

Take a Walk on the Shorts' Side. ClujShorts International Short Film Festival, 3rd edition (23-29 March)

There's no such thing as small festivals and movies. There are just events that keep growing and films that want to be great in spite of their brevity. This may be the alternate catch phrase for this year's ClujShorts International Short Film Festival Edition, hosted in Cluj-Napoca, 2015 European Youth Capital.

For the third year in a row, the organizers tried to think big in spite of their thus far concise history and financing: 160 short films selected from more than 600 submitted, 55 competing films for the ClujShorts trophy and lots of daily events.

Call Her Lotte! (Sie Heisst Jetzt Lotte) was the apple of jury's eyes receiving the ClujShorts 2015 Trophy. Director Annkathrin Wetzel showed some boldness in attacking a rather difficult subject due to its grand predecessors' portrayal of various cases of Holocaust heroes and trying to box up a rather large amount of dramatic moments in the film's 17 minutes, as the relationship between Maria (a German actress) and Lea



(her Jewish friend) develops. Despite this quite conventional story, with a rather predictable plot, especially with those familiar with famous Jewish leader Charlotte Knobloch's biography, Wetzel shows her firm directing style and true abilities to epitomize an otherwise dense story. Unfortunately, the 2D ClujShorts projection lacked the impact of the stereoscopic images that altogether with a special Google Glass trans-media game created a

buzz in Cannes in 2014.

The winner for the best student film in festival, *Berlin Troika*, directed by Andrej Gontcharov showed a more toned and unselfconscious take at decision making in time of great political turmoil. The clean-cut acting and Gontcharov's subtle humor take the absurd events around a young interpreter to a paroxysmal ending revealing that ethics can be sacrificed for the largely greater good of saving maybe millions of lives. The same theme, but with a grimmer outcome because of its contemporary

urgency, was approached in Dustin Loose's film *Side Effects* (*Zu Risiken Und Nebenwirkungen*), where a scientist has only a few minutes to decide whether the saving of millions of people affected by malaria can compensate endangering the lives of other patients. The brief and harsh resolution would scandalize no matter of your personal side on the subject, as the greater good feeds on an equally immoral decision.

The 2015 Best directing award went to Cyprus, for *5 Ways to die* (*5 Τρόποι Να Πεθάνεις*), a closely guided black-comedy based on a story by Fanos Christophides and directed by Daiana Papadaki. The repeated suicide attempts by Makis, to the interpretation of whom the comedy actor Mihalis Marinou contributes a Keatonesque blast, are closely followed by the director, to prevent the risk of repetitiveness and, thus, the spoiling of the most important surprises. This adds up to a neat and bleak atmosphere which is, however, full of humorous details.

Two very poetic documentary short films were awarded the best documentary film trophies and the jury's special prize: *Why I Write* (*Por Qué Escribo*), directed by Gaizka Urresti & Vicky Calavia, respectively, *Boulevard's End*, directed by Nora Fingscheidt. While the former looks into the most intimate reasons for writing a piece of literature, deeply relying on famous Spanish writer Félix Romeo's captivating answer on the same topic, the latter is a fascinating visual poem of togetherness, that the young German director finds at Venice Pier, a stranded place near Los Angeles. The camera observes the lives of those around, as they also act for

or pose in front of it, while off-screen an Austrian immigrant and a post-9/11 New York "refugee" recount moments of their lives. In her first documentary, Fingscheidt is curious, playful and natural, thus attaining a very intimate vintage postcard view of this place and these people.

ClujShorts 2015 was one of the most interesting places to be for animation lovers, for both in and off competition short features, and the special animation classes and projections for preschoolers and grade-schoolers. From the eight competing short animated films, the jury awarded the grand prize to the French 3D horror *Raphaël*, a collaborative project of Chloé Adenot, Baptiste Bourdon, Léa Delachapelle, Lou Thomas, Michaël Vigouroux. Placed in a medieval setting, the film follows closely a young apprentice's perilous chasing of a shadow character in a forbidden place. As he goes further on his way, the bizarre objects and the menacing dark music warn of his imminent destruction. Short and effective, *Raphaël* was indeed one of the most entertaining and haunting pieces of animations throughout the festival.

This year's audience award went to the very young Brazilian director Breno Moreira for his sly mock-instructional short movie *There ain't no bad directing when you shoot pretty girls*. A long title rephrasing Godard's famous words "All you need for a movie is a gun and a girl" for a small film with no particular point. But, sometimes, all you need for a movie is an ill-tempered woman, a bottle of Scotch and a sackful of regrets, like in the very short darkish comedy *Counsellor*, directed by young Australian director Venetia Taylor. The

two-minute film is simple and poignant, and casts gloomy shadows on career guidance in a post-crisis society.

Due to Cluj-Napoca being selected as this year's European Youth Capital, the jury awarded the Portugal-Spain co-production *Children of the river (Os Meninos do Rio)* with the Young Europe prize. Young Spanish director Javier Macipe follows in a semi-documentary style Portuguese boys and girls that spend their free time jumping in the Duero River from the tall Luis I bridge near Oporto. Using many non-professional actors and their families, Macipe manages to reveal stylish yet authentic generational portrait.

One of the most accurately constructed places in the entire festival came from the Armenian director Vagenak Balayan and his short comedy drama *Bear Mountain*. The classic storyline of a man with a mission is enriched with a fine-point showing of the everyday life of an Armenian village, its people and its customs, that unfolds while following a husband who wants to fulfill his wife's eccentric last wish. Adding the fine humor and the neat casting, *Bear Mountain* is a promising debut feature for Balayan.

The local film critics and journalists chose the German MMORPG-crossed lovers *Still Got Lives (Ich Hab Noch Auferstehung)* for their special award. Favored by many festivals around the world, Jan-Gerrit Seyler's short film revolves around young love in the most extreme conditions, and features delicate scenes of virtual and real-life delicacy and chivalry as the director strives to shun melodrama by cutting short the sequences prone to it.

The other awards of the 2015 ClujShorts IFF were received by Suso Hernández for her rock-scissor-paper short mockumentary *Citizen Torralba Redux (Ciudadano Torralba Redux)* – Best screenplay; Jonas Berlin for the excellent cinematography of the Danish film *Sailor's Song (Sómmand)*; Tiago Inuit for the eerie music and sound design of Portuguese sci-fi dystopia *Terra 2084*; Yoann Gourdon for the effective editing of the ghostly horror short *Puzzle*, directed by Rémy Rondeau. Two more films were selected by the jury for the precise portrayal of their characters by young actors Inaki Mur (*Saguine craving / Pulsión sangriente*) and Katrin Wolter (*Registered / Das Mädchen von Kasse 2*).

After a full week of short movies and events, ClujShorts IFF confirmed the already well-known fact that the greatness of a film never resides in its length, and that a serious walk on the short film boulevard is always rewarding for both audience and film professionals. Thus we may say Cluj-Napoca makes a significant promise to become one of the most interesting spaces to meet new names and innovative ideas for the cinema to come.

DANIEL IFTENE

Teaching Assistant Babeş-Bolyai University,
danieliftene@gmail.com



Rares Stoica, artistic director of the ClujShorts International Festival, Cluj-Napoca, March 2015



Ștefana and Ioan Pop-Curșeu announcing the awards for The Best Student Short Movie and for the Jury Award, with Dragoș Pop and Ana Munte, March 29th, 2015.