tutor at the rough-cut laboratory dok.incubator.

In 2002, he founded the production company Mira Film GmbH (www.mirafilm.ch) with Hercli Bundi, with whom he produces independent films for cinema and television.

His films have received numerous awards; his directorial works "Bashkim" and "The Woman with the 5 Elephants" were honoured with the Swiss Film Prize, among others, and received nominations for the European Film Prize and the German Film Prize.

Filmography (selection)

- 2024 "A Sister's Tale" (WT: An Octopus under my Skin) producer, cinema documentary by Leila Amini. Completion summer 2024
- 2024 "The Song of Others – A Search for Europe" (WT: Suche nach Europa) writer, director, cinema documentary. Premiere Visions du Réel April 2024
- 2024 "Reas" (Premiere Berlinale 2024) Co-producer, cinema documentary by Lola Arias, in co-production with Gema Films (Argentina) and Sutor Kolonko (Germany)
- 2021 "Taming the Garden" Producer, cinema documentary by Salomé Jashi, co-production with Sakdoc Film (Georgia), Corso Film (Germany), Arte and SRF
- 2020 "Amor Fati" co-producer, cinema documentary by Cláudia Varejão, co-production with Terratrema Filmes (Portugal) and La Belle Affaire (France)
- 2019 "Master of Disaster" co-producer, documentary film by Jörg Haaßengier and Jürgen Brügger, co-production with Fimtank (D), SRF and 3sat
- 2018 "Beyond the Obvious" writer and director, TV documentary produced by GoldenEgg Productions (Geneva) and SRF
- 2017 "Les Dépossédés" co-producer, cinema documentary by Matthieu Roy and Richard Brouillette. Co-production with Lucie Tremblay, Lowik Media, Montreal / Canada
- 2016 "The Beekeeper and his Son" Co-writer and producer (with Susanne Guggenberger), documentary film by Diedie Weng, co-production with Lowik Media, Canada
- 2016 "Ama-San" co-producer, documentary film by Cláudia Varejão, co-production with Terratrema Filmes, Portugal
- 2012 "Where the Condors fly" Producer, cinema documentary by Carlos Klein. Co-production with TM Film (D), SRF and Bayerischer Rundfunk
- 2010 "The Singing City" Director and co-writer, television documentary. Production Fimtank Hamburg with ZDF/3sat and the Stuttgart State Opera

2009 "The Woman with the 5 Elephants" writer, director, producer, cinema documentary, production Mira Film GmbH and Filmtank with ZDF/3sat, SRF

2002 "Bashkim" Writer and director. Cinema documentary 85, production Carac Film (CH) and Tiger TV (D)

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the cinema release in Switzerland is planned for autumn / winter 2024

