

EDITORIAL**Why Sofia ?**

Second, because last June in La Rochelle we awarded a prize to Andrey Paounov's wonderful film "The Mosquito Problem", produced by the Bulgarian company Agit Prop, in co-production with ITVS, FilmTank Hamburg, in association with ZDF-ARTE, YLE Teema, and with the support of Media Plus and the National Film Centre of Bulgaria... (Sorry about the poor company!). We'll hear more about this fine film later, in an interview with its producer, Martichka Bozhilova.

Lastly, because in Eastern Europe we have found fresh projects, new talent, and a desire and a willingness to overcome any obstacle in order to tell strong stories, with humour and with a technical expertise inherited from the best film school traditions.

This Rendez-Vous, and the introductions it will facilitate, is the first of its kind. It's part of our job at Sunny Side to be aware of innovation and new developments, and we want Western broadcasters and producers to discover for themselves what we've seen approaching in recent years: an Easterly wind, blowing over the documentary landscape. We hope that fruitful partnerships will be seeded in Sofia, and new co-productions will see the light of day.

Broadcasters are coming from all over Europe: ARTE, France Televisions, MDR, YLE, RTBF, ProSieben, The History Channel, Channel 4, BBC, as well as from a number of Eastern European countries; to share the projects they support, and to discover new ones.

We will even be welcoming a Brazilian delegation!

The great novelty of this 6th Rendez-Vous is its pan-European character. Previously, we've organised bilateral events (France - UK last year in London), but this time we are opening the event to all Europeans involved in international projects.

The crisis is here; it's a worry for us all, and it disrupts the markets. But we must come together, move forward, and support exchanges. With less money in each country it becomes all the more essential and intelligent to pool our resources, to co-produce. Perhaps there's a lesson here for the whole of Europe !

For all these reasons, the Sofia Rendez-Vous will be an opportunity for documentary filmmakers to gather across borders and to build on hope again. Trust me: the quality of the selected projects will justify both your journey and your undivided attention!

Yves Jeanneau

**DOSSIER**

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A fresh wind blows in from the East !

Documentaries from Eastern Europe are headed toward the 'Seventh art'! Need convincing? Just take a look at the acclaim each film produced by the Bulgarian company Agit Prop has received (an interview with Agit Prop producer Martichka Bozhilova follows later in this newsletter). Just take a look at Andrey Paounov's *The Mosquito problem* and other stories, released in 2007 and showered with a multitude of awards, including the Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival and the 2008 Sunny Side of the Doc grand prize. In fact, such success is no accident. For more than four years the East has laboured to dig out new talented documentary filmmakers. As an example, every year the Prague-based Institute of Documentary Film (IDF) gives the filmmakers the opportunity to present their works in progress, through the now established rapid-pitch, or "speed dating" approach. The filmmakers can thus convince producers to follow them in their adventures. And unique adventures do often originate from Docu Talents. It has even become an emerging trend in the former Soviet bloc after the yoke of collectivism fell away. As IDF's Rezkova Hanka remarks, "movies that have proved successful at the moment are not the result of a compromise of European tastes. They are often bold stories told with a strong cinematic style." The Sofia Rendezvous organized by Sunny Side will be another opportunity to witness the quality of documentaries blowing in from the East...

Cristina Hoffman, Sunny Side's consultant "The West has a mentoring role to play !"

Where does documentary film production in Eastern Europe find itself twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall ?

« I have to admit that the situation has not improved. Far from it. In the Eastern Bloc documentaries were actually being produced by state owned studios, and although centrally planned, we produced a certain number of documentaries each year, especially in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Today the documentary exists only through a sort of parallel market, a system of struggling resourcefulness. The finished products have rare visibility on television channels, which are submerged in the madness of reality TV, talk shows and US series. What's more, documentaries or short films are no longer screened at movie houses and cinemas, as had always been the case in Romania, for example. »

Is there a risk that "true" documentaries will disappear from these countries ?

« It should be a cause for concern because fewer people still cultivate the "true" art form, four or five in each country at most. This is where the West, with its expertise, has a role to play: A mentoring role. It should be our duty, especially

in these times of crisis that disrupt the market, to lift the East's talents out of their box, not only teach them to create documentaries in the finest traditions of the art, but also to co-finance their projects as an opening to international markets. This is the motivation behind organising the 6th co-production Rendezvous in Sofia. It's also the impetus of the Franco-German channel Arte for bringing together directors and producers from these countries at the ARISTOTLE WORKSHOP in Romania, March 8 - 9, 2009.

« Because of the relative low cost of a documentary in comparison to drama, project candidates do make ends meet with their budgets most years, scrapping together support from national film centres and the other private funds, but there is a perverse effect in this. Because they somehow succeed in making ends meet, these new talents tend to stay home, whereas it is more important than ever to pool our resources across borders. The success of Andrey Paounov's film *The Mosquito Problem* is a perfect example of what can be achieved. »



Martichka Bozhilova (Agit Prop) *The Mosquito Problem... An artistic success story*

What is very special in "Mosquito Problem and other stories" is the highly cinematographic aesthetic of the film. Several times in the doc, we get the feeling we're in a theater movie with actors or actress playing their own roles. How did you arrive at that result ?



One of the colorful characters of "The Mosquito Problem and Other Stories"

It lies on the border between genres, where real characters and events are placed within the dramaturgy and aesthetics of a fictional story. As a matter of fact, we've already been complimented on this - that the film looks like a feature film with actors - while actually it is a real documentary with real people being filmed. All of AGITPROP's films are known for this cross-genre peculiarity, which was called "the kitchen of Bulgarian non-fiction".

In terms of the technical aspects, the photography in particular is beautiful. Did you shoot the doc with a film camera or with a video camera?

The film was shot on S16 mm by the wonderful cinematographic duo Boris Missirkov and Georgi Bogdanov, who worked with the director Andrey Paounov on this film and also the previous one - "Georgi and the Butterflies".

Did you have problems finding the money to produce this film or is it easier now than a few years ago to find co-producers in Bulgaria or outside your country ?

It's always been difficult to raise money for a high quality and artistic documentary film. "The Mosquito Problem and other stores" is a major worldwide co-production including Bulgaria, Germany, USA and associate TV partners from the UK, the Netherlands and Finland. The financing process took nearly three years and in the end we had to deliver different versions. It is getting more and more accessible for Bulgaria to produce internationally but also more competitive.



Despite a little about a priori seller Mosquito Problem wowed audiences internationally through its artistic quality

Are you surprised that your film has been such an international success, since it's a very special story about a lost village? Do you think it's because there is something universal about the human condition in this film?

The film was much anticipated given the huge success enjoyed by the same team's previous film, "Georgi and the Butterflies". At the same time, the film's subject seemed extremely difficult and "non-commercial" at the first glance. But its many prestigious awards and worldwide acclaim highlighted its high artistic quality and universal meaning.

The Bulgarian "New Wave" in Sofia !

Producer Patrick Sandrin, founder of Sofilm and the "La Classe Libre" foundation, has taken on the role of "ambassador" for the Bulgarian new wave.



Patrick Sandrin



Executive producer with Sofilm, Patrick Sandrin has organised "La Classe Libre", a programme of "Paris/Sofia interactive conferences", in partnership with the critic and former editor-in-chief of Cahiers du Cinéma, Charles Tesson, since 2005

"I've always produced what I want to produce. I'm guided by a sense of adventure and a certain aesthetic."

This guiding principle led Sandrin to work alongside unconventional directors like Alain Fleischer, Werner Herzog and Nikita Mikhalkov, for whom he introduced and developed the concept for *Urga*, which won a Lion d'Or in Venice in 1991. At the same time, the French producer, a member of numerous CNC (Centre National de la Cinématographie) committees, including the ECO fund to support films produced in ex-Eastern bloc countries, visited Bulgaria to help rewrite and develop a project launched by a young local director. "This country had a profound effect on me - the countryside, the history, the qualities of its people, which enabled them to survive with dignity the economic slump that followed the fall of the iron curtain," explains Sandrin. "They basically needed work and I was able to help them." Sandrin started by co-producing four films and a documentary for Arte and Canal Plus.

Bulgaria very quickly revealed itself to be a land of a thousand possibili-

ties, including the remake of Bunuel's *Paris/Sofia interactive conferences* El by Chilean director Valéria Sarmien-

In contrast, Sandrin had to go to enormous lengths to raise money to shoot films in France or South America. The French producer went on to create his own executive production company, Sofilm, in 1995. Bulgaria and Sofilm have a lot going for them, including a pool of quality actors, extras on very low union wage rates, accessible shooting locations and unbeatable construction costs for sets, all combined with high French production and film crew standards. In fact, Sandrin's services were soon in demand in the west. He became "a sort of ambassador" for Bulgaria, although under no circumstances did he want Sofilm to become an "NGO". Sandrin believed it was vital to "help creative talent in Bulgaria move away from their country's arcane clientelist approach to production."

In 2005, Sandrin decided to open a window onto the world by creating, in partnership with the critic and former editor-in-chief of the Cahiers de Cinéma, Charles Resson, a programme of

called *La Classe Libre*, with the aim of showing Bulgarian creative types "what we can do with film".

They soon became highly sought after events, explains Sandrin, as "opportunities for sharing ideas and material, styles and practices." As well as aesthetics, discussions also centre on criticism and, consequently, politics and ethics.

Up until now, Sofia has primarily played host to filmmakers from outside Bulgaria. This fourteenth event, however, will provide a showcase for the "new wave" of Bulgarian documentary filmmaking for participants at Sunny Side on 14 March. Sandrin is convinced of its value: "The opening up of Bulgaria in the broadest sense of the term, economically, politically and culturally, will no doubt help speed up the emergence of new national talents. The digital revolution has created a new state of affairs that has transformed the practices of the country's creative minds and their areas of experimentation."

6th Coproduction Rendez-Vous in Sofia, from 11 to 14 March 2009

Adieu Comrade : a new project in the Eastern Europe !

A pitch for the Arte project, "Adieu Comrade", a series of six 52-minute documentaries retracing the history of the Soviet bloc, will be presented at the Sofia Rendez-Vous organised by the Sunny Side of the Doc. "All the conditions were in place to develop this unique approach to the way Arte operates," explains Pierrette Ominetti, director of the channel's creative documentaries unit. "In fact, this highly ambitious project, based on an original idea by Artline Films, quickly turned into a group project: Arte's three main offices - in Germany, France and its headquarters in Strasbourg - are going to work on it in partnership, partnerships, that goes without saying." Although Arte's international relations department has been working closely with certain east European countries for several years, particularly Romania, the channel's creative documentaries unit does not have a strategy or a framework plan for this part of Europe. In fact, most of the proposals it receives to work with East European countries come from French producers. However, Arte has already worked with Lech Kowalski, Sergei Dvorzevoi and other pure products of the East European documentary school.

Sunny Side NEWS

20th SUNNY SIDE OF THE DOC : registrations now open

You'll also find the results of the "20 Years of Sunny Side" competition on our website : <http://www.sunnysideofthedoc.com>

BIPS at Sunny Side for the first time

For the first time, Sunny Side is organising themed pitch sessions. THE BIPS - Best International Projects Showcase.

Project selection: Send your projects before 5 April 2009 to events@sunnysideofthedoc.com

Only six projects will be selected for each theme (history, the environment, politics and society, art and culture, science, and cinema). Your project will need to raise at least 20% of the project's total finances to be selected. The project must be certified either by a channel or one of the following bodies: IDF / DOK Leipzig / Discovery Campus / Sheffield Doc/Fest / Britdoc / Sundance Institute / Hot Docs/ Silverdocs / History Makers / EBU – UER / Le Festival de Nyon / Sunny Side of the Doc.

Prizes will be awarded to the best BIPS!

Sunny Side will present one prize of €2000 for each category. This sum will be awarded to producers to help them develop their projects.