


# Slow

A FILM BY Marija Kavtaradze



2023 | DRAMA | LITHUANIA, SPAIN, SWEDEN | COLOR | 108'



*A tender relationship  
between two complex  
individuals learning how  
to connect with one  
another.*

## SYNOPSIS

Dancer Elena and sign language interpreter Dovydas meet and form a beautiful bond. As they dive into a new relationship, they must navigate how to build their own kind of intimacy.



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## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1991, film director and scriptwriter Marija Kavtaradze graduated from Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, Film Directing studies in 2014.

Marija's debut feature film **SUMMER SURVIVORS** premiered at Toronto IFF in 2018 and did a solid career at the festivals, also sold to Italy, Albania, Latvia, etc. **SUMMER SURVIVORS** achieved 26k admissions at the domestic box office, which made it the most appreciated independent Lithuanian film in 2019. Her debut film received 3 Lithuanian Film Academy awards.

Considered to be one of the most talented upcoming filmmakers in Lithuania, Marija Kavtaradze is now preparing for the release of her second feature film **SLOW**, which got Producer's Network prize at When East Meets West and was a part of Berlinale Co-Production Market.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

### What is **SLOW** about?

It's a love story where characters try not to be led by any representation of how love should look.

For me **SLOW** is about different physical needs and how it affects the relationship, relationship with your own body, expectations that we have for romance, gender roles in relationships, the need to get approval through desire and sex. Above all it's about self-acceptance and honesty with yourself and other.

### Why did you choose **SLOW** as a title, does this / in what way does this apply to the relationship in the film?

Most honest answer would be this: the producer asked me to give a name to a story I was writing and it echoed a song I was listening to at the time, **SLOW** by Leonard Cohen.

Here are some lyrics:

“

I'm slowing down the tune

I've never liked it fast

You wanna get there soon

I wanna get there last

So, baby let me go

You're wanted back in town

In case they want to know

I'm just trying to slow it down



Or is **SLOW** also a declaration of intent, a statement of position in a world where speed has become the rule?

Probably, in a way. I think this film wrestles with a lot of beliefs about what relationships should look like. So **SLOW** is probably one of the ways I'm trying to fight any expectations. We usually expect relationships to go super fast (especially these days) and if they don't, then we go on to the next quest. It does make sense, but also it robs us from a lot of potential connections that we could create slowly.

**In what way is dance a way of expressing the physicality of the characters?**

I think you can tell everything through dance. One of my favorite (and also most awkward) scenes is when Elena and Dovydas are dancing at the wedding.

He is doing this silly dance and doesn't care what others think at all. Elena, a professional dancer, is following his lead but is super self-conscious. She is worried that others are not dancing, she is aware of how silly they look.

It's beautiful, but at the same time I think this dance already shows the biggest difficulties that they will encounter.

So yeah, I think you can tell everything through dance.

Also, through dance we get to know Elena's physicality, her sensuous nature, and even see her desires and passion for life and love.

**How did you cast your main actors? There is a lot of chemistry between them. How did you prepare them for the role?**

I had total trust in the actors and I believe that this is the only possible way (for me) to work. I don't think I had to prepare them. We rehearsed a lot and created the characters, analyzed the screenplay, and worked on scenes together. For me it's such a creative process and I think we all equally contributed to the characters and their relationship.

One of the main criteria why I chose them as a couple was that already during the first meeting with both of them I felt that all three of us will have a good working relationship and we will have fun. I think that chemistry came from that. And also from the fact that even if they are very different and they approach material differently, they both have something in common - that they are amazing partners. I think they both helped each other a lot. I liked observing them work and create together.

**How did you prepare them for the intimacy on set?**

I am happy that we had an opportunity to work with intimacy coordinator Irma Pužauskaitė. She is a Lithuanian film director who is also the first trained IC in the Baltic countries. I had an idea that I would love to have an IC for this film and then during one workshop I was chatting with Irma and she mentioned that she trained and now is



working on some projects as an IC. I knew we needed her and was really lucky she could join **SLOW**.

Having her made a big difference. Not only did she talk with actors about their boundaries, making sure that everyone (actors and crew) felt safe, but also we could really dive deep into every intimate scene. We discussed and rehearsed every movement, highlighting what is the most important. Having her on board let us really concentrate and create these scenes, instead of worrying about feeling awkward or lost.

### **Was the choice of a dancer as the heroine something that was obvious from the start?**

Yes, I knew Elena would be a dancer from the very beginning and it helped me to shape the whole story. Dance is her place, her world, her words. She doesn't always understand or put in words how she feels - she has to move in order to think, to understand herself.

### **Are you familiar with the world of dance?**

I love filmmaking because it brings you to different worlds. Every time I write different story, research is one of the most interesting parts. It allows you to meet and understand different people, communities.

This film opened three worlds for me: dance, deaf community and ace community. Of course, there are still

plenty of things I have to learn about these territories, but I was really interested to dive deeper and get to know these areas and people in them a bit better.

I was attracted to dance, dance performances, but was never an expert (also, not an expert now 😊), but of course getting ready for a film made me get more into it. Lead actress Greta Grinevičiūtė - she is a dancer and choreographer - helped a lot in answering some questions. Also, I try to follow what happens in theater in general, so dance is one of the most interesting and vivid parts of a theater in Lithuania.

### **Is the main actress a dancer with acting ability or an actress who has trained for the challenge of the role?**

Greta Grinevičiūtė is a dancer, choreographer, she is studying for a PhD where she is researching dance relationships with different medium.

Also she works as an actress in some performances (I saw her in the play even before starting a screenplay and she stuck in my mind). Even though she tried to deny that she is an actress, working with her was a great experience and she was one of the most professional, hardworking actors I have ever worked with. So I would say she is a dancer and a professional actor, for sure.







### Was the male character easy to cast?

I thought it would be more difficult, but when I met Kęstutis in a first casting, I felt calm that it's gonna be fine. Also, Kęstutis brought a lot to the character and helped me build Dovydas' character. And he was my advisor in the "male world".

Kęstutis is very different from Dovydas in real life, but he managed to have so much compassion and love for his character.

Kęstutis has a very analytical approach and he likes to work in theory a lot before approaching rehearsals, but when we got to hands-on stage, he was open to try many things and look for this character inside himself. I think this mix of him analyzing and then trying a lot (and being brave while doing it) helped a lot to navigate and build up Dovydas' character.

### The film succeeds very well in making the spectator enter the intimacy of the characters while remaining very respectful and avoiding any kind of voyeurism... how did you achieve that balance?

I felt close to my characters and I was spending time with them, rather than watching them from afar, maybe that helped?

Also, all scenes, even if they are intimate, are there for a reason. They help me to tell a story about their relationship.

### And do you feel that somehow your female gaze helped you as a director to tell this story with the right kind of benevolence towards the intimacy of your characters?

I was thinking a lot about female gaze and male gaze while writing and shooting film. Even the film talks about it in a way. Male gaze is something that Elena misses the most. Not sex itself, but being desired.

I thought that's interesting, because as a strong female in other circumstances she might try to deny it or wouldn't accept it about herself.

As a female director I do feel more connected to Elena's character in intimate scenes, so I can imagine exactly how she feels. She doesn't really enjoy any sexual interactions (except at the very end) so it was easy for me not to eroticize the scenes and go with her feelings.

### How did you go about telling this story? How did you construct the script? Did it involve a lot of research? Did you work with people from the asexual community?

While working on a screenplay I was mostly doing research online - reading about asexuality, watching YouTube (and later Tik Tok) creators and so on.

Also, I contacted a few people who identify as asexuals and they were very helpful answering my questions.



Researching - reading forums (AVEN - asexuality network), watching YouTube (Slice of Ace, AmeliaAce - were both recommended to me by my asexual contact) I was assured that every person's story and relationship with their sexuality is very different. That gave me the confidence to write characters that I thought were believable.

One asexual person wrote to me in an email: *"yeah, probably some people won't like it (we were discussing the ending of a film), but you know - you won't please everybody"*. That was a really simple thought, but it somehow put me at ease a bit.

Sexuality is such a wide spectrum and I believe it's sometimes hard to put oneself in a precise place because it might look different in a different relationship and even change over time.

That's why I was focusing on these particular characters - their love story and struggles.

**It is interesting that sign language is the first way of communication used by the two characters in their relationship. Can you discuss its importance and significance for you ?**

Sign language is an extremely beautiful language that is also very straightforward in some ways. You have to name people (give them sign-name) and it's usually based

on their appearance, you have to be very concrete and obvious when you speak.

Of course, there is a lot of poetry in it as well and many different art forms that come with it (like visual storytelling), but in general I admire its directness.

This for sure couldn't be said about the relationship of our characters and I liked the difference of it.

Also, what I find so interesting and I only started thinking about it when we were learning sign language for a film, is how deaf people could actually so easily be a part of the hearing world if only all of us knew the sign language. We can learn their language - but they can't learn ours.

Dovydas mentions in one scene that his brother is deaf and his parents hoped that *"he will change"*. That's a really small thing in the film, but for me it reminds of the oppression that deaf people were under (especially during Soviet occupation in my country). People were bullied into using their voice, deprived of talking in sign language. That is really horrible but it is still happening in some families (especially if the parents are not deaf).

I am writing all this because it reminds me in some ways how we are not able to accept people the way they are and we sometimes choose to believe that they can change. It's a parallel with asexuality as well.



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Can we say that both of them practice a visual language, the one of the body for her, the dance of words for him?

In a way, yes. In their visual languages they are safer than in a spoken word. So many things are left unsaid.

**The rock songs in the film are original compositions. Could you tell us where the artists come from, and the meaning of these songs?**

Most of the songs are created by our composer Irya Gmeyer and Martin Hederos. I was drawn to the special voice of Irya and the atmosphere of their songs. Also, Irya composed original music for the film. Irya's and Martin's music and songs add so much romance to the story.

The songs that Dovydas translates are by Lithuanian artists. The first song Klausyk, meloji (Listen, my dear) is composed by legendary Lithuanian electronic composer Teisutis Makačinas and is performed by Lithuanian girls rock band SHISHI.

Second song Troškimas (Desire) is created and performed by Lithuanian singer Monika Liu. She was our Eurovision entry in the year of 2022. She has a whole album with these romantic songs in the style of sixties Lithuanian variety.

Another Lithuanian artist who's song we use is r&b/hip hop artist Free Finga. We hear his song Testosteronas (Testosterone) when Elena is getting ready for a date.

Is their only compass "I'm not going to change you, me neither"?

At the same time, I believe 100% that they would say it.

When he says it, he's warning (or testing) her. She agrees with him and says the same. Why? My mom, after watching a film said: this story couldn't work out because they didn't change anything about themselves.

Maybe she's right, Usually, she is.

I think it's interesting how we hope to be with one another without really changing anything. In this case, of course, there are many things they can not change - Dovydas can't change his sexuality and Elena can not change her physical needs, but they could definitely try to change the way they communicate.

I find it interesting that Elena is the one who offers to be exclusive and Dovydas is the one who offers to discuss open relationships. They are both trying to guess others' needs while suggesting something they don't really want.

**They have to give their own meaning to the words loyalty, virility, jealousy. This gives each spectator the opportunity to think about it too?**

For sure. Their relationship for me was a puzzle, a math problem I had to solve. That's why I struggled and at the same time enjoyed the writing process so much. I had to rethink everything that I thought about relationships,



question everything that is ‘common sense’, that ‘goes without saying’.

It was so interesting to watch people’s reactions when I told them what my film is about. Some people would go silent and start thinking, calculating in their heads (*‘could I do it?’*) and others would go: *‘IT’S IMPOSSIBLE. THEY WON’T MAKE IT’* immediately.

**By telling a story of love without sexuality, by showing a dancer with curves, is there a will to fight against the clichés?**

I have this theory. There are so many clichés in stories (and in our heads) not because life is this or that, it is because

we keep on writing the same things, because we see them on screen.

There is nothing in my film that couldn’t happen, I’m not imagining everything. I just like to observe the world a lot and then I want to be as truthful as possible.

I want to see different people on screen, different kinds of relationships, people who are lost, people who are not in a relationship or the ones who are, but who could hardly define them.

Maybe it is a fight after all. I think I’m just really bored of seeing one way in which people live (just the way drunk Dovydas talks in a car 😊).



@THEREALCODYWEBB  
SHARED HIS THOUGHTS ON SLOW



Cody Webb is a comedian and content creator from Portland, Oregon. He is also known for The Ace Council on TikTok, where he discusses issues for asexual people and the queer community at large. You can find him on all platforms at [@TheRealCodyWebb](https://www.instagram.com/TheRealCodyWebb).

"What struck me immediately is that I could tell this film was thoroughly researched. A lot of the experiences in the film were very familiar to me as an asexual person. The reactions of Dovydas, the main male character, and everyone else around him are very honest and believable. I did not know what to expect, as often in fiction you get the usual stereotypes, but here the characters are complex. They both really try to make the relationship work. They have the same issues any other couple could have, such as personalities clashing, jealousy, lack of communication... Instead of trying to be themselves, they try to be the person they think the other wants them to be.

In general, I thought the film was a very good representation of asexuality but also people's reaction to it, and trying to make things work as an asexual person with someone who's not asexual. For instance, the initial reaction when Dovydas comes out and Elena laughs and assumes that is because he doesn't like her, this is something that happens. People assume that attraction is always the same, so if you're not attracted sexually, there can be nothing more than platonic friendship.

I think **SLOW** could help some asexual people understand what they go through, as it takes a while to figure out who you are if you don't have a community around you. Of course, I wouldn't recommend this film to the sex-repulsed part of the asexual community, as it is probably not something they would like to see. And for non-asexual people, it is important for them to understand the complexities of asexual people. It is going to take some time for them to understand asexuality, and that is fine. As long as they are trying to! If you're watching this movie and are putting in a good amount of effort, it is ultimately a good thing!"

CAST

Elena

Greta Grinevičiūtė

Dovydas

Kęstutis Cicėnas

CREW

CINEMATOGRAPHER

Laurynas Bareiša

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Sigita Šimkūnaitė

EDITOR

Silvija Vilkaitė

COMPOSERS

Irya Gmeyner  
Martin Hederos  
Vincent Barrière

CHOREOGRAPHER

Anna Vnuk

SOUND DESIGNER

Diego Staub

COSTUME DESIGNER

Fausta Naujalė

MAKE-UP DESIGNER

Jurgita Globytė

PRODUCTION MANAGERS

Justinas Pocius  
Rūta Petronytė



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Xunta de Galicia  
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ASSOCIATE PRODUCER  
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