



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
East of the West – Competition

a film by JURAJ LEHOTSKÝ

nina

about mom and dad and me

BIBIANA NOVÁKOVÁ

ROBERT ROTH

PETRA FORNAYOVÁ

nina

FILM JURAJA LEHOTSKÉHO

Original title	Nina
International title	Nina
Countries of origin	Slovakia (SK), Czech Republic (CZ)
Year of production	2017
Running time	82 min.
Tagline	About mom and dad and me
Screening formats	DCP Blu-ray
Language	Slovak German
Subtitles	English
Colour / Black&White	Colour
Director	Juraj Lehotský
Story & Script	Marek Leščák Juraj Lehotský
Cinematography	Norbert Hudec
Sound	Tobiáš Potočný
Editing	Radoslav Dubravský
Music	Aleš Březina
Producers Punkchart films	Ivan Ostrochovský Albert Malinovský Katarína Tomková Jiří Konečný
Producer endorfilm	
Creative producer	
Česká televize	Helena Uldrichová
Producers Lehotsky Film	Juraj Lehotský Miša Jeleneková
Producer Rozhlas a televízia Slovenska	Tibor Búza
Producer sentimentalfilm	Marek Urban
Cast	Bibiana Nováková Robert Roth Petra Fornayová Josef Kleindienst Miroslav Pollak Simona Kuchynková Tomáš Klobučník

Support

Slovak Audiovisual Fund
Czech State Cinematography Fund
Creative Europe MEDIA
Bratislava Municipality Fund

SYNOPSIS

Nina is 12. Her parents are getting a divorce and her world is falling apart before her eyes. Her mom and dad say they are only doing what is best for her, but in fact, they act as though they only cared for themselves. Nina doesn't understand them. She feels abandoned and deceived. It's like there is nothing left in the world that she could believe in. Her only remaining security in life is competitive swimming. At the pool she finds calm and support and everything else she lacks at home. When it looks like she won't be able to attend a swimming competition, she makes a radical move.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

“When I first conceived of this film, I was thinking about the theme of forgiveness. The film follows a difficult episode in the life of a small family. Love is on the retreat, anger and resentment are winning over. I was also thinking about how children, in their innocence, can find beauty in the world despite facing great odds. I wanted to examine the emotions of a child who wants to love both her parents equally but can't. I hoped to use this story to probe the depths of our souls and hold up a mirror to us - parents. I wanted to find a key to when and how we can start to forgive and live our lives better.”

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Filmmakers usually sail around “uncharted waters”, trying to find original themes and untold stories which no one before them has thought to document. You decided to tell a story which we have all seen unfold in one shape or another. Why did you choose to make a film about a small family which breaks apart when the parents divorce?

I realise that the theme is not especially original. We were growing increasingly aware that many families around us were breaking apart, and that it's becoming normal that a child loses the sense of having one family, one sanctuary, one home. She begins to live two separate lives in two separate homes, one at her mother's and the other at her father's. But how does the child experience it all? How does she feel?

So you decided to explore it through the eyes of a child...

Psychologists say that a divorce is like a small death of the family. We often only look at it through our own, adult eyes. That's why I wanted to examine the whole issue from a different perspective. How does the child cope with all the difficulties that come with her parents' divorce? We wanted to paint a sensitive picture of a child's confrontation with the world of adults.

Is your film a kind of warning for adults?

It was not our intention to moralise, nor did we want to criminalise divorce. We only wanted to show how important family is for a child. And also, what happens when we, the adults, who are meant to provide a safe harbour for our children, lose control. We also tried to highlight the small things which are so important in relationships, in family life, to the child's experience of life – the kind of things we often tend to overlook, unfortunately.

How do you capture that in the film?

Your children are most beautiful when they are growing up, asking questions, looking to talk to you... when they need you. When they see something for the first time that they have not seen before. When you talk to them, when you are fulfilling their little dreams. But we, adults, are sometimes too caught up in our own problems, our own lives and failures, and we miss the moments when we should listen to our children, when they tell us what colour they want the walls in their rooms to be, when they talk to us about their bizarre plans and dreams.

How does an adult like you think himself into the mind of a child so that he can tell a story from a child's perspective?

Both the scriptwriter Marek Leščák and I have children. When we were writing the script, I tried to pay very close attention to how my children view and experience things. I am fortunate to have a complete family, but still, we too have been through some rough patches. So I was drawing on my own experience to a certain extent. The story is mostly told from the child's perspective. We bring out the small things that children point out and parents do not necessarily want to see. Thus the film somehow becomes a reflection on us – the parents. We can see how when we are self-centred and egoistic, some important things start to slip between our fingers – the time we get to spend with our children, the time that's here now and that won't be coming back. We spoke to parents who had divorced, even to parents who had hurt each other very much in the process, having acted like lunatics, which they may not even have been aware of. We heard many stories where the adults had lost control of the situation and the child suffered because of it.

The theme of a family falling apart brings out many questions. Which were the crucial questions for you?

I wanted to look for answers and think about love, hate, and the ability to forgive. I wanted to use the story as a probe into the depths of our souls. I wanted to highlight how important it is to be sensitive to others.

How did you decide that Nina should be a competitive swimmer? What did you find so interesting about the motif of water?

The competitive swimming element helps paint a more complete picture of Nina's character. She is by nature competitive and wants to win. It's all a metaphor for her parents' struggle, for her own struggle for what she loves and is losing. The pool is also a place where she can escape and be happy for a while. The water washes away her sorrow.

How did you pick the main protagonists?

We discovered Bibiana Nováková at the auditions, which was surprising. Usually at auditions you get children who really want to act and they act like it, or you get parents who want their children to act. Only seldom do you get children who are so mature. It's very rare, finding a young talent like her. Bibiana had been in a drama club in school, but that wasn't important for us. At the auditions we clicked really well. We immediately understood that she has a knack for strong, natural acting, that she can be authentic. I saw how gentle she could be, but I also saw that she could cope with difficult situations. It was amazing how well she understood my language. We worked really well together. Ultimately, I think that the whole film works mostly thanks to her.

Did she have a personal experience similar to the one in the film that she could embody the character so well?

It was only over time that I learnt that her parents had also divorced. Their divorce, however, had unfolded very differently to the one in our film. Bibiana is a very mature individual even though she is only 12 years old. I never felt like I was talking to a child. We spoke very openly. She is a calm and thoughtful person. I really took a liking to her, which made me feel that she could also be popular with the audience. That the viewers would experience the story with her from beginning to end.

How did you cast the actors who portray the parents?

I had known Petra Fornayová for some time; I even wanted to cast her in my previous film. Petra is a dancer and director. She is authentic and sensitive and also rebellious in a certain sense. She is also relatively unknown and therefore interesting. She added another dimension to the script – her own profession. We built up the character of the mother as a woman who loves music and dance, but for financial reasons, she must work at a petrol station in Austria, where she is starting a new relationship with her colleague. I was fascinated by how the child knows what the parent loves doing and feels their frustration. The daughter is watching her mother dance and when she asks her to come perform at school, she refuses.

You cast the popular Slovak actor Robo Roth as Nina's father. The viewer has not yet seen Robo in a role like this – neither in film nor in theatre.

We were looking for someone who could play a manual labourer, a real masculine type who is physically able but is not “just” a worker. Robo Roth was really an atypical casting choice. The viewer does not associate him with manual workers. In the film he plays a crane operator who does not really fit in with his colleagues. He loves music and would prefer to do something else. I wanted to bring out in Robo his real, authentic self, which becomes essential to the character.

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FILM JURAJA LEHOTSKÉHO

Both parents have unfulfilled dreams and ambitions. Why is that so important to the film?

We were thinking about why these things happen to people, why their lives and relationships sometimes spin out of control. I have seen many times over how an unfulfilling work life, the failure to meet one's desires, enters into that equation. These things go hand in hand. When an individual is unhappy and does not know what to do with his life, how can he have a relationship, a family? It can only end in destruction.

Your film is sad...

I enjoy telling stories in such a way that when someone sees the film, he will believe that the story actually happened. That is my ultimate ambition in film – to make it so that it will seem like reality. Maybe that's why my films are so raw and unpolished. I appreciate beauty, but I attempt never to aestheticize truth and reality.

JURAJ LEHOTSÝ / DIRECTOR, CO-WRITER, CO-PRODUCER

Juraj was born in Bratislava in 1975. Between 1990 and 1994 he studied photography at the Fine Arts School in Bratislava. Between 1995 and 2000 he studied documentary filmmaking at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. Since completing his studies he has worked as a screenwriter and director, creating documentaries, features, advertising spots and music videos.

Juraj's documentary **BLIND LOVES** (2008) premiered at the Cannes Film Festival as part of the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs section, where it won the C.I.C.A.E Art Cinema Award. The film was then screened at various film festivals across the world and won several further awards (Golden Eye for Best Documentary at Zurich FF, Audience Award for Best Documentary at Trieste FF, Special Mention for Cinematographer at Plus Camerimage, Special Jury Award at Play-Doc Tui IDF, and many others).

Juraj's feature debut, **MIRACLE** (2013), premiered at the Karlovy Vary IFF as part of the East of the West section and was awarded the Special Jury Mention. The film was also screened at Toronto IFF, Haifa IFF, Thessaloniki IFF, Cottbus FF (Award for Outstanding Actress), Arras FF (Grand Prix), Tallinn Black Nights FF, Vilnius IFF (Award for Best Actress), and many others.

NINA (2017) is Juraj's second feature film.

FILMOGRAPHY

2017: *Nina* (orig. title *Nina*, feature)

2013: *Miracle* (orig. title *Zázrak*, feature)

2008: *Blind Loves* (orig. title *Slepé lásky*, documentary)

2000: *I Didn't Know That I Would Love You So* (orig. title *Nevedel som, že ťa budem mať tak rád*, short)

1999 – 2010: documentary profiles (series of shorts)

1999: *Twins* (orig. title *Dvojičky*, short)

1998: *Unwanted Children* (orig. title *Nechcené deti*, short)

1997: *A Funeral Is Actually a Premiere* (orig. title *Pohreb je vlastne premiéra*, short)

1996: *With Enough Effort, We'll Have Diplomas* (orig. title *Budeme mať výkony, budeme mať diplomy*, short)

1995: *The Silent World of Jožko Baláž* (orig. title *Tichý svet Jožka Baláža*, short)

MAREK LEŠČÁK / CO-WRITER

Marek is one of the most notable Slovak scriptwriters. Apart from working closely with director Martin Šulík (THE GARDEN, ORBIS PICTUS, THE CITY OF THE SUN, GYPSY), he also collaborates with the younger generation of Slovak filmmakers, such as Jaro Vojtek (MY ZDES, THE BORDER, CHILDREN), Iveta Grófová (MADE IN ASH, LITTLE HARBOUR), Mátyás Prikler (FINE, THANKS), Ivan Ostrochovský (KOZA) and Juraj Lehotský (BLIND LOVES, MIRACLE, NINA). His films have been screened at Cannes, Berlin, Rotterdam, Karlovy Vary, and Toronto, and many were selected as national entries for the Oscars and the European Film Awards.

He is a member of the presidium of the Slovak Film and Television Academy as well as a member of the European Film Academy. He teaches at the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTED)

- 2017: Nina (by Juraj Lehotský, feature)
- 2017: Little Harbour (orig. title Piata loď, by Iveta Grófová, feature)
- 2015: Koza (by Ivan Ostrochovský, feature)
- 2014: Children (orig. title Deti, by Jaro Vojtek, feature)
- 2014: So Far, So Near (by Jaro Vojtek, documentary)
- 2013: Miracle (orig. title Zázrak, by Juraj Lehotský, feature)
- 2013: Fine, Thanks (orig. title Ďakujem, dobre, by Mátyás Prikler, feature)
- 2012: Made in Ash (orig. title Až do mesta Aš, by Iveta Grófová, feature)
- 2011: Gypsy (orig. title Cigán, by Martin Šulík, feature)
- 2009: The Border (orig. title Hranica, by Jaro Vojtek, documentary)
- 2008: Blind Loves (orig. title Slepé lásky, by Juraj Lehotský, documentary)
- 2005: The City of the Sun (orig. title Slnečný štát, by Martin Šulík, feature)
- 2005: My Zdes (by Jaro Vojtek, documentary)
- 1997: Orbis Pictus (by Martin Šulík, feature)
- 1995: The Garden (orig. title Záhrada, by Martin Šulík, feature)

NORBERT HUDEC / CINEMATOGRAPHY

Norbert was born in Bratislava in 1974. Between 1988 and 1992 he studied photography at the Fine Arts School in Bratislava. Between 1992 and 1997 he studied cinematography at the Academy of Performing Arts. He also studied photography at that school between 1997 and 1998. He has worked on numerous short and documentary films, television programmes, series, commercials and music videos. He was nominated at Plus Camerimage for his work on MIRACLE (2013), which was his cinematographic debut.

FILMOGRAPHY

2017: Nina (by Juraj Lehotský, fiction)

2013: Miracle (by Juraj Lehotský, fiction)

IVAN OSTROCHOVSKÝ / PRODUCER

Producer and director Ivan Ostrochovský studied documentary filmmaking at the Film and Television Faculty at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. He later completed a PhD at the Department for Audiovisual Studies. He runs two production companies, Punkchart Films and sentimentalfilm.

As a producer he worked on his feature documentary debut VELVET TERRORISTS (2013), which was awarded the Tagesspiegel award at the Berlinale. He also produced his feature debut KOZA (2015), which premiered at the Berlinale and was later screened at over 50 festivals worldwide, winning more than 20 awards and being shortlisted for the European Film Awards.

Ivan also produces art titles of the new and established generations of Slovak directors – he has worked on films by Miro Remo (RICHARD MÜLLER: THIS IS NOT ME), Iveta Grófová (MADE IN ASH), Mária Rumanová (SUNRISE HOTEL), Martin Kollár (5 OCTOBER) and Juraj Lehotský (NINA), and is currently working on new projects by directors Jaro Vojtek (7 DAYS) and Juraj Šlauka (PUNK IS NOW!), as well as on his own feature project, DISCIPLE.

He is a member of the Slovak Film and Television Academy and a member of the European Film Academy. He teaches at the Academy of the Arts in Banská Bystrica.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTED)

- 2017: Nina (by Juraj Lehotský, feature)
- 2016: Richard Müller: This Is Not Me (by Miro Remo, documentary)
- 2016: 5 October (by Martin Kollar, documentary)
- 2016: Hotel Sunrise (by Mária Rumanová, documentary)
- 2015: Koza (by Ivan Ostrochovský, feature)
- 2015: Family Film (by Olmo Omerzu, feature, co-production)
- 2013: Velvet Terrorists (by Pavol Pekarčík, Ivan Ostrochovský, Peter Kerekes, documentary)
- 2013: Eugenic Minds (by Pavel Štingl, documentary, co-production)
- 2012: Made in Ash (by Iveta Grófová, feature)
- 2012: Bells of Happiness (by Marek Šulík, Jana Bučka, documentary, co-production)
- 2010: Matchmaking Mayor (by Erika Hníková, documentary, co-production)
- 2010: Ilja (by Ivan Ostrochovský, documentary)

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