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NY THEATRICAL RELEASE: APRIL 29TH

LA THEATRICAL RELEASE: JUNE 10TH

SYNOPSIS

VIKTORIA

Dir. Maya Vitkova

Bulgaria/Romania / 2014 / 155 min / DCP

In Bulgarian, with English subtitles

Aspect ratio: 2.39:1 Sound: Dolby

Official Selection – World Dramatic Competition – Sundance Film Festival; Official Selection – Rotterdam Intl. Film Festival; Official Selection – Göteborg Intl. Film Festival; Special Jury Award – Transilvania Intl. Film Festival; Critics’ Award – REC Tarragona Intl. Film Festival; Special Jury Prize – CinEast (Luxembourg); Youth Jury Award – OFF PLUS CAMERA;

Maya Vitkova’s stunning debut feature **Viktoria** follows three generations of women in the final years of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria and the early years of the new government, focusing on reluctant mother Boryana and her daughter, Viktoria, who in one of the film’s surreal, magical touches is born without an umbilical cord. Though unwanted by her mother, Viktoria is named the country’s Baby of the Decade, and is showered with gifts and attention until the disintegration of the East Bloc. Despite throwing their worlds off balance, the resulting political changes also allow for the possibility of reconciliation.

Viktoria is both personal and universal, demonstrating a precocious command of all elements of the filmmaking process—most notably, the film’s visual sensibility and its command of a range of shifting tones, from absurdist humor to political allegory to deeply moving familial drama.

Vitkova, named a Producer on the Move by the European Film Promotion in Cannes, wrote, produced and directed **Viktoria** through her own production company Viktoria Films (Bulgaria) and Anca and Cristi Puiu’s Mandragora (Romania).

PRESS

“A strikingly assured and ambitious feature debut...**VIKTORIA** has a touch of “Garp” and “The Tin Drum,” as well as plenty of dryly absurdist Eastern European humor in its tale of a young woman whose first two decades of life are sharply divided by the fall of communism in Bulgaria... an arresting mix of satire, surrealism and ambivalently angsty drama, with the helmer in precocious full command of pacing, tone and aesthetics... **VIKTORIA** heralds such a fascinating filmic sensibility that one eagerly looks forward to whatever Vitkova does next” – Dennis Harvey, *Variety*

“Irmena Chichikova as Boryana steals the screen. With deep set eyes and razor sharp cheek bones that recall Charlotte Rampling in her heyday, she’s not only striking to look at but subtly expressive. Though she puts on a stoic front, her final scene hints at the deep and invisible motivations of her character...” –Emma Myers, *indiewire*

“A bold and ambitious attempt to distill several decades of Bulgarian change and upheaval set against her plot’s often surreal structure...Vitkova certainly makes a great impact with her first film. She is a talent to watch.” – Mark Adams, *Screen Daily*

AN INTERVIEW WITH VIKTORIA DIRECTOR MAYA VITKOVA

by Filmmaker Magazine Staff

Attention, our audience's and our own — it's a valued commodity these days. We struggle to command our audience's attention, for them to discover our work and then, once they've discovered it, to actually focus on it. Meanwhile, we struggle to focus our own attention, to fight our society's weapons of mass distraction so we can not just see our work to completion but fully discover the meanings within it. What role does attention play in your work? Can you discuss an instance where you thought about some aspect of attention when it came to your film?

While working on *Viktoria's* script, I thought that attracting attention is crucially important for successful presentation and a step closer to realizing the film. The early stage selections of the project — the Script & Pitch Workshops, the Balkan Fund, the Berlinale Talent Project Market, the NIPKOW Programm, EKRAN Programme of Andrzej Wajda's Master School of Film Directing and others — quickly attracted attention to *Viktoria*, but that slowed down the realization of the film. People were pointing out that the project is innovative and appealing, but also very ambitious for a first-time director due to the complexity of the story, the long research and preparation needs, the difficult production (child actors, tough locations, special make-up, etc.), the CGI shots and so on. Everything was leading to securing a substantial European budget in order to make the film. I've found myself caught into Catch-22 — on one hand people expected me to be experienced in order to make an ambitious debut feature (and help securing the budget), on the other I was not experienced as that was my first feature. Attracting attention at the beginning made the journey longer...

I never lacked attention in my life. I had to change a few primary / secondary schools because I was wild at heart (please see the character Viktoria while she's on top — untouchable), although having excellent marks. I didn't let anyone tell me what to do — there were no authority figures. I started reading classic literature when I was 10. I saw a film that made me want to do what I am doing now when I was 12. I've been seeing hundreds of films until I turned 18. That all gave me self-esteem — following my dream has been giving me strength and confidence. When I was 18 I was accepted into the National academy for theatre and film arts and there freely expressed my mind, was always opinionated, fighting for what I believed in (attracting attention again) until 6 September 1997, when I fell into a 3-metre hole. After a few months at the hospital, at home, I started coming to my senses, but my world has changed (please see Viktoria when this happens to her). While doing *Viktoria*, I've been thinking about it — telling a personal and honest story made the question of attention highly important for building up the plot and developing Viktoria's character.

When I started working independently (producing along with directing), I began considering attention differently. I required my colleagues to keep everything related to the film entirely confidential during the research, preproduction, shooting and postproduction phases. Usually the first day of production in Bulgaria (I suppose everywhere else) is used for promoting the film throughout TV and newspaper media. Film industry professionals and representatives of cultural and financial institutions are invited to celebrate it with the crew over a glass of champagne after the first shot, but not in *Viktoria's* case. We didn't drink champagne after the first shot, but after the last one. I consider it a wise decision. *Viktoria* has been very

important to me ever since the moment the story was born into my mind and heart, not only because I wanted to express myself as a debut filmmaker but since the shooting day of a film main subject of the film has been and still is crucial for me – you cannot start your life until you learn to love and no attention would ever replace love (in that case parental), even if millions adore you.

Viktoria is dedicated to my mother and if some viewers give a call to their own mothers after seeing this film, I will know that we did well.

CAST

Irmena Chichikova
Daria Vitkova
Kalina Vitkova
Mariana Krumova
Dimo Dimov
Georgi Spasov

Boryana
Viktoria (2nd age)
Viktoria (3rd age)
Dima
Ivan
Todor Zhivkov

CREDITS

Director, writer & producer
Maya Vitkova

Co-producer
Anca Puiu

Cinematography
Krum Rodriguez

Editor
Alexander Etimov

Production design
Rin Yamamura

Costume design
Kristina Tomova

Composer
Kaloyan Dimitrov

Sound design
Kamen Atanasov

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