

Anniversary

KVIF
60/80

(1946–2026)



In 1946, the Medical House in Mariánské Lázně was converted into a festival cinema.





80 Years and 60 Editions of the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival

“The Karlovy Vary festival has experienced more ups and downs and changes than any other international film festival in the world.”

— Eva Zaoralová

When the Karlovy Vary film festival was founded in the summer of 1946, Europe was still recovering from years of war. Cannes and Locarno were getting ready to launch, and Venice was set to resume its prewar tradition, but the festival in western Bohemia beat them all that year. The first edition, held in both Mariánské Lázně and Karlovy Vary, more closely resembled a symbolic cultural and political gesture than today’s international survey of film. The two spa towns hoped that the new event would help to renew the local tourist industry in the immediate aftermath of the expulsion of the area’s German inhabitants, and cinema was also seen as a tool of postwar cultural politics.

Besides showing thirteen feature films, the 1946 festival included discussions on the future of Czechoslovak cinema and on what “national cinema” should look like. But even the first editions showed that Karlovy Vary would never be an ordinary festival.

An important figure in the festival’s first decades was **Antonín Martin Brousil** – a man closely associated with the founding not just of the festival, but of FAMU (the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts) as well. Brousil was a capable organizer, diplomat, and pragmatic thinker who managed to keep the festival going despite changes in the regime and ongoing political pressure. He headed the festival’s juries and organizational structures until his death in 1986, thus effectively shaping the event’s overall form for several decades.

After the communist takeover in February 1948, the festival was quickly transformed into a showcase event for the Eastern Bloc. It added prizes for Peace, Social Progress, and the Struggle for Freedom, the program came under ideological influence, and Karlovy Vary became an important player in the culture of the Cold War. But even during this time, the festival showcased outstanding films such as the Polish drama *The Last Stage* and the American film *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

In 1950, the festival definitively moved to Karlovy Vary, and several years later it received the prestigious **category A** status from FIAPF, the International Federation of Film Producers Associations, a ranking that placed it among the most important film festivals in the world. But success came at a price. The Soviet Union had decided to start its own festival in Moscow, and Karlovy Vary had to share the category A status with the Soviet capital. The festival thus took place only in odd years.



Soviet actor Innokentij Smoktunovskij with Miroslav Horníček, 1962.

The 1960s: Political thaw and new cinematic discoveries

With the political thaw of the 1960s, the festival began to open itself up to the world. Vary was visited by the likes of Alain Resnais, Claudia Cardinale, Henry Fonda, and Elia Kazan, and the festival screened films by Roberto Rossellini, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Tony Richardson. It also helped to discover new filmmakers from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and in addition to the Czechoslovak New Wave, it showed films by such directors as Glauber Rocha, Larisa Shepito, and Ousmane Sembène.

During this era, the festival acquired an increasingly open atmosphere. The Open Forums featured discussions on film as an art form, Miroslav Horníček's television program *Moments* presented the festival to the general public, and Vary began to attract important foreign producers and distributors. But then came August 1968.



Minister of Culture and Information Miroslav Galuška taps the foundation stone of the future Thermal (1968).

Actresses Nadja Lofti (Egypt), Dana Smutná (Czechoslovakia) and Christel Bodenstein (GDR) with the traditional festival cake.





FESTIVAL*78

FESTIVALOVÝ DENÍK — ЖУРНАЛ ФЕСТИВАЛЯ — QUOTIDIEN DU FESTIVAL — FESTIVAL DAILY

XXI. MEZINÁRODNÍ FILMOVÝ FESTIVAL — KARLOVY VARY — 6. ČERVENCE 1978 — ZVLÁŠTNÍ ČÍSLO

Letošní XXI. MFF se koná v období významného výročí — 80 let československé kinematografie. Je to poměrně krátké časové období, ale přesto bohaté a plodné na úspěchy naší filmové tvorby. Vždyť mnohé naše filmy byly vyznamenány nejvyššími národními i mezinárodními poctami.

Chceme proto při příležitosti tohoto výročí informovat hosty, novináře i ostatní přátele filmového umění o současném vývoji, struktuře i činnosti naší kinematografie, která se řadí k nejstarším v Evropě.

Její vývoj byl složitý, avšak rozhodující tendence směřovaly vždy k pokroku. Díky

Komunistické straně Československa dosahuje filmová tvorba i teorie úspěchů a náš film získává stále větší počet diváků u nás i ve světě. Úspěšně se rozvíjí mezinárodní styky, které jsou dokladem naší principiální kulturní politiky odpovídající karlovarskému festivalovému heslu „ZA UŠLECHTILÉ VZTAHY MEZI LIDMI, ZA TRVALÉ PŘÁTELSTVÍ MEZI NÁRODY“



The Karlovy Vary festival center makes its debut in the newly completed Hotel Thermal. Special edition of the Festival Daily, 1978

ZVLÁŠTNÍ ČÍSLO

FESTIVALOVÉHO DENÍKU VYCHÁZÍ VE VOLNÝ DEN XXI. MEZINÁRODNÍHO FILMOVÉHO FESTIVALU V KARLOVÝCH VARECH 6. ČERVENCE 1978

Text celého čísla je ilustrován fotografiemi z nejnovějších filmů české a slovenské produkce

„ZA UŠLECHTILÉ VZTAHY MEZI LIDMI, ZA TRVALÉ PŘÁTELSTVÍ MEZI NÁRODY“



British director Ken Loach accepting the Crystal Globe for the film Kes.

Normalization and the Thermal

Normalization changed all of society, Karlovy Vary included. “Uncomfortable” individuals were removed from the festival’s management and replaced by East Bloc functionaries. International contacts became more complicated again. The festival halted its cooperation with the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) because of the organization’s protest against Czechoslovakia’s occupation by Warsaw Pact forces. The atmosphere in Karlovy Vary became more closed off, discussions had to follow strict guidelines, and the festival once again became more of a formal showcase than a vibrant cultural event.



Italian actor Franco Nero (1982).

Even so, these years saw several powerful moments. In 1970, Ken Loach won the festival with *Kes*, in 1978 the Crystal Globe went to František Vlácil’s *Shadows of a Hot Summer*, and also that year the festival finally moved into the **Hotel Thermal**, which would become the festival’s symbol for the subsequent decades. Although this monumental brutalist building was rejected by a part of the local population during its construction, today KVIFF is unimaginable without it.

In the 1980s, the festival frequently struggled with a lack of public interest and an uninspiring program. Even so, Vary continued to be visited by important guests (Giulietta Masina, Bernardo Bertolucci, Franco Nero, Carlos Saura, Bob Hoskins), and the non-competition program was often more vibrant than the competition itself.

Italian actress
Giulietta Masina
at an autograph
signing on the
colonnade (1986).



Directors Věra
Chytilová,
Drahomíra
Vihánová, Helena
Třeštková and Olga
Sommerová at the
festival in 1988.



After the revolution: A new beginning

November 1989 marked a fundamental turning point. In just a few years following the Velvet Revolution, the festival transformed itself from an ideologically controlled affair into a self-assured international cultural event. To this day, 1990 is considered one of the strongest years in the festival's history. The program included an extensive survey of previously banned films, Vary was visited by Miloš Forman, Pavel Landovský, Vojtěch Jasný, and Robert De Niro, and the atmosphere reflected the country's celebration of its newfound freedom.



A trio of artists and longtime friends together at the free festival in 1990: playwright and politician Václav Havel, director Miloš Forman, and actor Pavel Landovský.

Subsequent years proved to be more complicated, however. The Czech film industry was privatized, institutions were transformed, the method of financing was changed, and there were serious discussions whether the festival would survive at all. There were even proposals to move it to Prague. An important role during this time was played by the newly established **Karlovy Vary International Film Festival Foundation** headed by **Jiří Bartoška** and **Eva Zaoralová** – the duo that would go on to give the festival the form we know today.

In the 1990s, the festival launched several new sections such as **East of the West** and **Another View**, documentaries were given more prominence, and the festival began to discover young filmmakers and progressive cinema. At the same time, Vary was visited by an ever growing number of international celebrities, among them Philippe Noiret, Max von Sydow, Gregory Peck, Whoopi Goldberg, and the then 19-year-old Leonardo DiCaprio.

The festival's audiences underwent a radical change as well. Young people with backpacks started to come to Karlovy Vary, not for the social scene or to network, but for the movies. It is during this time that the festival's unique atmosphere – which has typified KVIFF ever since – was born.



Rising star Leonardo DiCaprio captured by photographer Miloš Fikejzl with his grandparents on a bench in front of the Hotel Thermal (1994).

XXVII.
MEZINÁRODNÍ
FILMOVÝ FESTIVAL

27th INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
KARLOVY VARY 1990



SPŘÍZNĚNÍ
VOLBOU

ELECTIVE
AFFINITIES

The *Spříznění volbou* 1990 catalogue introduced, for the first time, authors banned by the regime and films locked away in both the symbolic and literal vault.

Robert Redford,
2005



A world-class festival

After renewing its category A ranking, which the festival had lost for two years in favor of its Prague competition, the Golden Golem, in the second half of the 1990s KVIFF firmly and definitively established itself as one of the most important festivals in Europe. Eva Zaoralová earned a reputation as a respected programming director, Jiří Bartoška became the face of the festival, and KVIFF began to regularly bring in notable films and international stars.



Over the years, Vary has been visited by notable actors such as Michael Douglas, Sharon Stone, Robert Redford, Scarlett Johansson, Jude Law, Michael Caine, John Malkovich, Renée Zellweger, Antonio Banderas, Morgan Freeman, Helen Mirren, Johnny Depp, Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, Willem Dafoe, Viggo Mortensen, Russell Crowe, and Julianne Moore, to name but a few. Christopher Lee even sang *The Bartered Bride* during his legendary master class.

At the same time, the festival has continued to focus on auteur cinema and on discovering new talents. In fact, it is this combination of big-name stars, cinephile audiences, and an exceptionally open atmosphere that makes Karlovy Vary unique, with very few parallels in Europe.





KVIFF today

In 1998, the task of organizing the festival was taken over by Film Servis Festival Karlovy Vary. A new era dawned for this self-assured festival, celebrated both at home and abroad, with an organizing team that, despite various changes, has remained stable over the years. Its current executive director, Kryštof Mucha, and its production director, Petr Lintimer, first earned their wings during their student years under the guidance of Jiří Bartoška. Karel Och joined the programming team in the early 2000s and has been the festival's artistic director since 2011.

The Covid pandemic in 2020 forced the postponement of the 55th edition, but the festival responded quickly. It set up the **KVIFF.TV** streaming platform, started the **Tady Vary** (Vary at Your Cinema) series of screenings at cinemas throughout the country, and launched new year-round activities such as **Variations** and **KVIFF Classics**.



The festival program has seen numerous changes as well. Today, documentaries can compete for a Crystal Globe alongside fiction film, the festival added the **Proxima** competition for progressive cinema, and the number of films has been consciously reduced in order to allow for more repeat screenings, thus giving viewers a greater chance to actually see the films.

Even after the loss of Eva Zaoralová, who died in 2022, and of Jiří Bartoška, who headed the festival for more than a quarter of a century, KVIFF remains the most important cinematic event in all of Central Europe – a festival that, over its eighty-year history, has survived war, totalitarianism, Normalization, political turmoil, and a pandemic... and still has managed to preserve what matters most: an extraordinary connection between film and audiences.





