

**Transilvania IFF.23 - Official Competition & What's Up, Doc?**

*Cluj-Napoca, May 16, 2024.*

Dedicated to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> time directors, the international competitions of the **23rd Transilvania International Film Festival** (Cluj-Napoca, June 14-24, 2024) have been announced. 12 productions are running for the Transilvania Trophy and the other awards of the **Official Competition**, while 10 documentaries will compete for the **What's Up, Doc?** award.

*"The films of the Official Competition tell stories about atypical characters, their reactions to social pressures and the need for connection, affirmation, or independence. Intimate dramas, absurd comedies, unconventional melodramas or family chronicles of different calibers, with a slight predilection for stories of young people at crossroads."* (Mihai Chirilov, artistic director, Transilvania IFF)

After winning the directing award at the previous edition of Transilvania IFF with *Charcoal*, Brazilian director Carolina Markowicz returns to the Official Competition with *Toll*, a film about a mother whose love for her son is so great that she will do anything to raise money to send him to a "healing" camp for homosexuality.

In another corner of the world, in India, the protagonist of *The Adamant Girl* (r. PS Vinothraj, previously awarded at Transilvania IFF for his debut *Pebbles*) also struggles with an absurd situation due to the deeply patriarchal society that cannot conceive that a young woman could decide whom to love. Also from India, *Girls Will Be Girls* (r. Shuchi Talati) is a coming-of-age story of a teenager from a Himalayan boarding school whose mother seems to have not experienced maturity herself.

Winner of the Big Screen competition at the Rotterdam Festival, *The Old Bachelor* (r. Oktay Baraheni) is a chamber family drama of Shakespearean proportions, where the cause of the problems is the same patriarchal world (this time, Iran) that doesn't know how or doesn't want to function differently.

*Summer Brother* (r. Joren Molter, Netherlands) is a sharp debut about an apparently hopeless family and the youngest son forced to grow up suddenly to save himself. The theme of adolescence and family is also explored in *The Other Son* (r. Juan Sebastián Quebrada, Colombia), in which a young man tries to make peace with his brother's death and find a way to continue his life.

Inspired by the stories of migrants who left Andalusia for Catalonia, *Permanent Picture* (r. Laura Ferrés, Spain) is a fascinating blend of comedy, realism, and melodrama in which a casting director wanders the outskirts of Barcelona in search of "normal" faces for the image campaign of a political party.

*The Dreamer* (r. Anaïs Tellenne, France) is a fairy tale about the unforeseen power of art. Raphael, a golem-like man, without an eye, lives with his mother and takes care of an abandoned mansion. The appearance of the domain's heiress, an eccentric artist, will disrupt his existence.

A meditation on art, but also a corrosive study of a radical identity crisis, in *Daniel Auerbach* (Israel) David Volach plays his own role, that of a director stuck in pre-production of his new film after the success of his debut. Crossing the destinies and trajectories of several seemingly disparate characters, *Day Tripper* (r. Yanqi Chen) is a delicious mix of Kaurismäki and Roy Andersson, and, at the same time, an unexpectedly acidic and comic chronicle of today's China. In the same satirical vein, but with an extra shot of vitriol, *The Hypnosis* (r. Ernst de Geer, Sweden) is about an apparently perfect couple

whose marital balance is ruined after one of them undergoes a hypnosis session to quit smoking but instead begins to shed inhibitions.

Directed by Cătălin Rotaru and Gabi Virginia Șarga, the only Romanian film in the Official Competition is a detonating cocktail of genres, mixing black comedy with melodrama and frequently playing with the absurd. **Where Elephants Go** is the story of an unlikely friendship between two nonconformist heroes - Leni, a feisty and energetic 9-year-old girl, and Marcel, a homeless, agitated, and mocking young man - both facing difficult moments in life.

### **The What's Up, Doc? Competition**

It's the third year in which the **What's Up Doc?** section has a dedicated competition within the Transilvania International Film Festival, and the 10 selected titles propose an extension of the idea of documentary, bringing together classic formats, hybrids, and even fiction cleverly disguised in the verité aesthetics of the genre.

*"The stake of the What's Up, Doc? selection was ambitious from the start: that of not confining it to the stale conventions of the documentary genre - with an added risk this year, in which we chose not to perpetuate the inflation of heavily political films that opportunistically populate similar international competitions, and to build an alternative reality, a refuge zone from dominant narratives. Not from defiance, but with the hope that the sole dive into the program will have the raw, but welcomed force of a gut-punch."*  
(Mihai Chirilov)

**April in France** (r. David Boaretto) begins after the pandemic lockdown, in which a 5-year-old girl lives a nightmare when she has to leave London where she grew up and temporarily move to the medieval village in France where her great-great-grandfather came from. What seemed like a torment at first becomes a magical experience for both her and the locals.

Danish octogenarians speak about losing a loved one in **Echo of You** (r. Zara Zerny), an emotional film about love, fidelity, and death. **Eternal You** (r. Hans Block, Moritz Riesewieck, Germany) also addresses the theme of losing a loved one, but from a futuristic and extremely provocative perspective: services that offer the possibility to dialogue with a digital clone of the lost ones. How does this change the idea of mourning?

Fouad is a young Moroccan who has been living in Italy undocumented for ten years. Daniela is a former drug addict from a wealthy family. Their meeting is a promise of a better future. In **Casablanca**, director Adriano Valerio followed the destinies of the two for 7 years, outlining a love story as heartbreaking as the film's title.

In defence of the idea that the most devastating true stories take time is the documentary **Alice On&Off**. The only Romanian title in the competition tells the story of a girl who becomes a mother at 16, a decision driven by her love for a man much older than her. Filmed over 10 years, director Isabela Tent's film is an unexpectedly empathetic portrait of an adult life begun prematurely.

**The Featherweight** (r. Robert Kolodny) sends us straight to the 1960s, into the life of Italian American boxer Willie Pep, who at 40, after a life full of disappointments, decides to return to the ring. It's a story about masculinity and fame, reminiscent of Darren Aronofsky's **The Wrestler**, and at the same time, a Trojan horse in the competition.

Directors Bálint Révész and Dávid Mikulán filmed Kix for 12 years, ever since he was a kid in Budapest with a problematic family and who didn't quite manage at school. Like **Boyhood**,

**Kix** is one of those works that make you witness, in a short time, an important part of a person's life forced to mature prematurely.

**La Reine** (r. Nikola Klinger, Czech Republic), an experimental essay about individual and collective memory in a suspended world, introduces us to Ian, a 73-year-old man whose bohemian life has always been marked by drug addiction. Now, he lives in a former lavender processing plant, turned into a home for a community withdrawn from civilization.

It's never too late to fulfill your childhood dream: at 52, Dutch director Rogier Kappers tries to learn to play the glass organ, a musical instrument made of glasses in **Glass, My Unfulfilled Life**, which includes, among other things, a meeting with the famous composer Arvo Pärt.

The razor's edge premise of **Danger Zone** (r. Vita Maria Drygas, Poland) might seem, at first glance, fiction, but it's as true as can be. Once you accept this, you can dive headfirst into the fascinating universe of agencies that sell vacations in conflict zones to thrill-seeking tourists. What for many is a tragedy becomes, thus, the amusement of others. For a hefty price, of course.

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