

# Martina Sakova about SUMMER REBELS

*“A big head on a big screen”*

The poster of SUMMER REBELS shows young Jonas biting a watermelon. A perfect illustration for a film that is like a watermelon in itself, summery, sweet and in bright colours, but with a few feisty pits to crack. This German-Slovak co-production, directed by Martina Sakova, was pitched in Zlin and Warsaw, and will now have its European festival premiere in the Zlin Film Festival.

11 year old Jonas expects lots of fun and action for the summer holidays, visiting grandpa Bernard in Slovakia, like they always used to do when dad was still alive. When mum decides to scrap that plan, Jonas is stunned. He promptly packs his bags and sets off on his own, from his German hometown all the way to Slovakia. But grandpa Bernard is not in the best of moods, and Jonas is pretty much left to his fate. Teaming up with his new friend Alex, together they develop a series of criminally good ideas... and

end up with the police at their heels.

## What is this special bond between children and grandparents?

Martina Sakova: Often in summer children will spend two weeks at their grandparents place, for the first time away from their parents. These are the days when their personality evolves. Since grandparents – different from parents – don't try to keep control over their grandchildren, they can feel what freedom is about. This special moment we wanted to capture in the film.

## Do you have specific memories of spending the holidays with your grandparents?

Sakova: Beautiful memories! For an entire month we stayed in an unknown town, playing with new friends on the streets or around my grandparents house. It was great! Many memories from co-author Sülke Schulz and me are incorporated in the story.



Sülke's grandfather was like grandpa Bernard, while the road trip comes from my memories.

## Tell us about Jonas' position in his family.

Sakova: His father died less than two years ago, and ever since a conflict has been growing in the family. Jonas has accepted his father's death, but he can't accept his family splitting up, especially not since this deprives him of spending the summer holidays with his granddad. Now life is full of obstacles, only because of the adults not being able to deal with a great loss. Travelling to his granddad is also about bringing the family back together. Mum is not exactly a sweet,

loving woman at first sight, but imagine being a single mum, struggling all the time with two little boys, and then one of them decides to travel 600 kilometres to Slovakia... How would you react?

## There is this crucial thing that Jonas says to Alex: “Do you also feel sometimes like you don't belong here?”

Sakova: When two outsiders meet, they will recognise each other as such and connect. What Jonas and Alex have in common is growing up with their mothers, without fathers. Which makes you feel unusual somehow, because you permanently realise that something is missing. My father died when I was 11, while Sülke's father



fled to West Germany, leaving behind his family.

**Jonas is often alone, and that is how you frame him in long, lonesome scenes.**

Sakova: We combined character drama with comedy elements, mixing feelings of sadness and anger with pure fun. Which requires a special way of acting. Main actor Eliáš Vyskocil was often very central in the picture. Bringing him closer to the audience – a big head on a big screen – he needed to create all emotions on his face.

**SUMMER REBELS has a kind of rural charm, small-scaled and close to nature.**

Sakova: We wanted the story to be set in a small city with a strong countryside appeal, like the place where my grandparents used to live. In Handlova you'll find all these small houses with huge backyards where people meet in a family atmosphere. Behind the gardens, the forest begins. In the city centre, you can feel nature being very nearby. We had a wonderful time, living together with the crew for almost two months in this small town where there were only two hotels.

**Talking about nature... What is so**



*Director Martina Sakova on the set.*

**special about being in a boat on the water?**

Sakova: All children love water! If you say summer, I say water. In a film about summer holidays, water can't be but a super important element. And the water is meaningful in each and every of Jonas's relationships. Alex, his father and his granddad... water connects them all.

**Another element of summer are the colours catching the sunlight beautifully.**

Sakova: Due to the combining of many different elements, like the scenography, for which we choose particular

colours, some of them matching very well together, others rather contrasting. There was a huge car full of lighting equipment! We shot with sunlight, which isn't always stable. The main purpose of all that equipment was to stabilise the sunlight. The sun was the most important light source but sometimes it wasn't enough. There were the camera optics, creating depth in those images and making you feel part of it. There was the colour grading, which took us two weeks in post-production, struggling with different colour combinations, searching for this brightness that fits with the nature and the season. And then there was our DoP Jieun Yi from South Korea to whom I'm super grateful for making these wonderful pictures.

**There is so much music in the film!**

Sakova: I always use a lot of songs in my films, I'm a big lover of songs. For an adult audience, it might feel too much, but the children in the test screenings loved it. Guitar driven music is not an obvious choice for a children's film, but it turned out the best way to capture all the different moods: sad, angry and funny.

**How was the co-production frame-**

**work organised?**

Sakova: I myself am some kind of co-production – a Slovak woman living in Berlin for 17 years – I recommend co-productions for many reasons. SUMMER REBELS was set up very clearly. The story is divided over two countries, we shot in both countries and did post-production in both countries. The camera crew was German, the other technicians were Slovak, and the actors were mixed, with main actors Eliáš Vyskocil and Pavel Nový (granddad) both being Czech.

**There is this sentence in the film: who doesn't conquer his fears will never live life to the fullest.**

Sakova: If you want to achieve something you need to trust yourself, you need to trust others, and you need to go straight-forward. That is granddad's credo, and Jonas made it his own. He is going straight-forward!

–  
Gert Hermans