

Ludmila Cvikova about the CINEDU Festival

“Children’s films were simply another world”

The Slovak CINEDU Festival for children & youth (18–29 September) might be a relatively new event on the international calendar, but festival director Ludmila Cvikova is not a rookie. For 15 years, Cvikova has been programmer for the Int’l Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), she has served as advisor to some of Europe’s leading festivals like Karlovy Vary and Locarno, and has been Head of Programming for the Doha Film Institute. Seven years ago, she jumped off the merry-go-round of big festivals and engaged in a small-scale event in a different segment of the film industry: young audience cinema. It is a unique opportunity to question someone with such a track record about her impressions of the youth film industry, and the specific challenges she faces in her native Slovakia....

Ludmila Cvikova: Slovakia is a sleeping beauty. Almost nothing happens there in terms of children’s films, except in animation. Children grow up on Hollywood blockbusters and don’t have a notion about European qual-

ity cinema. We launched CINEDU in an attempt to bring something new to the country. Kids know about the festival and love it, but professionals and financiers still need to discover CINEDU’s values and its potential.

In less than a minute you shifted from ‘sleeping beauty’ to ‘total wasteland’.

Cvikova: The production for children, especially in live action, is very poor, with maybe one title every two years. However, this year in the Berlinale we had SHE-HERO by Mira Fornay, a well-respected director who had never made a children’s film before. We lack not only the films, but also the audience. Even among Slovak adults, there is no cinema culture beyond the multiplexes. This country urgently needs a wake-up call.

The good news is that nowadays there is a festival!

Cvikova: The first years of the festival, we were only working on getting kids to the cinema. The breaking point came in the fourth edition, in

2022, when we found not only an audience in our own town Nove Mesto nad Váhom, but even attracted kids from surrounding villages - for some it was their first time inside a cinema. We had around 2,300 visitors in total, and we are proud of it! What we do is really pioneering.

What kind of a place is Nove Mesto nad Váhom?

Cvikova: A smaller town, one hour north from Bratislava, on the river Váh. First we’ve been trying other cities, like Bratislava, Trenčín, Trnava, but in Nové Mesto we found this beautiful City Cultural Centre, with a director who has an understanding of what young people need and deserve. I noticed how every children’s film festival develops its own profile, adapting itself to the needs of the city where it takes place. That is fascinating! We are also searching for our ide-

al format. For instance, we work with a two-weeks-concept; one week for kids and one for a 12+ audience, as we want to include teenagers too, even if it’s a challenging audience.

The impact you can have in Nové Mesto nad Váhom is much bigger than in Bratislava.

Cvikova: With only one cinema our capacity is limited, but we’d love to further spread the festival throughout the country. Like the Young Horizons festival in Warsaw, who have their own distribution network and festival spin offs in almost every city - that’s my ultimate dream.

The first ones you reached out to were the schools.

Cvikova: That worked out well - all the time they’re asking us about the next edition. But we’re trying hard to close the gap with the family audiences dur-





ing the weekends. We still have to win Slovak families' trust and persuade them.

With all your experiences from the world of festivals, can you share some observations on the children's film landscape?

Cvikova: It's a fantastic new world for me and I love it. I especially admire the Dutch children's film production with its great quality and topical diversity. Strangely enough, all those years that I've been living in Holland, I

wasn't aware of it so much - children's films were simply another world. Just like our industry and government don't pay attention to the relevance of what we do at CINEDU. I hope we can more often join forces with colleagues in Central Europe. I feel there is a need for it.

Where do you see Cinedu in 10 years?

Cvikova: I would love to have a festival in 10 cities simultaneously with thousands of spectators in every city.

I find this a typical answer. All you seem to care for is your audience!

Cvikova: That is indeed where my concern is. It is written everywhere that the youth of today are the audience of the future, but no... they are here now, and they have the right to see good films and enjoy their own film culture.

Looking back upon your impressive track record, what were the heydays of your career?

Cvikova: The best moments were at the Rotterdam Film Festival, right after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. The world was optimistic and the future looked bright. Suddenly I could welcome directors from Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan, discover all these upcoming artists who are nowadays big directors, and travel the world with a suitcase full of VHS tapes. We felt really lucky.

Did you keep some of that optimism alive?

Cvikova: At my age I'm organising a festival and I strongly believe that it will work someday. Wouldn't you call that optimistic? But it's a challenge to remain optimistic when people are being killed in your neighbouring country; in Slovakia we can feel the

impact of Putin's propaganda and that makes me sad. That's why more than ever I feel a responsibility to work for and with young people. In last year's opening speech, I stated that I believe that every film is a window to another culture, and kids discovering all these cultures will make new friends, and not feel the need to fight a war. Nations might have weapons, but we have cameras, so let's use them.

What kind of titles would summarise for you what a good children's film is all about?

Cvikova: There is a preference for the Scandinavian and the Dutch tradition, with both strong artistic titles like KAUWBOY or comedies like JACKIE AND OOPJEN. There was the film THE SENTRIES by Rumanian cinematographer Liviu Marghidan about kids in a summer camp that didn't make it to many festivals, but our audience loved it. The director gave a lot of decisive power to the children in making the film their own. But I grew up with the Czecho-Slovak classics with Jan Werich, or films like THE GIRL ON THE BROOMSTICK by Václav Vorlíček, about little witch Saxana. That was such a fantastic and empowering film.

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Gert Hermans