



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
East of the West – Competition



*Mirrors in
the Dark*



Mirrors in the Dark ***(Zrcadla ve tmě)***

Country of production: Czech Republic

Year: 2021

Format: Digital, DCP, 1,85:1

Duration: 83 min

Genre: Drama, Comedy

Language: Czech

World Premiere: 24. 8. 2021, IFF Karlovy Vary

Distributor (Czech Republic): Aerofilms



Synopsis

Marie (Alena Doláková) and her boyfriend František are trying to save their relationship by answering 36 questions that will, according to scientists, make you fall in love with anyone. Marie, fresh off of her 30th birthday, has a head full of many important questions of her own. Is it worth it to continue a career as a dancer if she will never reach the top? Will she be able to overcome her fears of mediocrity and be happy with herself? Will her mother stop questioning her choices in life? Most importantly – is her relationship significant enough to save? Šimon Holý is putting an extraordinarily authentic spotlight on relationships, dreams and concerns of present-day millennials in his formally distinct feature debut.



Director, screenwriter, composer, producer: Šimon Holý

Cinematographer, co-producer: Jana Hojdová

Executive producer, co-producer: Alžběta Janáčková

Editor: Sabina Mladenová

Sound Editor: Hana Kašpárek Vyšínská

Costumes and make-up: Anežka Karasová, Michaela Kyselová

Main cast: Alena Doláková, Bořek Joura, Eliška Soukupová, Markéta Tannerová, Václav Vašák

Dancers: Kamila Mottlová, Barbora Ješutová, Kristýna Štarhová, Tereza Votavová, Viktor Bukový, Mathias Deneux, Jan Homola

Voices in performance: Denisa Barešová, Soňa Beaumont, Hana Řičicová, Václav Šanda, Vítek Svoboda



About the movie

Mirrors in the Dark is a feature debut written, directed, produced, and scored by Šimon Holý, describing the state of the current generation of young adults and their restless waters of passing days "differently". An intensive relationship study of dancer Marie and her loved ones, touches on the themes of femininity, family background, and Slavism. **Mirrors in the Dark** is an authentic film about a young dancer who is looking for her place in the world and would like to understand herself and not be bound by "difficult" relationships with the closest people in her life.

The film is inspired by the Czechoslovak new wave and attempts to resuscitate its film language, which was distorted by the normalization wave of the 1970s. The black-and-white film concerning mediocrity was originally intended to be a musical. However, all musical scenes were eventually cut out. The screenplay was shot for eight days during the coronavirus pandemic.

The cast features new and upcoming Czech actors. In addition to Alena Doláková starring in her leading role, Bořek Joura starred in the film, where he was mostly filmed from the back, and viewers will especially enjoy his voice. Eliška Soukupová, Václav Vašák, Markéta Tannerová, and Martin Dědoch also appeared in other roles.



"Marie reminded me of myself from birth to seven years ago, when I started working to be able to express myself." Doláková comments on her role. Regarding the complexity of the role, which required dancing and acting, she says, "When I was tired of dancing and had too many demands on myself, I thought that my focus should be portraying the character, and conversely." Alena was engulfed in the character of Marie. "It was difficult for me to get out of Marie after the shoot. I noticed that my sense of humor returned three months after filming. I had trouble returning to a normal eating regime," recalls Alena Doláková, who went through intense dance training for the film.



The dance scene was choreographed by Eliška Soukupová. "I knew about Eliška that she is extraordinary dancer, and I thought this movie can be an amazing opportunity for collaborating with her," says the author of the film, Šimon Holý. She has also played Marie's best friend Erika. "I think of that main dance scene in the movie as a big transforming sculptural group, matter. A bit like painting. I mainly worked with dynamics of movements and distance. I am quite happy that the result is specific and mine," added the choreographer.

Both Holý and Soukupová were inspired by the movie *Kdyby tisíc klarinetů*, performances of world-famous choreographer Ohad Naharin, Romanticism and the themes of femininity and Slavism.

Jana Hojdová, co-producer and cinematographer of the film, with whom Holý has been collaborating since school years, found her inspiration for the camera in Nykvyst's conception of Bergman's *Persona*. The decision to shoot the movie statically and with a black and white image was unanimous for both of cinematographer and director.



Šimon Holý (director)

Šimon Holý was born in Prague in 1994. He graduated from the Department of Feature Film Directing at FAMU. During his studies, he directed five short films that premiered at several film festivals.

He was a jury member at NEST section in San Sebastian Film Festival in 2017 as well as in Queer Film Festival Mezipatra or Prague Film Festival Febiofest.

Holý also served as a film composer for many films of up-and-coming Czech filmmakers. The film score he composed with Monika Midriaková for Olmo Omerzu's *Winter Flies* was nominated by the Czech Film and Television Academy for the Czech National Film Award. He is also a radio host of weekly pop-culture show *Kompot* and daily afternoon *On-Air Show* at the Czech National Radio channel *Radio Wave*.

In 2021, he is developing two feature films (*Thinking David* and *Chica Checa*), mockumentary TV series *Persona* and directing second season of popular podcast series *Zkouškový* (*Exams of life*). His feature debut *Mirrors in the Dark* premieres at this year's *Karlovy Vary's East of the West* competition.

Director's note

Psychologist Arthur Aron conducted a study that explores whether intimacy between two strangers can be accelerated by having them ask each other a specific series of personal questions. The 36 questions in the study are broken up into three sets, with each set intended to be more probing than the previous one. The whole experiment ends with the fourth set, during which both strangers look into each other's eyes for four minutes straight. I took this test with my ex-partner and I was always thinking about its cinematic possibilities.

I was also obsessed with the topic of mediocrity. What does it mean to be mediocre? What are the integral parts of mediocrity? I decided to combine two things I was inspired by and create *Mirrors in the Dark*.

Marie, a dancer, takes this test together with her long-term boyfriend František. With every further set of questions, we delve deeper into their broken relationship, Marie's obsession with success and also her fear of being average and stuck in life.

Between the sets, we watch fragments from Marie's daily life. We see her dining angrily with her mother, talking in the night with her best friend and crying in solitude at her apartment.

She also rehearses new dance performance that is based on stories of classic Literary realism heroines Maryša (Mrštík Brothers), Nora and Heda (Henrik Ibsen). These women were standing at a crossroads in their lives and they must have made a decision as well as Marie does in the present. Maryša was one of the very first plays that made me think about career in directing and I wanted to work with the idea of Maryša in 2021. That is also where Marie (and František) got her name from.

Will Marie leave František? Will she prove her value to the strict choreographer? Will she accept her mistakes? Is there a chance for her to be happy? *Mirrors in the Dark* hopefully answers those questions along with 36 more.



Alena Doláková (Marie)

Alena Doláková, born in Vyškov, 1989 is best known to Czech audience as "Holena" in critically acclaimed Czech-Danish box office hit "Tri Bratri" directed by two-time Oscar winner Jan Sverak.

She was also cast in "Lost in Munich" that premiered at the London Film Festival in 2015. It received awards from across the globe and was the Czech Oscar contender. She played a cheeky maid in British feature "Interlude in Prague" starring James Purefoy and Anaurin Bernard which premiered in London in 2017.

After 15 years of professional dancing (ballet, street dance), prestigious drama school JAMU and about 20 leading parts in theaters in Europe and the US, Alena is also developing a career as a stand-up comedian, wrote a book Anna z Hollywoodu, hosts podcast Chci to with Eliška Soukupová and acts in English, French, Czech, Russian, and German.

She is an incredibly versatile and well-trained actress, who's ability to use the emotions and techniques available in her toolbox, put her amongst the select group of up-and-coming European film stars.

Soundtrack

Many famous names of the contemporary Czech music scene, such as Klára Vytisková, Never Sol, Terra, Hellwana, Eva Pašuldová and also Ester Geislerová, took part in the soundtrack for the film. It will be released on all streaming sites at the end of September.

Tracklist

1 *Zrcadla ve tmě (remix)*

Music, lyrics, vocals: Šimon Holý

2 *Don't Leave Me Now (feat. Terra)*

Music, lyrics: Šimon Holý

Lyrics & Vocals: Terra

3 *Closer (feat. Never Sol)*

Music, lyrics: Šimon Holý

Lyrics, vocals: Never Sol

4 *Take Me Anywhere (feat. Eva Pašuldová)*

Music, lyrics: Šimon Holý

Lyrics, vocals: Eva Pašuldová

5 *On the Dancefloor (feat. Annabelle)*

Music, lyrics: Šimon Holý

Lyrics: Walter Farmer Hart

Lyrics, vocals: Annabelle

6 *Survive (feat. Klára Vytisková, Never Sol)*

Music, lyrics, vocals: Šimon Holý

Lyrics, vocals: Never Sol,

Klára Vytisková

7 *It Is Too Late To Leave*

Music, vocals: Šimon Holý

8 *You and I (feat. Ester Geislerová)*

Music, lyrics, vocals: Šimon Holý

Lyrics, vocals: Ester Geislerová

9 *La La La (remix)*

Music, lyrics, vocals: Šimon Holý

10 *No Man's Land (feat. Hellwana)*

Music: Šimon Holý

Lyrics, vocals: Hellwana

11 *Vzpomínka (interlude)*

Music: Šimon Holý

Samples a scene from *Mirrors in the Dark* performed by Alena Doláková and Bořek Jura

12 *Loučení ve tmě*

Music, vocals: Šimon Holý

Lyrics quote old folk song *Goodbyes, Goodbyes (Loučení, loučení)*

13 *Já a můj byt*

Music: Šimon Holý

14 *Tanec smutku*

Music: Šimon Holý

15 *Zrcadla ve tmě (feat. Alena Doláková)*

Music, lyrics and vocals: Šimon Holý

Vocals: Alena Doláková

All tracks were mixed and mastered by Tomáš Karásek

36 questions

- 1 Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?**
- 2 Would you like to be famous? In what way?**
- 3 Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say?**
- 4 What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?**
- 5 When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?**
- 6 If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?**
- 7 Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?**
- 8 Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.**
- 9 For what in your life do you feel most grateful?**
- 10 If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?**
- 11 Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.**
- 12 If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?**
- 13 If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?**
- 14 Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?**
- 15 What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?**
- 16 What do you value most in a friendship?**
- 17 What is your most treasured memory?**
- 18 What is your most terrible memory?**

- 19 If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?
- 20 What does friendship mean to you?
- 21 What roles do love and affection play in your life?
- 22 Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.
- 23 How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people's?
- 24 How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?
- 25 Make three true "we" statements each. Example: "We are both feeling..."
- 26 Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share..."
- 27 If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know.
- 28 Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.
- 29 Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.
- 30 When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
- 31 Tell your partner something that you like about them already.
- 32 What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
- 33 If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?
- 34 Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
- 35 Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
- 36 Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

Contact

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