



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
East of the West – Competition

ХРУСТАЛЬ
CRYSTAL SWAN

Хрусталь// Crystal Swan

Belarus / Germany / USA / Russia
2018, 93 min

Logline:

In 1990s Belarus, a wanderlust young DJ is derailed by a typo in a forged US Visa application, forcing her to a backwater factory town where she is determined to fake her way to the American dream.

Short Synopsis:

In post-Soviet Belarus, unemployed raver Velya dreams of emigrating to the U.S. After purchasing blank letterhead and forging proof of employment to win a much-coveted visa, her dream appears within reach... Until Velya realizes the American consulate plans to call the fake phone number on her application to confirm her employment.

Velya's only solution is to endure a week in a small factory town to convince the authorities of her supposed job. She locates the cramped Soviet apartment on the other end of the line, overrun by a family preparing for the wedding of their son.

The imperious mother refuses to lie for her, but Velya negotiates a solution: she can answer the phone during business hours as if she works at the factory.

But Velya's presence soon upends both the family's and the town's order, with potentially disastrous consequences for all.

Hi res images:

[Image 1](#)

[Image 2](#)

[Still 1](#)

[Still 2](#)



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Production notes:

The film is a production of [Demarsh-Film](#) (Belarus) in association with Fusion Features (US), Unfound Content (US), Vice Films (US), Inspiration Films (Russia), Crystal Goose (US). The film has been made in association with BelarusFilm (Belarus), Nashe Kino (Belarus).

The film has been supported by grants from New York State Council for the Arts (US), Hessen Film Fund (Germany), Tribeca Film Institute (USA).

[Alina Nasibullina](#) stars as Velya. She previously appeared in “How Victor the Garlic took Alexei the Stud to the Nursing Home,” which won East of the West competition in Karlovy Vary in 2017.

The film was lensed by an award winning Brazilian DP [Carolina Costa](#) (*They, Flower, The Chosen Ones*).

The script was written by a recognized Russian poet, filmmaker and screenwriter [Helga Landauer](#) (Olshvang); Darya Zhuk co-wrote the script.

Crystal Swan was invited to participate in international work-in-progress sessions during Tribeca Film Festival, Cottbus International Film Festival, POFF Black Nights in Tallinn, and Vilnius International Film Festival. It won the best International work-in-progress at Tallinn’s Black Nights. Jury members that included festival programmers and sales agents lauded the film as “an intriguing story with a light touch of irony and humor blended with numerous cultural references, amounting to a colorful and fresh take on the good old American dream.” *Crystal Swan* is set to premiere as the opening film of the East of West competition at Karlovy Vary Film Festival in June 2018.

Production Team

director	Darya Zhuk
screenwriter	Helga Landauer
co-screenwriter	Darya Zhuk
producers	Birgit Goernbock, Olga Goister, Debbie Vandermeulen, Valery Dmitrotchenko
executive producers	Danny Gabai, Will McCance, Eddy Moretti, Dmitriy Osmerkin, Chris Schumann, Shane Smith, Bernie Stern
director of photography	Carolina Costa
editors	Sergey Dmitrenko, Michal Leszczylowski
sound design	Oliver Achatz
production designer	Andrey Tolstik

Key Talent

Alina Nassibulina	Velya
Ivan Mulin.....	Stepan
Yury Borisov.....	Alik
Svetlana Anikey.....	Velia's mother
Ilya Kapanets.....	Kostya
Ludmila Razumova.....	Alya, Stepan's mother
Natalya Onishenko.....	Angela, Vika's mother
Vyacheslav Shakalido.....	Mikhalych, Stepan's father
Anastasiya Gavrya.....	Vika, bride

Director bio (long):

Darya Zhuk lived between US and her native Belarus since she was 16. She fell in love with filmmaking while studying Economics at Harvard University. Today she is proud honors graduate of Columbia University MFA program in Directing.

She just finished her debut feature *Crystal Swan*. Receiving multiple competitive government funds and private equity investments, including early support from Vice Films (US), *Crystal Swan* became one-of-a-kind coproduction between four countries Belarus-Russia-US-Germany.

She spent the past four and a half years thoroughly investigating the craft of filmmaking and received her Columbia MFA in directing with honors in 2015. Short films she directed premiered at such prestigious festivals as SXSW, Palm Springs, Tarkovsky film festival in Russia, Oaxaca film festival in Mexico, First Student Film Festival in China, Seoul Short Image film festival in South Korea, also Santa Fe, Atlanta, Long Island Film Expo, Brooklyn Arts Council, Manhattan Film Festival; several feminist collectives screened her films in US, Canada, and Ukraine.

She won the best female writer-director award from New York Women in Film and Television for her work on *The Real American*, which also received a diploma at the oldest film festival in Belarus "Listapad"; *What Doesn't Kill You* won multiple awards including the best short at Boston Jewish Film Festival. She received such film grants as New York State Council for the Arts, Panavision Emerging Filmmaker grant, and Interdisciplinary Council for the Art of Columbia University grants.

Darya was competitively selected to independently teach an undergraduate directing class at Columbia University a year before the completion of her MFA degree. While at Columbia, she assisted such powerhouse film critics as Prof. Richard Pena, and Prof. Annette Insdorf.



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Director bio (short)

Belarus-born award-winning film director Darya Zhuk has been obsessing about filmmaking long enough to see her short films selected to SXSW, Tarkovsky, Oaxaca, Atlanta, Palm Springs, Koroche, Santa Fe Independent film festivals just to name a few. She is a graduate of Columbia University MFA program in Directing. Darya lives and creates between Minsk and Brooklyn. Crystal Swan is her feature debut.

Director's photo

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1KrpUtnhsQoF3mSchdo-zwn-T_zEWwWD9
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1LyePTny7zW0YHkcCXp1XFLqrMMuEl1du>

Filmography

2018 “Crystal Swan” feature narrative
2016 “Like a Dream” documentary short
2015 “The Real American” narrative short
2015 “What Doesn’t Kill You” narrative short
2014 “Eat the Tourists” narrative short
2013 “WAX” narrative short
2012 “Half-Life” narrative short
2011 “The Air Inside Her” narrative short

Production company

Film production company “Demarshfilm” was founded in Minsk, Belarus in 1992. Ran by Valery Dmitrotchenko, it produced an impressive number of features, TV films, episodic television, commercials and music videos.

Key producers

Birgit “Bitz” Gernböck

Producer

Birgit “Bitz” Gernböck is an independent producer based in New York City and Frankfurt, Germany. Prior to pursuing her MFA from Columbia University in 2016, Gernböck was an executive producer in Germany, she produced TV movies, documentaries, and feature films.

Gernböck is well-versed in international film funds such as MEDIA Desk Europe, CineTirol Austria, Hessen Film Fund, DFFF Germany, and the South African Tax Credit.



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While at Columbia University, Gernböck received two Katharina Otto-Bernstein producing awards for her outstanding work. She co-produced Sonya Goddy's award-winning thesis short film "Sundae", which premiered at NYFF in 2015, and produced Francisca Alegria's "And The Whole Sky Fit In The Dead Cow's Eye", which premiered at TIFF and has thus far screened at NYFF, Telluride, Valdivia IFF, Warsaw IFF, San Francisco IFF, Busan IFF, Melbourne IFF and many more. The film received Short Film Jury Award for International Fiction during the 2017 Sundance Film Festival.

Most recently, Gernböck produced Sonya Goddy's directorial debut "Holy New York", which is currently in post-production. "Holy New York" is a stylized drama shot on location in New York starring Victor Rasuk, Ione Skye, Gillian Zinser, and iO Tillet Wright.

Debbie Vandermeulen
Producer

Savvy in her approach to using tax incentives and maximizing investors' ROI, Debbie travels the globe talking about financing, development and marketing. Innovative and positive, Debbie's projects have earned recognition at renowned festivals, including Cannes, Sundance and Toronto.

Just wrapping principal photography and starting post is Hipsters Gangsters Aliens & Geeks. This is a feature sci-fi romantic comedy starring Verne Troyer (Austin Powers) Steve Agee (Guardians of the Galaxy) and French Stewart (Third Rock from the Sun). Directed by Richard Elfman (Forbidden Zone) and music by Academy Award winner Danny Elfman this film will have a fan only screening in ComicCon and then look to have a Premiere at an international film festival in September.

Debbie has producer credits for 10 features, The most recent feature film Crystal Swan winning the Grand Prize for Works In Progress at the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival last November and invited to Premiere at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in the Czech Republic. Then, Brahman Naman in Competition at the Sundance Film Festival in 2016 was sold to NETFLIX. In 2015 Debbie completed Guys Reading Poems starring Patricia Velasquez (The Mummy). Two Kickstarter campaigns secured over \$40,000 of financing and now the film is available on Amazon through a partnership with Gravitass.

Director's statement

I'm a Belarus-born film director living in New York. I spent most of my young adult life straddling two worlds: the world of my freshly independent home-country, just



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starting to define its identity after the split from the Soviet Union, and my new home in America where I stayed after finishing an undergraduate degree at Harvard.

Most of this straddling, I spent standing in long cues to the US Embassy in Minsk. I visited my parents a lot, and as Belarus was openly critical of US international policy, the visa requirements were quite brutal.

It's in this long line to the embassy that I first thought of Crystal Swan. People waiting on the permission to go to America were like prisoners waiting for the verdict, - they were so stressed out that they often shared their whole life stories with strangers next to them. The humiliation people had to experience to apply for a visa wasn't always what my American friends thought about or knew much about. I wanted to explore what this process of like.

The story of Crystal Swan is set in mid 90s since this is the time I know well from my personal experience. My protagonist Velya is a DJ dreaming to go to Chicago to visit the birthplace of house music. We meet her in one of these cues to the embassy. She is young and full of illusions, she still feels like she is the center of her world. She is an archetypal American character placed in the post-Soviet mess. Freedom she seeks is not available, and in the reality where she lives, the individualism doesn't always win. Her beliefs and approach to life are constantly challenged with every step of her journey.

Can she be a free agent in an unfree world? The unfreedom of people around is what stops my main character from reaching her goal. The history, the trauma of the previous history, catches up with her through the abusive actions of the people who surround her.

Velya's dream is as fragile as crystal swan she is given as a present at the end of the film. Or does swan represent her new friend Stepan who betrays her? Stepan is like Zeuss turned swan to go after his sexual satisfaction.

Visually, I was interested in the world that recently experienced a geopolitical disaster, where high culture is mixed with low culture in the most unexpected places. Everything is upside down. Clothes are sold together with pianos. Crystal chandeliers sparkle by the highway. Rave party is jumping among the huge sculptures of Lenin and Marx. I tried to add surreal notes to underline general absurdity to a world firmly placed in the real.

I collaborated with my DP, Carolina Costa (*They, Flower, The Chosen Ones*) to create specific visual language to this very particular moment in history. We used 4:3 framing with lots of overhead space to show overbearing prison-like sense of Velya's reality, but added primary colors to keep her hope alive.



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Selected press in English:

<https://closeupculture.com/2017/12/15/director-darya-zhuk-talks-crystal-swan-casting-and-taking-chances/>

<http://www.kviff.com/en/news/2321-east-of-the-west-competition-opens-belarusian-director-darya-zhuk-energetic-debut-crystal-swan>

<https://www.screendaily.com/news/tribeca-film-institute-to-launch-works-in-progress-programme/5128264.article>

<http://neweastcinema.com/crystal-swan-new-east-title-anticipate-2018/>

<https://www.imdb.com/news/ni60363198>

Selected press in Russian:

<https://afisha.tut.by/news/anevs/594621.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v57sFcgmjZg>

<http://listapad.com/news/2017/12/kinoproekt-khrustal-beloruski-dari-zhuk-poluchil-glavnuyu-nagradu-v-sektsii-works-in-progress-v-tall/>