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Photo: Petr Horník

Director Jiří Mádl is bringing a 21st century Czech odd couple to cinemas.

Mádl on the roof

Director and actor Jiří Mádl is screening his second directorial feature, *On the Roof*, at KVIFF, an international story with origins in New York City

The story of a grumpy, lonely former communist and a young Vietnamese boy on the run in Prague, *On the Roof*, is a compelling, tender and subtle drama about friendship and loss. After writing his first feature *To See the Sea* (2014) Mádl decided he needed more control over his own creative process.

by Michael Stein

"It came out of nowhere into my head," he says. "But I knew that I badly needed some insight, some structure. And that's why I decided to go to the New York Film Academy." Mádl spent over

six months in intensive screen-writing study. The result of that New York writing experience is his latest film.

Naturally, the work went through multiple drafts and some very specific changes, including being adapted for a German ver-

sion. "There was a plan to make it as a German film, for which I had Bruno Ganz cast," Mádl says. "And he had already signed the memo and was really into it but I'm not a big enough name to get international financing so we saw that that was a dead-end street. We simply

decided to bring it back to the Czech Republic."

Different kind of Song

According to Mádl, the character of the Vietnamese lead, Song, played by Duy Anh Tran also came out of his time in New York.

"It was a real story," he says. "My roommate in New York was Korean and his background was similar to the one Song has in my film. He had these difficulties with his papers, needed to get rid of his citizenship, get another one so he didn't have to do military service. So, the background was a bit different but the motivation was the same."

As for the character of the irritable old former teacher Rypar, played by well-known Czech character actor Alois Švehlík, the basis is a bit more surprising. "The old man was based on me," he says laughing. "When I thought about it I realized it was someone I would like to be at this age."

A commie protagonist

There are a few references in the

film to Rypar's communist past, and questions of forgiveness or lack thereof, a feature which was added when the project was brought back to the Czech Republic. Mádl had a particular reason for making this a part of the film here.

"We often see all former communists as bad people," he says. "We never let them pick up a new life. I wanted this to be about the present and the future, which means, we have to renounce the past. I wanted both characters to have some difficulties in the past, to have something to renounce, and to start a new life. And I had never seen a communist as a protagonist, they are always antagonists, so I wanted to try."

Working with a veteran actor might be intimidating but Mádl insists it wasn't. "He's greatly experienced. He's been in this business for 50 years but he says he hasn't had a lead role for 40 years. And at this age, I think roles are getting limited for older actors." ●

See you there

Helena Koutná
KVIFF interpreter



I still have a full working-day today because at 3 pm I'm interpreting the non-statutory jury awards. I always like those. After that, I will be interpreting the closing ceremony, both from Czech into English and from English into Czech for the TV feed.

I have been an interpreter at the film festival for 23 years and the days are so busy, I don't have much time to see films in between. But when I get a free moment, I hope to see *Mosaic Portrait* and *Old-Timers*. I've heard good things about them.

Mosaic Portrait screens July 6 at 11.30 am [Drahomira Cinema]. ●



Koutná interpreting Clarkson.

Photo: Jan Handrejch

Replay

Lensing from the heart

Master cinematographer Vladimír Smutný – who has filmed dozens of Czech classics since his start in 1969 with the short *Eduard a Bůh*, moving on to a gamut of 1980 s gems including critically acclaimed *Dobré světlo* (Good Light), then the Jan Svěrák Oscar winner *Kolya* and his WWII adventure *Dark Blue World* – arrived at KVIFF. He will be picking up a Festival President Award at the closing gala tonight in recognition of his powerful

imagery covering a vast range of genres, stories and characters.

This week he introduced his post-war drama set in the Czech-Polish-German border region, *The End of Berhof*, in which remnants of armed groups of German marauders hide in the woods, trying to get back across the border to Germany amid a bloody trail of fights at solitary local farms. Jiří Svoboda's tense feature conveys "despair and cruelty, but also mercy, illustrated by Smut-



Vladimír Smutný, in good light.

Photo: Jan Handrejch

ný's melancholic shots," as KVIFF curators put it.

One scene, lit only from a light concealed in a stove, was the kind of bold move that helped pave the way for a career of wonder making. *Dobré světlo* indeed. ●

WT

Architorture



The geothermal water-fueled pool was once the pride of the country.

More than just a hotel

The Thermal, a notorious festival landmark, desperately needs some tender loving care

by Adam Gebrian

They call it a hotel but that’s not a very accurate term. For a hotel, the Thermal has too many other features and spaces both outside and inside which were meant to be accessible to the general public, and primarily as the headquarters of a certain international film festival. In any case, it is a large complex of buildings finished 42 years ago. But it was actually designed 55 years ago. Conceptually, it hasn’t aged much since.

A linear construction laid along the valley of the Teplá divides the space around itself into two parts: into a generous pedestrian promenade at the front and a service part with car and cab access at the back. The pedestrian promenade is maximized in size, for instance by the fact that the largest part of the interior – the theaters, levitate in the air on breathtaking beams.

Just try to stand underneath them and look up at the large mass – which is to a large extent unsupported by anything from beneath – with a hundred people sitting on top of it at any given moment. A large public base enables a pedestrian connection between these two parts through the outdoor space, albeit covered by a roof. It is no coincidence. The cool air descends along the wood-

ed slope and gets through the building, just like you, without hitting any kind of insurmountable barrier. Inside you find yourself in an artificial world, kind of a dark cave. The theaters, by the way, are some of the few spaces that can do without any direct sunlight. When you leave them, you find yourself in a dark hallway penetrated here and there by the first flashes of the outside

world bathing in the sun. It is the result of thoughtful work with light, space and materials.

Brutalism at its best
The Thermal’s bad luck is that it looks sturdy from afar, like a solid construction that can withstand almost anything without the need of major investment. However, on closer inspection, you find out that it is actually

a very fragile composition full of fine detail – note, for example, the vertical supporting glass construction set at a right angle to the glazing of the frontage adjoining the terraces in order to maximize the view outside, or the way artificial and natural lighting are combined in the lobby. And above it all, on the hill, there is another composition of buildings – also accessible from the hotel by a diagonal elevator copying the surrounding dramatic terrain. This place could stand up to any international comparison. A composition of smaller glass pavilions surrounds a fifty-meter swimming pool placed on a giant cantilever (the overhanging part supports the diving part of the pool with the largest mass of water) with a spectacular view of the landscape and the town. The swimming pool used to be partly supplied by the geothermal waters which allowed for winter swimming. This once used to be a great source of pride for the Czech Republic. It still could be, had it not been shut down four years ago.

Mission impossible

For a few years we have been hearing news of

a pending major renovation which would bring the compound back to its old glory. Judging from my repeated visits I can only say one thing: I think renovation is still possible but it would be extremely hard work involving a team of great architects who love the complex, who will invest a lot of energy into understanding it, helping it and improving the features which really need it without damaging their principal qualities. Some might say that the biggest problem is always going to be money – which is never sufficient to cover such a project – and that the government should get rid of this property because there is no reason why the state should run a hotel. I don’t think so. A much bigger problem is going to be finding a team of architects who would know how to proceed in such a complex situation and who would dedicate themselves to systematic work over several years. I haven’t come across any information in the public domain that would reassure me that the owner of the building realizes that. Or is trying to. ●

Adam Gebrian is a writer and architecture fan.



It’s called brutalist architecture for a good reason.



The famous red chairs being neglected among random furniture.

Q & A



Sophie May goes on a scavenger hunt.

Brutal awakening

Up and coming British filmmaker Sophie May turns her attention to the Thermal in her short *Brutal Neglect*, currently shooting at the festival

by Marta Balaga

Inspired by Marie Kordovská and her brother Jan – trying to celebrate their grandparents’ work, Thermal architects Věra and Vladimír Machonin – a young director set out to document the hotel in all its original glory before its too late.

Once you start coming to KVIFF, Thermal becomes a big part of it. But how did you first discover it?

I was briefly studying at FAMU and decided to stay for the summer. I got a job as an assistant of one producer and told him I would work for free if he takes me to Karlovy Vary. I just remember seeing this building for the first time, thinking: What is *that*?! I went on a tour of the building and by the end, I decided to do something about it.

The title of your film doesn’t leave one overly optimistic.

The main problem is that nobody really wants to take the blame. It’s the unique situation, because Thermal is owned by the government, but there’s also the film festival and the hotel: three separate parties that don’t get along and don’t want to spend any money on restoration. They are supposed to start some works in November but Věra, the architect, got hold of the plans and they don’t respect her designs. The Czech government doesn’t really recognize authorship rights. It’s this really weird, messy thing that has been going on for ten years.

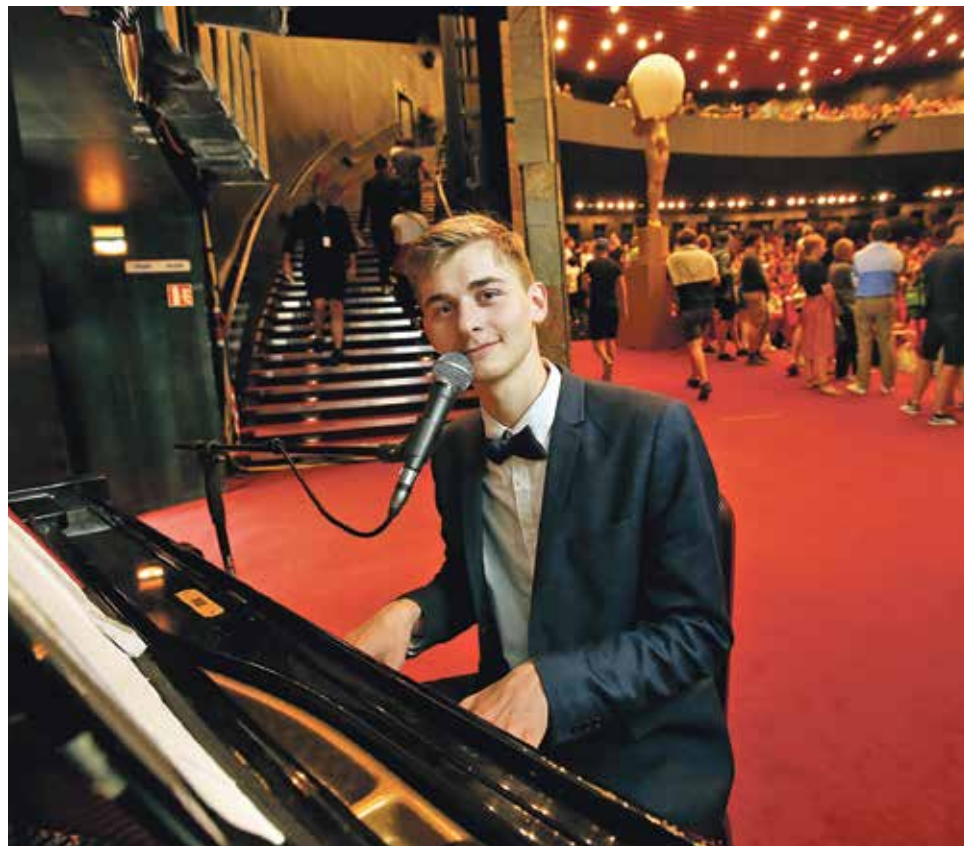
You were filming since the beginning of the festival already, what are the places you have found?

We have definitely been

on a little scavenger hunt. The other day we were genuinely trying to find a car park. Instead, we ended up in some rooms filled with old chairs – just piled on top of each other. It’s completely mad.

I understand the attitude from the people who have grown up surrounded by this kind of architecture, a constant reminder of communism. They would rather forget all about it. Local people, or the ones visiting the festival, go: “It’s just horrible, isn’t it?” But everyone has amazing stories about it! I interviewed this guy in the park and he still remembers ice-skating around it as a young boy. The Thermal isn’t like all these other buildings – it was such an innovative design at the time. So it breaks my heart when people complain about it. ●

Q & A



Samuel Navara, 18, plays the piano before film screenings at the Grand Hall.

Play it, Sam

KVIFF might be packed with celebrities but often it's the "invisible" people that truly make the festival

by Marta Balaga and Iva Roze

Almost as if echoing the glory days of silent cinema, there is a resident pianist at KVIFF. But here comes the twist: an 18-year-old Samuel Navara plays and sings before every screening at the Grand Hall. No wonder people always come on time, or even half an hour earlier

You have been doing this at the festival since you were 16 years old. How did it even start?

It was my music teacher's idea. He told me about this opportunity, asked if I wanted it and I said yes. I have been here for three years now and I really enjoy it.

My whole life, singing has been very special to me. I started playing the piano when I was seven years old. I love music, because it's exactly the same everywhere; it has no language barriers. You can go anywhere, play the same songs and people will understand it. It's really beautiful.

Was there someone in particular who introduced you to music?

My grandfather played the piano, so he started to teach me way before I even considered taking proper lessons. But he is probably the only person in our family with that special connection to music. He used to

play jazz, swing. I always admired that about him.

Do you personally choose all the songs you are playing? We were listening to you yesterday and recognised tunes from *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* and *Pretty Woman*.

I just love Ed Sheeran, but not all of them are related to films. This song, *I See Fire*... I just really like it, even though it seems to have three times more words than others. For me, memorising all the lyrics is probably the hardest thing. Playing is fine, singing too, but the words are always the trickiest. I have a very complicated relationship with words.

I like the song *Pretty Woman* too – my mother loves it. Every time I play it, it reminds me of her. Sometimes people come up to me, asking for songs; a while ago somebody asked if I could play Stevie Wonder's *Isn't She Lovely*. I always try my best to oblige, although it gets really complicated if you either don't know it or you can't play it. And it happens!

You play for half an hour before every screening in the Grand Hall. What does your daily work routine look like?

I give six performances a day. The ones in the morning and in the evening are always the hardest – first I'm too sluggish and then

too tired after the whole day [laughter]. What's really great is that you immediately get a reaction from people coming into the hall. When they like it, it's just the best feeling. It's a bit like 'busking', playing outside on the streets. One simply takes a piano or a guitar, which is probably easier, and starts to sing in the middle of the road or the colonnade, like in our case here. It's something that has been neglected in the Czech Republic, with people looking at the musicians as if they were beggars. But it's starting to be popular again.

Is music something you would like to continue doing, something you see as your career?

Yes, definitely. I wish it could come true one day, but coincidence also plays a big role. Sometimes it all depends on who you meet or if you are at the right place at the right time... But yes, I would be so happy if it came true.

Usually when somebody plays, other people just listen in silence. This is clearly not the case, with all this background noise, people laughing and talking. Does it bother you?

Actually, for me this is much better than being on stage. The idea of people looking at you like that makes me nervous. So being here is just perfect. People are just wandering around and you can play, and play, and play. •

Three picks for today

Vladan Petkovic
Journalist Cineuropa



Based on a 300-page novel and clocking in at 450 minutes, Bela Tarr's magnum opus is considered to be the seminal work of what we today call "slow cinema." But the moniker is misleading, as the experience of watching *Satantango* redefines our perception of time itself.

Satantango

Directed by: Béla Tarr
Hungary/Switzerland/Germany 1994, 450 min
Today at 10 am, Čas Cinema



The best Serbian fiction film since Srdan Golubovic's *Circles* is a quiet drama thriller based on real events, in which the fabulous Snezana Bogdanovic plays a mother investigating the apparent kidnapping of her son from the maternity ward 18 years ago.

Stitches

Directed by: Miroslav Terzić
Serbia/Slovenia/Croatia/Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019, 97 min
Today at 7 pm, Congress Hall



Forget the campy phenomenon of what *Rambo* turned into in subsequent installments, free your mind of Sly's public and creative persona and just go to see this film with the awareness that it is one of the best action films ever made.

Rambo: First Blood

Directed by: Ted Kotcheff
USA 1982, 93 min
Today at 11:59 pm, Čas Cinema

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On the town

Freddy Olsson
Buyer, Draken Film



Jury



How to train your dragon to like festivalové brambory.

Feeding the dragon

For our last edition of On the Town, *Festival Daily* met with Freddy Olsson and his inseparable red companion at their favorite spot – Catering Design stand just to the right of hotel Thermal when you face it. The dragon, we have been told, was especially fond of *festivalové brambory* (festival potatoes) – for very good reasons, as we discovered after he gave us a taste. “It used to be on the opposite side of Thermal, I was struggling to find it this year,” he complained, with Olsson nodding his head right beside. “It’s nice because it’s Czech, it’s simple and it’s close. The thing is, when you are at a festival, you often need a quick bite in between all the films. So what’s the point of going to all these fancy restaurants so far away?” Well, we wouldn’t know, but at least we got some *festivalové brambory* out of it. ● MB



KVIFF main prize jury, each bringing a contrasting perspective.

A jury of your peers

Diverse voices go into the top prize decision this year

by Šimon Šafránek and Will Tizard

Palestinian writer, director and producer Annemarie Jacir says her service on the Official Selection jury has led to lively debates with co-jurors Czech screenwriter Štěpán Hulík, Ukrainian di-

rector, scriptwriter and producer Sergei Loznitsa, Greek actress Angeliki Papoulia and French film writer and festival organizer Charles Tesson. “We have a good jury,” says the director of the subtle Nazareth-set wedding story *Wajib*, which screened at KVIFF last year. “Really very well picked, very different people, very different ideas. Already we’re having very interesting discussions.” A veteran of fests in Cannes, Berlin, Venice, and Locarno, all three of Jacir’s features officially represented Palestine at the Academy Awards. She is also a respected curator and mentor who actively promotes independent cinema and founder of Philistine Films, who collaborates with fellow filmmakers as an editor and screenwriter. “I had a film here last year but I wasn’t able to come,”

Jacir says. It’s the first time I’ve come. Now I hope I can come back every time.

Awards help films Jury duty has real benefits for a filmmaker, she says. “I like being on a jury because it’s really a chance to see films you don’t normally get to see, especially where I live in Palestine. All the films that are competing - where am I gonna see them except at a festival?” And while the jury’s role is to award one film over others, that does not mean the group is making a definitive judgment, she says. “Everybody has their opinion. But I don’t think a jury reflects anything except the opinion of the jury. It doesn’t reflect the best film because everybody has their own.” Being able to help a filmmaker break through is rewarding, Jacir admits. “Awards help films - they help films get seen, gives it something that maybe will help it travel, maybe it’ll help it get a theatrical release.” But the granting a Crystal Globe is no simple task, she adds. “Sometimes you can have it that the whole jury feels the same about a film but it’s rare.” ●

Top 5



It all went up in Smoke.

Goodbyes in films

- In films or in real life, goodbyes are never easy. As Andrea Bocelli once sang, it’s time tooooo say goodbyeeeeeee or *Farewell my Love*, as in Youssef Chahine’s film. But before we do, let’s dive right into these spoilers.
- 1. Alien** There is really no better way to say goodbye to unwelcome, toothy visitors than blowing them right into space. But last year’s KVIFF guest, Terry Gilliam, wasn’t impressed. “She just runs around in her underwear, trying to find a cat.”
 - 2. Smoke** You find a girl. You pretend you can dance to impress the girl. You finally spend the night with the girl, only to have her say she is leaving, like *now*, and you will never see each other again. Somebody told us it was supposed to be a comedy?!
 - 3. Rambo: First Blood** From machismo to melodrama as John Rambo ends his “private war” with a tearful speech and is led out in cuffs past a Santa-Claus Coke billboard. “Nothing is over!” Rambo shouts. The end credits say otherwise.
 - 4. The Bull** Anton Bykov, the Bull, leaves the film, and everyone he loves with a bang, pressing a grenade against his failing heart as a horde of dangerous Mafiosi close in on him and his friends.
 - 5. Farewell my Love** Yeah, what he said. ●

KVIFF54 in ‘kvotes’



Tim Mielants, director of *Patrick*, on how far you can push actors - even top-shelf ones - for your art film premiere about a nudist camp maintenance man with a hammer obsession: “Nobody said no to the project because they’d be naked.”



Casey Affleck on studio reaction to *The Assassination of Jesse James by Coward Robert Ford* with Brad Pitt. “No one wants to watch a movie after Brad Pitt dies.”



Jaeden Martell, actor on learning how to convey emotion with his eyes in a scene when your face is covered with prosthetic fur in *The True Adventures of Wolfboy*. “That was borne out of not being able to move my face and my neck and my mouth. I had to use another medium.”



In Fabric’s **Peter Strickland** on why he made a film about a murderous dress. “It just couldn’t be a sock.”



Icelandic director **Benedict Erlingsson** on what to do if we want sustainability “Work less, sleep more and plant lots of trees.”



Julianne Moore on rooming with your kids on location “Next time, I will ask for some extra space. Just a little bit, right by the bathroom.”



Cineuropa’s **Vladan Petkovic** on his first screening of 450-minute-long *Satantango*: “When the film ended Béla Tarr came in for the Q & A. I particularly remember my joy at his answer to the question ‘How many takes do you usually need?’ ‘What is a take?’ he replied.”



Director **Ivan Zachariáš** on shooting a trailer with John Malkovich. “He got terribly drunk and started sharing all sorts of conspiracy theories with us such as *The Guardian* being run by the KGB.”