



PANIC ATTACK

DIRECTED BY
PAWEŁ MAŚLONA
POLAND, 2017



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Official Selection - Competition

SYNOPSIS

Six stories about ordinary people put in extreme situations, which cause them to experience a panic attack. We experience a roller-coaster of events: a woman meets her two exes during one night, a couple picks the worst seat on an airplane, a young girl risks having her girlfriends expose her as a porn star, a bride gives birth at her own wedding, a teenager gets stoned for the first time while a young man has to beg his weird mother to save his life's work. A brilliant satire that cuts through society with razor-sharp humor.





INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR

by Marta Bafaga



At first you wanted to make a film about the garbage crisis in Naples. How did you end up with Panic Attack instead?

Few years ago my co-writers Aleksandra Pisula and Bartek Kotschedoff, who also ended up acting in the movie, asked me to take part in a screenwriting contest. In order to participate, we had to come up with a story set in Italy. We thought it might be an amazing opportunity to say something about our times and things that bother us the most. This famous garbage crisis was supposed to serve as a background for few independent storylines. It was a common denominator for plots which were also about “rubbish”: things that people keep shoving aside until they hit them back twice as hard, creating a situation they could not handle anymore.

Unfortunately, we couldn’t get any funding for such story and after a while I started to feel tired. I started to think it would be much better, and not to mention easier, to make my first feature in Poland, in Polish and with people I know. However, it quickly became obvious that we have to write the screenplay from scratch, because I didn’t want some character that was supposed to die of a heart attack while climbing Mount Vesuvius experience the same thing on some Polish mountain. It was the same for the garbage crisis too, because in Naples it would be a natural part of the scenery, but if we would move the setting somewhere else, it would become some pretentious symbol. At one point I noticed that all these stories are about fear and I remembered the title of a short film I never finished in film school: *Panic Attack*. I thought it might be an amazing challenge – to make a film which won’t be about an actual panic attack, but will be structured like one: a film which *will* be a panic attack.

Not all the stories shown here happen at the exact same time. This playfulness with chronology reminds me of Pulp Fiction – not Damián Szifron’s Wild Tales, which your film has been compared to since the premiere.

Pulp Fiction and Quentin Tarantino’s work in general are much closer to me as a director. I was never interested in repeating the success of that comedy. Sure, in both films you can find stories taking place on a plane or during a wedding, but that’s it as far as any similarities go. It was never my intention to just glue some shorts together into one film – it wouldn’t be challenging enough. I wanted to create a coherent world.

In real life, you have to wait for the outcome of your decisions. If you cheat on a person you love, the consequences won’t necessarily be felt right away – it will take months. I decided to show the events from the past and present as if they were happening simultaneously, because that’s how our memory works. When I was writing the script, I was annoyed by the fact that most anthology films are set during one day. So what, all of a sudden everyone is experiencing their biggest crisis at the exact same time? How do you explain it to the viewer? I find it extremely fake, so I said to myself: if there is a wedding and a divorce in a film, I should make it about the same guy. It makes everything much more interesting.

It’s extremely rare, at least in Poland, to choose something as playful and complex as Panic Attack for your first feature film – people usually opt for socially engaged dramas. When did you decide that you want to do something completely different?

A long time ago I came to the conclusion that realism in cinema doesn’t interest me, and as time went by I felt reassured in my conviction. Polish cinema can often seem to be safe and deprived of imagination. Some filmmakers try to hide the shortcoming of the script behind some tragic story but for me,

it’s seems like an emotional blackmail. We should play more with the language of cinema, because while a film should talk about our reality, it doesn’t have to mirror it. When I watch a film, I don’t want to see what’s outside of my window. I prefer cinematic reality – one that has been meticulously created and is full of meaning. Also because a viewer can easily “swallow” it and be immersed in it – that what’s the magic of cinema is all about. A viewer can believe in anything you show him, as long as it’s coherent and believable. In cinema, I look for worlds I don’t see every day – a bit like ours, but different. When I was writing a screenplay for Marcin Wrona’s *Demon*, I was thinking about it too.

You already knew most of the actors that show up in the film. But why did you decide to work with Nicolas Bro from Denmark?

Aleksandra [Pisula] mentioned him once. I assumed it might not work out, because no one is dying to be in a film by some rookie director from Poland. But we sent him the screenplay in English and suddenly it turned out he really wanted to do it, even though for most part his character is actually dead [laughter]. Even people in high demand want to do something interesting. You just have to make the first step.

From the very beginning it was clear to me that I want every single character to be completely different. I wanted this film to show many shades of these personalities. With time, their stories changed quite a bit, but they were always connected by this sudden moment of crisis. Something that slowly grew underneath the surface and, just like all this waste in Naples, suddenly flooded the streets. Nicolas’ story, which takes place on a plane, is completely different from the one in a restaurant, which is much more realistic. But they still belong to the same world. Trying to figure out such complexities was very interesting to me.



Did it make editing the movie more challenging for you and Agnieszka Glińska?

I wanted to connect all these threads in a logical way. I didn't want it to feel accidental or lazy, like when you use this well-worn "...and meantime, in the other part of town". I divided everything already in the screenplay, but during the editing it became clear that sometimes we have to look for other solutions and give up the ones we really liked. Because a scene, which was supposed to last for 5 minutes, began tiring you after already two. I wanted these connections to correspond to each other and make this entire universe even more coherent. For example, when Kamila, who is played by Aleksandra, is told that some tragic event is not her fault, we cut to another character sitting with his face buried in his hands. The last sentence of a scene can be always felt in the next one, and then the tempo of the film escalates. The final sequence was a bit of a challenge, because I wanted it to feel like a panic attack; stream of consciousness of a dying man.

Was it the same with the score?

Instead of making a typical soundtrack, I wanted our composer Radzimir Dębski to focus on this eponymous panic attack. I didn't want the music to tell us what's sad and what's funny. He asked me: "What do you think about techno?" I didn't think anything, I am not an expert and it was hard for me to imagine. But then I heard his unsettling, rhythmic melodies and I realised he has found his own way to solve this particular problem. This score is his original vision, but it immediately felt right for the film. I can't imagine anything working quite as well. Before, I was scared that some composer would just show up and fuck everything up, because music is a powerful tool – it can help the film, but it can also ruin so much. Working with him was one of the most joyful experiences I had while making this movie.

People often say that comedies don't work abroad. Even international film festivals rarely decide to show them.

What do you think is the reason?

This issue came up a few times when we were already working on the film and I am not going to lie – I would be upset if this film was shown only in Poland. It's an undeniable fact that it's much harder for comedies to get into an important festival, but I really think it shouldn't bother me as a director. European cinema generally tends to be politically engaged; there are so many different fashions and current politics to consider. Personally, I don't like it. I think that cinema should operate within the sphere of fiction and what I call an "attractive fabrication". It doesn't mean it shouldn't refer to contemporary events, but you can say so much without taking an easy way out and turning to realism.

I strongly believe that you have to be consistent and honest in everything you do. Only then your work can stand on its own. If I decide to follow some trend and make a film I am not interested in and which has nothing to do with who I am, I will lose in every way. And the film itself will quickly become irrelevant. *Panic Attack* is alive – you can feel the energy in it. Not just mine, but that of everyone involved. I like when cinema pulsates with life. I know that some will hate it and others will love it. It may not be perfect, but at least it won't leave anyone cold: you are either for or against it. And that's important to me.







CREW



PAWEŁ MAŚLONA
DIRECTOR

Director and screenwriter. Paweł graduated from Katowice Film School where his thesis film *Magma* won the first prize at the Palm Springs ShortFest, as well as the main award in the Young Cinema Competition at the national Gdynia Polish Film Festival. He won the Best Director award at the Shanghai International Film Festival for his earlier film *Eclipse* and The Young Talent Award at The International Festival of Film Schools in Munich for *For Madmen Only*. Paweł is also a co-writer of the acclaimed *Demon* by Marcin Wrona. *Panic Attack* is his directorial feature debut.

AKSON STUDIO
PRODUCTION COMPANY

Established in 1992, Akson Studio is one of the leading production companies in Poland. It has been cooperating with such outstanding filmmakers as: Andrzej Wajda, Roman Polański, Márta Mészáros, Jerzy Skolimowski and many others. During the past 20 years Akson Studio has successfully produced and co-produced more than 40 TV series and 35 feature films such as the Academy Award nominated *Katyrń* and *Sweet Rush*, a winner of the Silver Bear at the Berlinale. Akson Studio has also produced two of the biggest recent Polish movies, *Warsaw 44* and the highly acclaimed *Wałęsa. Man of Hope*.

JAN KWIECIŃSKI
PRODUCER

Producer and director. Graduated from London Film School with an MA in Filmmaking. Selected for the Sundance Directors & Screenwriters Lab, Berlinale Talents & EAVE Producers Workshop, he is now focusing on working with young talents and co-productions.

PANIC ATTACK

FESTIVALS

International Premiere:
Karlovy Vary IFF 2018

FILM INFORMATION

Original Title: Atak Paniki
English Title: Panic Attack
Genre: Comedy
Country: Poland
Language: Polish, English
Year: 2017
Duration: 100 min.
Picture: Color
Aspect Ratio: 2.39 : 1
Sound: 5.1
Available Format: DCP

CAST

Dorota Segda, Artur Żmijewski,
Nicolas Bro, Magdalena Popławska,
Grzegorz Damiński, Julia Wyszynska,
Aleksandra Pisula, Bartłomiej Kotschedoff,
Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik,
Daniel Guzdek

CREW

Director: Paweł Maślona
Screenplay: Paweł Maślona,
Aleksandra Pisula,
Bartłomiej Kotschedoff
Cinematography: Cezary Stolecki
Editing: Agnieszka Glińska
Production Design: Elwira Pluta
Sound Design: Jarosław Bajdowski,
Grzegorz Kucharski,
Marcin Kasiński,
Kacper Habiśiak
Make up: Liliana Gałązka
Costume design: Ewa Gronowska
Music: JIMEK
Production Company: Akson Studio
With support of: Polish Film Institute
Producer: Jan Kwieciński
Co-producer: Plan Zet

PRODUCER'S CONTACT

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