

# Latvian Film magazine



National  
Film Centre of Latvia



**Poetry  
and analysis**

**Discovering  
potential**

**Traces  
of Eisenstein**



National  
Film Centre of Latvia

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# Latvian Film magazine

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Cover: *The Pagan King* | *Nameja gredzens* (2018)

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# Bridges of time



**Dita Rietuma**

Director of the  
National Film  
Centre of Latvia

It was a good year, and it will be a good year.

This is definitely a good way to sum up the current developments in Latvian cinema.

In 2018 Latvia celebrates its centennial, with the festivities culminating on Independence Day (November 18). This significant anniversary has been crucial to the recovery of Latvian cinema, which has suffered for a long time from a lack of funding. The additional funding provided through the programme *Latvian Films for Latvian Centenary* has resulted in the production of 16 feature-length films (six feature films, two animation films, eight docudramas), thereby regaining long-forgotten levels of production and intensity of film-making. It is significant that the Centenary Programme's first film, the family-friendly *Grandpa More Dangerous Than a Computer* (*Vectēvs, kas bīstamāks par datoru*), became the second-most popular film in Latvia, surpassed only by the animated Hollywood blockbuster *Despicable Me 3*. This film was a good start for the Centenary Programme, demonstrating that the Latvian public appreciates a contemporary film for the whole family.

Following a “warm-up” period in the second half of 2017 with the premieres of three films, the Centenary Programme comes up to speed this year, when each month will bring new first showings. Among these are a couple more films for the whole family: *Paradise '89* (*Paradīze '89*, dir. Madara Dišlere) and *Bille* (dir. Ināra Kolmane). Also premiering in 2018 are the holocaust drama *The Mover* (*Tēvs Nakts*, dir. Dāvis Sīmanis), the nostalgic and bohemian comedy *Homo Novus* (dir. Anna Viduleja) and the historical drama *1906* (dir. Gatis Šmits). Alongside these also comes a versatile programme of documentaries and two artistic feature-length animations: *Jēkabs*, *Mimmi and the Talking Dogs* (*Jēkabs, Mimmi un runājošie suņi*, dir. Edmunds Jansons) and

*The Sun Rides Up Into the Sky* (*Saule brauca debesīs*, dir. Roze Stiebra).

Cinematography's potential is always measured against the versatility of genre and the spectrum of artistic expression and authorship found in its audiovisual product, the films created. For many years Latvia's cinematographic potential was constrained by a lack of funding. Although more funding is always welcome in filmmaking, in Latvia today there is at least enough to start fulfilling the expectations of a wide range of audiences.

For example, *The Pagan King* (*Nameja gredzens*, dir. Aigars Grauba, prod. Andrejs Ēķis) had its first showing in January 2018. The cast includes a number of European actors (Edvin Endre of Sweden and James Bloor of Great Britain play the main roles), and the film's main language is English. This demonstrates the filmmakers' ambition to create a historical legend in line with the current trends in commercial cinema that target both local and international markets. This 2.5-million-euro production is no doubt one of the most ambitious projects in the history of Latvian cinema. It is an effort to demonstrate the potential of Latvia's film industry, which is currently classified as “low capacity” in the world of European bureaucracy.

Already a well-known and ambitious film producer in Latvia, Ēķis is also known for his considerable commercial success with *Swingers*, a sitcom-style comedy that was one of the most popular films in Latvia in 2016/2017. Estonian and Ukrainian versions of the film (likewise directed by Ēķis) have also been produced, with the main roles played by the most popular actors in their respective countries. An “export” of this kind is a first for Latvian cinema, and the films have quickly become commercial successes also in Estonia and Ukraine.

The development of original cinema is also extremely important in the European and Latvian cinema traditions. Laila Pakalniņa, one of the best-known Latvian directors internationally, continues her work. Her poetic, fragile and meditative documentary *Hello, Horse!* (Zirdziņ, hallo!, 2017) has become one of the most-travelled and most-requested Latvian films at international film festivals. Pakalniņa is the most consistent and radical of Latvian film writers. In her films she continues the traditions of Latvian poetic documentary cinema, which had its beginnings in the 1960s, when filmmakers searched for alternatives to the officious Soviet documentary cinema.

Significantly, two films made within the Centenary Programme serve as both a reflection on the history of Latvian documentary cinema and as proof of its potential in today's cinema world: *To Be Continued* (Turpinājums) and *Bridges of Time* (Laika tilti, also known under its working title *Baltic New Wave*). In this magazine you can read about director Ivars Seleckis, the patriarch of Latvian documentary cinema, who continues to be in excellent creative form. He is the director of *To Be Continued* and

simultaneously one of the main protagonists in *Bridges of Time*, a film that examines the phenomenon of Baltic documentary cinema. *Bridges* is a Baltic co-production, which there have been increasingly more of in recent years. The film is a good example of effective collaboration between neighbouring countries.

The role of international cooperation keeps increasing in the Latvian cinema industry. In addition to co-productions, a cash rebate programme has also been set up. Approximately two million euros are available through the rebate programme, with the funds administered by the National Film Centre of Latvia and the Riga Film Fund (Riga City Council). In 2018–2019 Latvian producers will be involved in 30 co-productions, 20 of which are minority co-productions.

Latvia is a country with fewer than two million inhabitants. But its cinema is becoming increasingly diverse and gradually gaining momentum. By the way, did you know that Sergei Eisenstein, that genius of editing and most radical director of all times, was born 120 years ago in the Latvian capital, Riga? One can still find places in Riga that reflect his creative genius. ■



The meditative documentary *Hello, Horse!* (2017) by Laila Pakalniņa has become one of the most-requested Latvian films at international film festivals



*Latvia is a country with fewer than two million inhabitants. However, its cinema is becoming increasingly diverse and gradually gaining momentum.*



**T**he Latvian film industry has prepared a present for everyone in honour of our country's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday this year: a film programme titled *Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary*, organised by the National Film Centre of Latvia. Sixteen feature-length stories – six feature films, eight documentary films and two animation films – that tell about Latvia, its recent and ancient history, its present and also its future. Because our country really does have so much: it has fighters and thinkers, grandfathers and grandchildren, painters and legionnaires, museum artefacts and sacks of Cheka files, mummies and carousels, monuments and bunkers, the last pagans and the first poets, Riga's suburbs and the border regions, anxious childhood, youthful courage and venerable wisdom...

This family portrait of Latvia on its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday has gathered together film directors and story characters whom you will also meet on the following pages. ■



LV 100



Gatis Rozenfelds

# Looking for new crossroads



Ilze Auzāne



Paraksti: - Edinātaji  
- Pavlovska  
- Gatis Kelle  
- ...

Nav datu: - Malinovskis (70)  
- ...  
- ...  
- ...

Taisīt P. līgumu: - Bauskas Edināta  
- ...  
- ...

Veikta Darbāne - Nauris Buda  
- ...  
- ...

... - Dit doktoram (40+)  
- ...  
- ...

- ... (175 d)  
- ...  
- ...

- ... (Toms Hari)  
- ...



Toms Harjo

**T**he film production company *Tasse Film* was founded seven years ago. At its core were the two young producers Aija Bērziņa and Alise Ģelze, who had already gained recognition on the international cinema scene. The company's first feature-length film was Renārs Vimba's debut work *Mellow Mud / Es esmu šeit* (2016), which won the main prize at the Berlin International Film Festival in the *Generation Kplus* competition. This was already the second *Crystal Bear* in this competition for Ģelze, who had won it previously as a producer for Jānis Nords' feature film *Mother, I Love You / Mammu, es tevi mīlu* (2013).

Ģelze and Nords' second film together, now produced by *Tasse Film*, came out last November – *Foam at the Mouth / Ar putām uz lūpām* (2017) is a feature-length film about a former policeman named Didzis, who also trains fighting dogs. In the span of just a few days, Didzis' life is turned upside down when he suspects his wife of being unfaithful and his beloved dogs become infected with a dangerous disease. Bērziņa comments on this working together again: "If people successfully manage to go through the process of producing one film, they stay together. It's just the same as in personal relationships – you have to struggle through those first two or three years until you've got things smoothed out and know what to expect."

Director Madara Dišlere's debut film *Paradise '89 / Paradīze 89*, also produced by *Tasse Film* and developed within the framework of the National Film Centre of Latvia's *Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary* programme, will premiere in February 2018. But the company does not produce only films by Latvian directors; it is also actively involved as a minority co-producer in a number of international film productions. "Last year was a test of our

capacity – having three Latvian films and three foreign films in production is a kind of limit if we don't want to sacrifice quality," says Bērziņa.



**Director Jānis Nords says that acquiring the rights for *Origin of a Species* by American screenwriter Matt Gossett was a major challenge for the producers of his film.**

Yes, that was a challenge because we had not had any previous experience with the acquisition of screenplays. Especially from the United States, where the Screen Writers Guild has very strict guidelines, and we needed a far-sighted plan to get through the process. But herein lies the magic of cinema – each new project brings with it new situations that you have to deal with. For example, Nords' film features trained dogs. Where do we find animals like that? How do we work with them? Each time a completely new world opens up.

**Nords' previous feature-length film, *Mother, I Love You*, won the main prize, the *Crystal Bear*, at the Berlin International Film** ▶

**◻** "If people successfully manage to go through the process of producing one film, they stay together," believes producer Aija Bērziņa (on the right)



**Festival in the *Generation Kplus* competition. Did that create an additional burden?**

I believe that such achievements make things a lot more difficult for a director. He feels more pressure because peoples' expectations have gone up. But this isn't right! Making a movie is a creative process, and the outcome is not predictable. It's the same with music – your work might result in a hit, but the song might just as well turn out to be not so popular.

**The film *Foam at the Mouth* is a Latvian/Lithuanian/Polish co-production.**

The Lithuanians and Poles joined us at the very beginning. For us it was important to find partners as early as possible so that they could

participate in developing the script. They might have different ideas, and those are valuable contributions, because they will have to sell this project in their respective markets, too.

**One of your studio's projects is being realised in the framework of the National Film Centre's programme *Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary*, which will result in a total of 16 new films. How important is this programme for the local cinema industry?**

This programme has been a very necessary shot of energy and funding for the Latvian cinema industry, which suffered greatly from the last economic crisis. State funding had been cut by 70%, and the film industry never recovered from it. With this programme,



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*Herein lies the magic of cinema – each new project brings with it new situations that you have to deal with.*



people have begun to feel that the sector is recovering, and film professionals no longer have to work additional jobs in order to continue working in their vocation. I hope that the programme's results will demonstrate that film creation is important in Latvia, that by entering co-productions and offering cinema-related services the industry has the potential to become self-sustainable, thus creating jobs and contributing to Latvia's economy. And I hope that this upturn will be supported with new programmes, for example, support for making historical films, for which there is never enough funding because they are very resource-intensive.

**One of your productions deals with Latvia's recent history.**

You're referring to Madara Dišlere's feature film *Paradise '89*, which is based on her own childhood memories and the summer of 1989, a very significant time on Latvia's way towards regaining independence. When we organized test-screenings of the film to children, it produced many questions: why are the shops empty, who are the soldiers, and so on. This resulted in a dialogue between three generations, two of which had experienced this time themselves. Dišlere has dedicated this film to her children in order to tell them about her own childhood and the place where she grew up. Our children know little about this time of the Reawakening, and a feature film is a great means for talking about it.

**Can you tell us about your next project?**

In January of this year we started filming *Oleg / Oļegs*, Juris Kursietis' second feature-length film. Filming will continue until the end of April. Just like in his film debut *Modris* (2014), this is a character-driven story. It centres around a 35-year-old Latvian "non-citizen" who heads to Brussels to put his life into order. In a broader sense, the film addresses the issue of emigration in today's world and what it means to find one's place in this era of migration.

**Your cooperation partners are Belgians and Lithuanians.**

Half of the film is filmed in Belgium, where everything is twice as expensive as in Latvia. In order to address this challenge, we found a local co-producer. And because the film's main character is the renowned Lithuanian actor Valentin Novopolskij, we also involved a Lithuanian co-producer. We call this a natural co-production, which results from the storyline or the team selection. At the turn of the year we overcame great odds to win financial support from Belgium's Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel (CCA), for which fifteen different projects with lots of well-known names had been competing. These days you have to take into account that you're competing with the whole world, and that forces you to raise the bar for quality and prepare your project to perfection.

**Your company is actively involved as a Latvian minority producer in various international projects. What productions did you work with over the last year?**

Last year *Tasse Film* represented Latvia as a minority producer in three projects. The *Humorist* was a Russian/Latvian/Czech co-production, *Outside* involved a Czech/Latvian/Dutch partnership, and *The Sonata* was a French/English/Russian/Latvian collaboration. All of those projects were filmed in Latvia.

**Latvian cooperation with foreign producers has increased a lot in recent years.**

There are two reasons for this development. First, funding for filming foreign productions in Latvia has become available in recent years from the National Film Centre of Latvia and the Riga Film Fund. Second, Latvia is increasingly being recognised as a location and as a cooperation partner. It also helps that the Baltic states have started to present themselves as one region, as is done by Scandinavia or the Balkan states. ►



"Everybody in Europe faces a permanent battle with Hollywood films," knows Aija Bērziņa, the organizer of the Riga International Film Festival (Riga IFF)

### **What has facilitated this Baltic cooperation?**

In recent years the Baltic states have made many co-productions amongst themselves, attracting and putting to good use the available funding and human resources in the neighbouring countries. This is a new development. Furthermore, we have joint marketing activities in Berlin, Cannes and elsewhere. By organising presentations and receptions together, we increase our network of partners.

### **What is your outlook for the future?**

I believe that cooperation will continue to evolve. From our perspective, we've had only positive experiences with co-productions. For example, the Dutch actors were pleasantly surprised about their experiences in Latvia, because there are still a lot of stereotypes about us being a post-Soviet state and not knowing how to work on a European level. In addition to official presentations, face-to-face communication is also a very important factor in finding cooperation partners. When somebody has had a positive experience, he shares it – here you can get co-funding, here you work with real professionals, here you'll have a good working environment. And besides, Latvia's cinema industry is not as swamped with projects as, say, the Czech Republic or Hungary, where you have to compete for human resources with large-scale Hollywood productions.

### **You're also the president and founder of the Riga International Film Festival (Riga IFF). Why is that also important to you?**

The Riga International Film Festival plays a very important role in the context of the local film industry. Everybody in Europe faces a permanent battle with Hollywood films. Hollywood has enormous marketing budgets, and that's why it dominates our cinemas. So, a festival like this is a good tool for maintaining and developing other kinds of film traditions, such as local and European cinema.

The *Arsenāls* Riga International Film Forum began in 1986 but ceased to exist in 2012. However, if you don't maintain traditions like that and stop investing money in them, you cannot expect any results – you won't get a response or involvement from audiences, nor can you expect good-quality local products. So, Riga IFF is trying to fill that gap and continue the tradition.

This year the Riga IFF will celebrate its fifth anniversary. Much has been accomplished, but there's still a lot to be done. If we look at the Baltic context, Estonia and Lithuania both have more than twenty years of experience hosting film festivals, and they have significantly more funding, more resources and capabilities. We realise we've still got a long way to go, but we see this as motivation to continue our work.

### **What makes your festival special?**

Latvia has always been a crossroads, and we want to use this to our advantage in the context of our festival, too. Therefore, in our festival's main competition, which is the most visible signboard of any international festival, we do not have any restrictions in terms of genre. It includes feature films as well as documentaries and animation, and we place special emphasis on experimental productions that try to combine different genres. So, we're looking for new crossroads and new forms. ■

# LV100



**KRISTĪNE ŽELVE**  
(director of the documentary  
*Mērijas ceļojums / Mērija's Journey*)

**IVARS SELECKIS**  
(director of the documentary  
*Turpinājums / To Be Continued* and  
a character in the documentary  
*Laika tilti / Bridges of Time*)

**EVELĪNA OZOLA, MARTA GERTRŪDE AUZĀNE,  
LĪVA LOČMELE and MAGDA LOTE AUZIŅA**  
(Linda, Maija, Laurēns and Paula in the feature  
*Paradīze '89 / Paradise '89*)



# Ivars Seleckis.

# Restless

 Sanita Grīna

Ivars Seleckis (1936) is an iconic figure of Latvian cinema both historically and today. He is one of the most prominent Latvian directors and cinematographers, whose engaging and poetic view on the world has shaped the visual aesthetics of the Riga school of documentary film since the 1960s. Though already 83 years of age, he remains restless and is currently actively involved in two film projects being produced in the framework of the *Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary* programme.

■ Seleckis' films are considered masterpieces of Latvian cinema and remain well known and beloved by the public. This is especially true for his best-known work, *Crossroad Street / Šķērsiela* (1988). Even Latvians who have not seen his films have certainly noticed Seleckis at festivals and film premieres – always wearing a suit and a black beret, his full, white goatee easily recognised in the crowd, a man attentively listening to his conversation partners. Maybe it is this attentiveness, this ability to listen and observe in a non-judgemental way that is lacking in today's world. Maybe this is what ensures that Seleckis' work remains relevant today. And maybe this quality also serves as the driving force for the director to take on ever new challenges – even at age 83.

This year, two events in Latvian cinema – two film premieres in the country's centenary film programme – will be linked with Seleckis. First, his own documentary *To Be Continued / Turpinājums* (a detailed review of which can be found on page XX), and, soon after that, *The Bridges of Time / Laika tilti* (directed by Kristīne Briede of Latvia and Audrius Stonys of Lithuania). *The Bridges of Time* focuses on the founders of new Baltic documentary cinema in the 1960s, of whom Seleckis is one of the main protagonists.

## Rolling back the film

Already with his very first steps in the world of cinema, Seleckis seemed to demonstrate patience and the trust that, by observing reality long enough, it will reveal a new, transcendental facet that is hidden behind the obvious, everyday side of life. When he began his career as a camera operator in the early 1960s, Seleckis was still a student and spent a whole summer living in a fishing village together with another newcomer to the field, director Aivars Freimanis (who had just made

the move from journalism to cinema), to film the mere 20-minute-long documentary *The Coast / Krasts* (1963). This film became one of the first works of so-called poetic documentary cinema. Such films showed a true interest in the lives of the people portrayed in them, which was a stark contrast to the stiffly informative, poster-style coverage usually found in Soviet Latvian documentary cinema of that era.

The new generation of directors and camera operators had studied at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow, where they had experienced a sense of creative freedom and boldness. After all, life in the capital of the Soviet Union was more boisterous, turbulent and radical than in the republics, where the prevailing attitude was fear about “What will Moscow say about this?” A good example of this is another film by Freimanis and Seleckis, *Bread for the Journey / Ceļamaize* (1963), which resulted in a local scandal and heated discussions about whether it was allowed to depict Soviet reality in such an unembellished way. Only the filmmakers' courage to seek support from their superiors in Moscow saved the film and their own future careers in cinema.

However, the prevalent line of thought and stylistic perceptions changed quickly. Just two years later, the two rather inexperienced filmmakers were asked to create a feature film dedicated to Latvia's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Soviet Socialist Republic. They were joined in this task by screenwriter Herz Frank, who would himself become a legendary maker of documentary films, and the poet Imants Ziedonis, who at that time was already a well known and influential voice. The resulting film, *Reportage of the Year / Gada reportāža* (1965), received the highest honours possible – the state award of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. ▶

## Keeping in step with the times

A similar mood was also present in the other two Baltic republics, Lithuania and Estonia. This exciting and inspiring time of changes is at the core of Kristīne Briede's and Audrius Stonys' *The Bridges of Time* (produced by Uldis Cekulis of *VFS Films* in cooperation with Lithuania's *Studio Nominum* and Estonia's *Vesilind*). It is the story about a generation of cinematographers who returned from their studies at the Institute of Cinematography full of ideas, craving to experiment and wanting to create a new form of cinema with its own rules. In an unexpected, but probably logical way, these developments reverberated with events taking place at that time on the other side of the Iron Curtain, in the free West.



*The maestro could now enjoy a well-deserved rest, but his world-exploring nature keeps him on his feet.*

The working title for Briede and Stonys' film was *Baltic New Wave* (Baltijas jaunais vilnis), and under this title it was presented at several international project fairs. It focuses on the pioneers of poetic documentary cinema from the three Baltic states: the Latvians Uldis Brauns, Aivars Freimanis, Herz Frank, Ivars Seleckis; the Lithuanians Henrikas Šablevičius and Robertas Verba; the Estonians Andres Sööt and Mark Soosaar. It is not a coincidence that artists from all three countries developed an interest in similar themes and changing the ways of cinema. Baltic cinema professionals had close collegial links and were often close friends, too; they met regularly at symposia and enthusiastically exchanged ideas, thus inspiring each other.

Briede says that the film's protagonists remember these times with a sparkle in their eyes. Each of them contributed in his own

way to this cinematic bouquet: Lithuanian cinema of that time had strong links to the countryside, making references to folkloristic and traditional values that remain present through the times; Estonian film was more urban and modern, characterised by witty and dynamic editing; Latvian cinematographers, for their part, committed themselves to timeless questions and tried to look into a person's soul with the help of the camera. The style of *The Bridges of Time* is also an homage to this poetic documentary cinema. It aims at familiarising a wider audience with this phenomenon that inspired several generations of filmmakers.

## From factories to Crossroad Street

Seleckis continued to work as a camera operator throughout the 1960s. Together with Freimanis, they created several more films, the most noteworthy being *Frescoes of Kuldīga / Kuldīgas freskas* (1966) and *Lomi* (1969). *Frescoes of Kuldīga* was a pioneering, experimental mosaic of scenes in a small town with a daring sound track that abandoned a narrator in favour of live sound. *Lomi* was remarkable for Seleckis' style of filming, which researcher Inga Pērkone has described as "funnel shapes".

For many years to come, Seleckis continued to work as a cinematographer and was also involved in a number of feature films. By the late 1960s, however, he began to also direct documentaries. Gradually a pattern emerged in his original work: an apparent continuation of the philosophical questions raised by poetic cinema, while at the same time reflecting his interest in society and his desire to explore people and the world with the means available to him. He wished to discover broader social processes through the magnification of the daily lives of individuals.

A good example of this approach is *The Girls of Valmiera / Valmieras meitenes* (1970), which in Latvian cinema history is considered to be one of the first socially topical films made in a poetic style. It portrays the life of

female workers in a glass fibre factory – at work, at rest, their hopes and dreams – and the problems that arise through the influx of young women in the small town after the factory is built there. Seleckis had found an unusually delicate and detailed way of performing a simplistic and rather uninspiring task – to make a film about Soviet workers.

The series of two films *The Woman Who is Awaited?* / *Sieviete, kuru gaida?* (1978) and *I'm Looking for a Man* / *Meklēju vīrieti* (1983) was an even sharper dissection of society, openly exploring male and female roles in Soviet society – not the desirable, but the real, existing situation. In these films, Seleckis analysed the manifestations and consequences of equality of the sexes as advocated (and officially achieved) by Soviet propaganda. Obviously, both films created an uproar and resulted in heated discussions.

With *The Woman Who is Awaited?* Seleckis began a long-lasting collaboration with screenwriter Tāivaldis Margēvičs, who also took him to a certain small street on the outskirts of Riga and thus played an important role in the creation of Seleckis' masterpiece *Crossroad Street* (1988). On many projects Seleckis worked together with his wife, the film editor Maija Selecka, and they formed a unique creative tandem in Latvian cinema. In 2014 Liv Ullmann – most renowned for her work with Ingmar Bergman – presented the Seleckis couple with the Latvian National Film Award for lifetime achievement.

*Crossroad Street* (1988) received the Latvian National Film Award, was honoured at various prestigious international film festivals, and even won a European Film Award for best documentary. Latvian cinema historians boast that the film received the three highest awards possible in the world of documentary film. Audiences around the world fell in love with the simple people living on the small street featured in the film, thanks to Seleckis' sensitive and lucid immortalisation of their daily lives, their joys and sorrows, the big and little events they experience. Anybody



could sympathise with them because their lives seemed so familiar. At the same time *Crossroad Street* is an extremely precise cross-section of a specific place and time, having been made right when European audiences had begun looking with curiosity to what was actually happening on the other side of the crumbling Iron Curtain.

### Investment in the future

The 1990s were politically and economically turbulent times in Latvia and resulted in a catastrophic lack of funding for the filmmaking sector. But even in this difficult period Seleckis managed to make a new feature-length documentary almost every year, thus producing a unique and valuable testimony to the history of Latvia and its cinema during that time. This work includes a continuation of his masterpiece, titled *A New Era on Crossroad Street* / *Jaunie laiki Šķērsielā* (1999). The final instalment of this trilogy was finished in 2013, with *Capitalism on Crossroad Street* / *Kapitālisms Šķērsielā*.

The maestro could now enjoy a well-deserved rest, but his world-exploring nature keeps him on his feet. His newest film, *To Be Continued* (produced by Antra Gaile, studio *Mistrus Media*), will premiere in Spring 2018. ▶



Ivars Seleckis in 1966, working on the pioneering, experimental documentary *Frescoes of Kuldīga*






For many years to come, Seleckis continued to work as a cinematographer and was also involved in a number of feature films

Inspired by other famous examples of time-spanning masterpieces, such as the *Up Series* by Michael Apted, he has started his own grand project to be passed on to the next generations. Namely, Seleckis spent a year filming the lives of first-grade pupils who had just started school in various places around Latvia.

Seleckis explains: “I am completely a product of totalitarianism – I started my education in Autumn 1940, just after the Soviet regime was imposed on Latvia. It’s interesting for me to see how a young person grows up in a free country. And school is the place that shapes a human being, his views on things and events.” He envisages that at each stage of the children’s educational pathway (entering high school, entering university) a new director with his own perspective will follow the lives of the film’s protagonists.

This is Seleckis’ first film in which he was not behind the camera himself. Instead, he entrusted this task to Valdis Celmiņš (*Liberation Day / Atrīvošanas diena* (2016), *Double Aliens / Dubultie svešinieki* (2015) and others), who over the past years has become a much-sought-after cinematographer. As an interesting sidenote, Celmiņš was also one of the cameramen in *The Bridges of Time*. Thus the traditions of poetic cinema are passed on from one generation to the next – ever changing and developing in step with the times. *To Be Continued* is a beautiful title for the work of a master, reminding us that nothing ever comes to a standstill. “This is the first time in my cinema career that I’ve worked with children,” mentions Seleckis during our conversation. “A documentary filmmaker always has to work with new ideas.” ■

# LV100



**JĒKABS** (main character in the feature-length animation *Jēkabs, Mimmi un runājošie suņi* / *Jēkabs, Mimmi and the Talking Dogs*)

Drawing of artist **KURTS FRIDRIHSONS**  
(documentary *Kurts Fridrihsons*)

**DĀVIS SĪMANIS**  
(director of the feature *Tēvs Nakts* / *The Mover*)

**LIDIJA LASMANE-DORONINA**  
(a character in the documentary *Lustrum*)

**ANDRIS KEIŠŠ**  
(painter Salutauris in the feature *Homo Novus*)

**KASPARS DUMBURS**  
(fighter Svīpe in the feature *1906*)

**DAUGHTER OF SUN** (a character in the feature-length animation *Saule brauca debesīs* / *The Sun Rides Up Into the Sky*)



# Poetry and analysis

**D**ocumentary film is the foundation of Latvian cinema – so it has been historically, and we are proud of it. But what’s even more important is that Latvian documentary film remains relevant today and that directors representing different generations continue to present their perspective of the world around us. Poetry and analysis are the two main postulates that make Latvian documentary film unique and recognised around the world.



**Daira  
Āboliņa**

■ It seems that today our filmmakers have become even more daring, more sensitive and more stinging than ever before, because – as strange as it might

sound – reality is the greatest challenge for documentary cinema. It is absolutely vital to document the present and reflect on the past in order to prevent self-deception and

to fight indifference. Four new Latvian feature-length documentaries demonstrate a wide scope of topics and diversity in cinematic means.

## D IS FOR DIVISION

MŪRIS

Director: Dāvis Sīmanis

Studio: *Ego Media*  
guntis@egomedia.lv  
www.egomedia.lv

Premiere: Spring 2018



■ Dāvis Sīmanis has created a personal story about borders on a state, political and symbolic level. And also on a personal level. Throughout history, Latvia has always been a desirable territory. For this reason, people here regularly talk about the Swedish times, the German times, the Russian times.

Sīmanis was still a boy when the USSR fell apart and

a border was drawn between Latvia and Russia. De jure and de facto this happened 25 years ago, but in this film he describes today’s situation, in which psychological aspects also play an important role. He not only narrates a story but also offers a delicate and, at the same time, stinging analysis of the situation on both sides of the border.

An old, black-and-white

photography has left a lasting impression on the director: the Latvian woman Hermīne Puriņa lies murdered on the edge of a ploughed field. She was one of the first victims of the Soviet occupation in 1940. Puriņa was killed close to the Latvian border while trying to save her teenage son. He lies next to her, also killed. In the bigger picture, they were just two of the countless victims

killed during the occupation. Aggression always takes sons away from mothers, and vice versa, and everything else...

Sīmanis uses traditional techniques of observational cinema. The camera does not interfere with the events; it never intrudes, but it follows the action, trusting that the viewer will understand and make his or her own judgment. In this film, we follow the life stories and fates of two antipodal characters. Two Latvian citizens who have become outsiders, outlaws, due to their passionate beliefs (a rather uncharacteristic feature nowadays).

Ansis Ataols Bērziņš is a folklorist, singer-songwriter and political dissident. He was sentenced to prison because of his involvement in a politically provoked riot in Riga. He chose to emigrate to Russia instead, leaving behind his family and a small child. He perceives himself as the only Latvian political criminal who is a true Latvian patriot. His antipode is Beness Aijo – the offspring of a mixed marriage who wants Latvia to return into the already collapsed USSR. He has willingly gone into exile and joined the separatists fighting against Ukraine's independence.

Bērziņš visits local Russian storytellers, produces Latvian schnapps to bring along to festivities and sings Latvian songs. Aijo learns to shoot

with an automatic rifle, knows how to drive a tank and addresses his fellow Latvians through radio broadcasts. Neither of these men feigns his beliefs (at least the film does not indicate this didactically), both are very lonely and have been expelled from their country, which has borders. They are the type of idealists that any government is uncomfortable with.

Sīmanis is sympathetic to both Bērziņš and Aijo, because each in his own way seems to have emerged from Latvian mythology. And Latvian folktales are both philosophical and cruel. But, in reality, Sīmanis story is not about these two men. It is about all of us. Also about those of us who live without any ideals and beliefs, about those of us who celebrate holidays without knowing their meaning.

The director's voice behind the camera is much more than an informative narrative (he actually relies on the audience to be informed about political events in Latvia and globally)... First of all, it is a dialogue with himself, his generation and everybody who is able to identify with the philosophical flow of his thoughts. What is happening with Latvia, and can freedom be limited by a line on a map?

Sīmanis shoots the film on both sides of the Latvian-Russian border, from nearly extinct villages to a shocking

and desperate victory celebration ritual at the point where Latvia, Belarus and Russia meet (which in Soviet times was called the Barrow of Friendship)... The scene is of very old people bussed in to celebrate a long-gone world order. Many of their faces reflect the sorrow of lost youth, without any political context. Sīmanis feels for them, and at some points the commentary behind the camera falls silent. These are the film's most touching moments – nobody is telling you, the viewer, who is the bad guy and who is the good guy in this group of people, who is lying and who is pretending. Because there are no victors here.

The film's strength is its unintrusiveness and the intonation of its message. But by following the director's narrative, one can learn more about Latvian's state of mind on both sides of the border than from official facts. In fact, the film is not only about borders and the people on them, but about every country that has to protect its identity. This requires both physical and ethical victims.

Sīmanis has created one of the most personal historical lectures. And it does not matter whether you know where Latvia is or what its ethnic composition is. The film goes deeper, because we draw borders both in our heads and in our hearts. And in our consciousness. ▶

# TO BE CONTINUED

TURPINĀJUMS

Director: Ivars Seleckis

Studio: *Mistrus Media*

birojs@mistrusmedia.lv | www.mistrusmedia.lv

National premiere: March 22, 2018

Programme *Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary*



■ Ivars Seleckis is the only Latvian winner of a European Film Academy award and is considered a classic of Latvian documentary cinema. This is his first film about children, who will grow up in front of our eyes. Seleckis is one of the founders of the legendary and internationally acknowledged poetic school of Baltic cinema, which since the 1960s has offered an alternative language and way of thinking on screen that was in complete contrast to the pathetic and affective socialist realism style of filmmaking during the Soviet era. In fact, the poetic school was a revolution of cinematic language (and thus also its content), similar to what Polish and Czechoslovak documentary filmmakers began to do around the same time by using concealed humour to speak about their lives.

In the 1960s a new generation of Latvian documentary filmmakers chose to look into the faces of ordinary people, to see

the world's beauty in fields of white daisies as well as in muddy roads. By using specific editing techniques and confrontational images, they created alternative content that audiences read like aesthetic rebuses, feeling engaged and perhaps even somewhat happy.

The director and cinematographer Seleckis has not lost his cameraman's gene – it's in his eyes. He still picks up the camera himself and knows the exact right moment when to turn it on. This film is a kind of symbolic project for him and Latvian cinema as a whole. The main protagonists are children and their families at a very significant moment in their lives – the year they begin first grade in school. The project is planned to continue over the next 20 years, following the film's heroes as they grow, develop interests, solve problems. In short, it will follow their lives.

The film's developers did substantial research to select the five children who form the core of the film. Seleckis

travelled all over the country to create a model of today's Latvia, which can be seen and discovered through a child's eyes. Little Anastasija, who has a clever and bright outlook on life and lives in a remote area in accordance with nature, loves her horses and her mother – is she an indigo child? The boy from a wealthy family who follows a rigid schedule, does sport, has a strict father, but is also brave enough to play a wrong move in chess just to prove that it can be done – will he become a distinguished mathematician or physicist? And the boy who, with a child's mind, explains to his teacher the phenomena of the universe – will he become a scientist, or has fate something else in store for him? Yes, this is also a time when many a Latvian mother supports her family by working abroad and must do her parenting via Skype, with the daily burden placed on the grandmother's shoulders.

With the awareness of an experienced director, Seleckis has made the first move in

documentary cinema about the person of the future. Of the entire population, he has taken on the responsibility of selecting precisely these five ordinary, lively, pleasant children, who will have to carry the conscious and unconscious inheritance of their families. He does this very sensitively, without putting any didactic or directorial influence on the chain of events. He and his camera are merely close by. Very close.

Seleckis allows us to experience joy entering a home, he allows a girl to cry when the day's morning is already so difficult... Life is beautiful because childhood deserves it – even if the shoes are worn out, the hands are cold, or the child longs for her mother's kisses.

The camera depicts Latvian landscapes in fog, in sleet, and at the height of summer. This is a heritage from the long-gone 1960s, when filmmakers showed

the world that a door handle can be cinematographic. Reality has inherent value; if a documentary filmmaker manages to immortalise it, the wonder has been materialised. Seleckis has set a high bar for human engagement and visual quality. A film like *To Be Continued* can be lived. It is the Latvia of the new century, with all its contradictions, joys, sadness and dreams. We wait for the continuation of *To Be Continued*.



## SOLVING MY MOTHER

DOTAIS LIELUMS: MANA MĀTE

Director: Ieva Ozoliņa

Studio: FA Filma

fafilma@fafilma.lv | www.fafilma.lv

National premiere: January 4, 2018

■ Director Ieva Ozoliņa's first film, *My Six Million Dollar Father / Mans tēvs banķieris* (2015), created an uproar in Latvia. It told the unflattering story of her father's financial misfortunes and how he took flight from his family. It was probably Latvia's first documentary thriller, as Ozoliņa travelled half the world to find traces of her father's fate. She eventually found him in a psychiatric hospital in Malaysia – a broken man who did not recognise his own daughter.

Her second film, *Solving My Mother*, has already won an award at the International Documentary Film festival Amsterdam (IDFA). It's not a story about her own mother, yet the film preserves that same level of frankness that balances on the knife's edge of ethics. The film follows the lonely and desperate life of a young doctoral student in mathematics. The young man, who looks barely over the age of 30, has contacted the police regarding his mother, who teaches at the

university and has threatened to commit suicide over a domestic argument. The situation has caused the son to suffer from a neurological illness.

What's happening here? Why do people not hear or understand those who are closest to them? Why do they lay blame on their loved ones?

Every family quarrels from time to time, but the events described in this film exceed the accepted (or maybe imposed) norms. This is definitely not a story ▶

about a person striving for independence. It is a triumph of egotism. The film's characters do not generate compassion or sympathy; they themselves have built around them a fence of loneliness. Maybe this explains the universal appeal of this story about a cowardly son and his despotic mother.

Ozoliņa uses a "home video" approach to the film – she has earned the confidence of this family. Camera operator Māris Slavinskis draws attention to a room's stuffed corners, the dirty dishes, the bedroom. At times the camera feels almost lost in this domestic chaos; its movement occasionally resembles that of a mobile phone video clip submitted to the police as evidence.

Ozoliņa refuses to offer an explanation for why things have turned out the way they have for this young man, his brother, his mother, his grandfather and

his unfulfilled love affair. Why is there so much hate and failure among them? It's the illness of the century – depression – but in an aggressive manifestation. The mind of a mathematical genius (Ozoliņa gives us a sample of it on screen) and good looks are not enough for this young man to reach a level of maturity that would enable him to resolve his relationships with his family and mother in a humanly acceptable way.

Maybe it's helpful to step away from this noisy story for a moment. We could look towards Greek mythology, where sons turn against their mothers out of fatal jealousy. We could also look towards Shakespeare and remember the story about Hamlet and his mother... Not very encouraging.

The relationship between a son and his mother is perhaps one of life's greatest mysteries. A woman bears

a son and cannot let him go his own way, even after he is a grown man. As a result, he either loves all women only as likenesses of his mother, or he never learns to accept his mother's power over him – as is the case in this film. Ozoliņa widens the borders of documenting a life, the borders of privacy on screen – and this is her strength. There is nothing shocking in the film's visual details, environment or relationships, and yet it leaves a shocking impression. It is not a comfortable feeling to be in someone else's kitchen, with no right to be there. But it's always useful to remember that images on *Facebook* are deceiving and that the truth is somewhere beside them. It's hard to imagine a happy ending for this duel between a son and his mother – whether on screen or off. But it would be wrong to assume that such stories do not exist. Welcome to this family hell!

## WONDERFUL LOSERS: A DIFFERENT WORLD

BRĪNIŠĶĪGIE LŪZERI: CITA PASAULE

Director: Arūnas Matelis

Studio: VFS Films

vfs@vfs.lv | www.vfs.lv

Co-production with Lithuania, Italy, Switzerland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Spain, Belgium

National premiere: February 2018



■ There is a long history of cooperation between VFS

Films and our Lithuanian neighbours. *Wonderful*

*Losers: A Different World* is the studio's second collaboration

with the Lithuanian director Arūnas Matelis.

Films about sport are easily converted into any language, but they often lack a broader audience due to their specific content. Due to a sense of humanity. A winner is superhuman, isn't he? That's why this film offers an intriguing alternative: it allows us to look behind the scenes of the famous *Giro d'Italia* bicycle race and observe the riders from a perspective that is usually not seen by fans. Teamwork with the goal of helping the leader win. A brutal hierarchy in a sport in which the participants are expected to fall so that their teammate can win. And afterwards, to wake up smiling in a hospital bed after another difficult operation. To perceive all of this as a mission; to keep up the spirit, speed and frenzy for the winner, but never for himself... Without doubt, professional sports are cruel.

The director of this co-production is the award-winning Lithuanian director Arūnas Matelis. Italy, Switzerland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Spain and Belgium are partners in the project. The production was supported by the European programme *Creative Europe*, the National Film Centre of Latvia and film foundations from all of the participating countries.

Matelis and his team have created a moving and

noble ode to the losers – the domestiques (or gregarios, as the water carriers are called in cycling, whose task it is to support the leaders in any way possible). The film's inner rhythm and pain is captivating, and the beautiful sound track helps to create a philosophical dimension to the question of how much it costs to win and what a loss is worth. All aspects of the film have been conceptualised in detail. Because it is apparent that there will be no second take – as is the case in any victory and, for that matter, in any area of life. Either the camera is ready for the event, or else you don't have a film.

Therefore the director assembled camera operators from a variety of countries who feel the essence of bicycle racing in their fingertips. This is how two Latvian cameramen became part of the team – the sensitive and refined Valdis Celmiņš and Ivars Zviedris, himself a former bicycle rider and director of many renowned films. This explains the unexpected camera perspectives, which compose portraits of the athletes but also show the tense muscles and fluid movements. In a way, the creation of this film resembles the sporting event Matulis is depicting. Everybody has an important, even fateful, role to play: the physician leaning out of the window of a moving car to treat an injured rider still

on his bicycle; the catering, because access to water while riding is a crucial factor in the race; the masseur, whose work begins once the day's racing has finished. Each of them must be in the right place at the very right moment.

The film's tempo is in sync with the riders' emotions and creates tension as well as short moments of rest. For example, when the service personnel provides a rider with a bouquet of flowers, and a moment later, without ever stopping racing, he passes it on to his beloved and proposes to her, and we hear him ask while speeding away, "Did she say yes?" There's also the emotional support of fathers and families – even if their sons will not be the winners. There are many falls in this film; even non-bicyclists will find it easy to identify with the athlete who must get up after a fall in order to reach the finish line, because this is what he's spent months or even years preparing for. The film is a masculine story that can also be shown to women. But maybe not to mothers of athletes. It might be too painful for them.

*Wonderful Losers: A Different World* received the prize for best documentary feature at the Warsaw International Film Festival in October 2017, which automatically qualifies it to be nominated for the European Film Awards in this category. ■



# The triumphant advance of feature-length animation



Ieva  
Viese-Vigula

**A**s in previous years, in 2018 Latvian animated films will be shown in local cinemas and international festivals, where they have gained considerable visibility and recognition. Viewers will see a variety of short films created with different techniques – from silly films to poetic films to endearing films. However, a gradual increase in funding and growth in capacity of the local film industry over the past few years has led to an unprecedented achievement: six feature-length animation films are currently being produced in Latvia and its partner countries. The first two premieres will take place in 2018 as part of the National Film Centre's *Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary programme*. More will come in 2019 and thereafter.

■ The upcoming films address different audiences. *Apple Pie's Lullaby / Ābolrauča šūpuldziesma*, directed by Reinis Kalnaellis, will bring joy to the very young, while *Jēkabs, Mimmi and the Talking Dogs / Jēkabs, Mimmi un runājošie suņi*, directed by Edmunds Jansons, will target the curiosity of primary-school pupils. The several generations that have

grown up with Roze Stiebra's films will look forward to her newest work, *The Sun Rides Up Into the Sky / Saule brauca debesīs*. Stiebra wrote the script herself, which is based on motifs from Latvian mythology. Children in Latvia, Estonia, and further afield will cheer about the newest film from Gadgetville, *Lotte and the Lost Dragons / Lote un pazudušie pūķi*, directed

by Janno Pöldma and Heiki Ernits and co-produced by the *Rija* studio. The ironic *My Love Affair with Marriage / Mans laulību projekts*, directed by Signe Baumane, and the childhood memories told in *My Favorite War / Mans mīļākais karš*, directed by Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen, will give adults a chance to have a laugh at themselves or perhaps shed a tear.



## LOTTE AND THE LOST DRAGONS

LOTE UN PAZUDUŠIE PŪKI

Directors: Janno Põldma and Heiki Ernits

Studio: *Rija Films*

info@rijafilms.lv | www.rijafilms.lv

National premiere: 2019

■ The stories about Lotte from Gadgetville, created by Estonian directors Janno Põldma and Heiki Ernits, are known not only in Latvia and Estonia. The films have in fact been screened in approximately 50 countries around the world. The dog-like main character has become a recognisable brand for a variety of products, and even a theme park dedicated to Lotte was opened in Estonia in 2014.

Currently work is ongoing on the third feature-length film about Lotte's adventures (a co-production of Estonia's Eesti Joonisfilm and Latvia's Rija Films). Põldma and Andris Akmentiņš wrote the screenplay, and Renārs Kaupers, the front-man of the widely popular Latvian band Brainstorm, composed the music. Background artist Laima Puntule and sound engineer Andris Barons complete the

Latvian contingent on this production's creative team.

In this new film, all of the attention in Lotte's family is on her little sister, Roosi. Meanwhile, two scientists visit Gadgetville. They are collectors of folk songs and want to find the oldest mythological song on Earth, which is about the legend of the fire-breathing dragons. Will these ancient songs ever be heard again?



## THE SUN RIDES UP INTO THE SKY

SAULE BRAUCA DEBESĪS

Director: Roze Stiebra

Studio: *Locomotive Productions*

office@locomotive.lv | www.locomotive.lv

Programme *Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary*

National premiere: November 18, 2018

■ *The Sun Rides Up Into the Sky* is based on Roze Stiebra's original screenplay describing the mythological fight of light against darkness. The theme is rooted in Latvian folklore, but many of the motifs are

familiar to other cultures as well. Stiebra is considered to be the founder of Latvian hand-drawn animation and was awarded the National Film Prize in 2017 for her lifetime achievements.

She has a talent for telling myths and folk tales through the creation of compelling characters, and her storytelling is brisk and authentic. The upcoming film begins with a mummies' party, but ►

it quickly transforms into an action-packed journey between the visible world and the afterworld in which the film's heroes – a little girl and her young brother – try to find and save the kidnapped daughter of the Sun.

The film's artist is Ilze Vītolīņa, who has already proven her ability to create rich and secretive worlds in Stiebra's short-film series *The Little Fairytales / Pasaciņas*. The characters' animation is mainly done by students and graduates of the Art Academy of Latvia.

A scene from the *Locomotive Productions* studio. Stiebra bends over an open folder and hands the scene to the animator.

"The eyes, see, are like this. According to the action, Selēna is pottering about with Nabašņiks; they fill up on berries. And now he becomes kind of blissful."

"He gets high."

"Yeah, they get high on berries. And she comes up, takes the sword out of his hands and throws it away. And he's like, 'Ahh...'"

"The negative impact of drugs on a person's life."

"No, they're berries. They're not necessarily narcotic. We don't know. There's just this moment, when he's almost reached the Sun's daughter. He's up there, on the mountain. But suddenly there are these temptations. The moment you're already at the

door and preparing to open it, someone always appears with a tempting offer – 'listen, take this!' And that's the minute he falls, instead of climbing higher. It's a very grave moment."

The film is produced by Roberts Vinovskis, one of the most experienced Latvian film producers on the international arena. The film's composer is Juris Kaukulis, who is a member of the popular Latvian alternative folk rock band *Dzelzs Vilks*. This will be his debut for creating music for an animation film. The premiere of *The Sun Rides Up Into the Sky* is planned for Latvian Independence Day – November 18, 2018.

## MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH MARRIAGE

MANS LAULĪBU PROJEKTS

Director: Signe Baumannē

Studios: *Locomotive Productions, Sturgis Warner, The Marriage Project LLC*

[www.signebaumannē.com](http://www.signebaumannē.com)

[www.locomotive.lv](http://www.locomotive.lv)

National premiere: 2019



■ Signe Baumannē is a New York-based Latvian director and artist. Her film's main theme is the nakedness of human beings – both psychological disclosure and vulnerability as well as physical nakedness and sex. In her explorations of this theme, Baumannē has developed a consistent style

in her feature-length films about the female body and mind, which are told through a personal prism. Her award-winning autobiographic film *Rocks in My Pockets / Akmeņi manās kabatās* (2014) used the backdrop of Latvian history to explore depression in the women in her family. In her new film she addresses

the topic of relationships, enhancing the story with the dystopic fairytale elements of her imagination.

For this film Baumannē uses her original production technique, which combines two-dimensional drawings with papier-mâché backgrounds. It tells the story of how the Sirens teach a

young woman to aspire to the Ideal Marriage. However, the concept of the Ideal Marriage is completely crushed when the woman's Biology, with its hormones and neurons, starts influencing her behaviour and emotions, thereby jarring the foundations of the marriage. The film is a co-production between

*Locomotive Productions* (Latvia) and Sturgis Warner and Baumane's partner company *The Marriage Project LLC* (USA).

By early 2018 the film's characters have already gotten their voices. Biology is dubbed by the gifted actor Guna Zariņa, who has played several other strong women,

including Medea and Spīdola (a character in the Latvian epic poem *Lāčplēsis*). The Sirens' songs are performed by the trio *Limonāde*. Other characters will be dubbed by renowned Latvian theatre actors, and singer Linda Leen will perform the film's finale.



## JĒKABS, MIMMI AND THE TALKING DOGS

JĒKABS, MIMMĪ UN RUNĀJOŠIE SUŅI

Director: Edmunds Jansons

Studio: *Atom Art*

sabine@atomart.lv | www.atomart.lv

Programme *Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary*

National premiere: October 18, 2018

■ Edmunds Jansons is internationally known as a creator of short films, such as *Choir Tour / Kora turneja*, *International Fathers Day / Starptautiskā Tēva diena*, and *Isle of Seals / Roņu sala*. This is his first feature-length film. “The film’s idea developed slowly,” he says. “Only during the process do you understand a film’s deeper meaning, and surrounding events also have an impact. At this stage, the film has become a commentary about how I want to see my city – maybe also about a country in which the people, like Jēkabs and Mimmi in the film, don’t put up with the absurdities happening around them but do their

best to improve their lives.”

The film’s target audience is 6- to 9-year-olds. “I’ve noticed that children are more sensitive and sometimes object to absurdities sooner than adults do,” Jansons adds. The film is based on Luīze Pastore’s award-winning children’s book, which screenwriter Līga Gaisa adapted for this project. The story is set in a romantic Riga suburb that a rich tycoon wants to turn into an impersonal district of offices and shopping centres. The children join forces with the talking dogs to save their home neighbourhood. Elīna Brasliņa, the film’s artist, spent a lot of time exploring this particular district of Riga

in order to get a better feel for the location.

The film was created using computer animation. After gaining support from the Polish Film Institute’s minority co-production scheme in 2017, the film has become a joint production between Latvia’s *Atom Art* and Poland’s *Letko*. Part of the Polish partner’s contribution will also be the film’s music, for which the composer Krzysztof Janczak will be responsible. *New Europe Film Sales*, which focuses on the distribution of quality European original productions, has obtained the distribution rights for *Jēkabs, Mimmi and the Talking Dogs*. ▶

# MY FAVORITE WAR

MANS MĪLĀKAIS KARŠ

Director: Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen

Studios: *Ego Media* and *Tritone*  
guntis@egomedia.lv | www.egomedia.lv

National premiere: 2019



■ The animated documentary *My Favorite War* carries an anti-war message intended for a global audience. In it, director Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen, who was born in Latvia and lives in Norway, remembers her Soviet-era childhood, where the previous and next war were always part of the ideology and even of people's daily lives. The film is being made in the *Tritone studio* in Riga and is based on drawings by Norwegian artist Svein Nyhus. *Ego Media* and producer Guntis Trekteris are responsible for the production and international cooperation.

"I first had the impulse to make this film ten years ago," explains Burkovska-Jacobsen. "My mother had just died, and I was packing up books from her immense library. By chance I opened a page from a book published in 1986. It told about the Courland Pocket and cows falling out of a hit German cargo plane. I imagined this sight and decided to make a film about it. And right then and there I also decided that it had to be

an animation film – THIS had to be drawn. Of course, there are no archive photographs of the last months of the war showing what the civilians experienced on this occasion.

Neither are there any photographs of the shocking event that I and my 1200 fellow pupils witnessed in Saldus in that same year of 1986, when we saw through our school's windows how a burial ground for German soldiers was dug up by an excavator. For seven years we had walked across that field from our apartment blocks to school, and we had no idea that there were graves under it. And then one sunny day in May the heavy machinery arrives and starts digging, and the skeletons are flying all over the place. I remember a hand flying up really high because the excavator had somehow thrown the soil up in the air. I had the feeling that death was waving at me with its delicate finger bones.

My personal experiences during the Cold War underpin the story line for this film. A person grows up and starts

looking for the truth – for example, why did the Soviet regime feel so threatened by those graves that it needed to destroy them? What was the regime hiding, and what was it lying about? During the Cold War the Soviet regime used the Second World War as an ideological weapon with which to frighten its citizens. When I started school, I was 100% convinced that a third world war was inevitable and that the Americans would attack us because they hate us for having the most just state in the world. Also, I was convinced that these Americans would speak German, because all around us there were films about the Second World War in which the enemy was evil and spoke German..."

By combining hand-drawn animation with documentary archive materials, the film creates a visually rich world of memories in which facts entwine with the fantasies created in a child's mind. This complex and costly project is in its fifth year of production. The premiere is planned for 2019.



## APPLE PIE'S LULLABY

ĀBOLRAUŠA ŠŪPUĻDZIESMA

Director: Reinis Kalnaellis

Studio: *Rija Films*

info@rijafilms.lv | www.rijafilms.lv

National premiere: 2019

■ Reinis Kalnaellis' *Apple Pie's Lullaby* is created in cooperation with *Paul Thiltges Distributions* (Luxembourg). The pastel colours used throughout are produced in a combination of digital and colour pencil techniques. The film contains both excitement and calming sincerity, along with a bit of slapstick humour for the youngest viewers. Audiences will recognise some of the film's heroes from Kalnaellis' debut short film *When Apples Roll / Kad āboli ripo* (2009), which was first screened at the Berlinale and has since then been shown in more

than 100 festivals around the world.


This feature-length film tells the story of the little penguin girl Telma, who is worried that her upcoming fifth birthday might not be able to find her. But everything is possible in the dreamy world conjured by artist Andrejs Prigičevs: secrets are written on coconut shells, and snail shells become fabulous ships. In the studio, too, the production team members have all fallen in love with the characters in the film – one with the snail shell-cruise ship, another with the flying parachute-

whale, yet another with the fiery pair of zebras. Kalnaellis comments: "At the age of five one starts to be aware of upcoming birthdays. But, as in other matters, a child's explanations can differ a lot from what is happening in reality. But everybody has to live and experience these things for himself. I agree with the view that lack of fantasy is humanity's biggest problem."

This film is currently in active development, with part of the work being carried out in Luxembourg. The finished film will be available to audiences in 2019. ■



One of the greatest events in Latvian animation today is the fact that director **Roze Stiebra**, the founder of Latvian hand-drawn animation and laureate of the National Film Prize in 2017 for lifetime achievement, is now working on a feature-length animation *The Sun Rides Up Into the Sky*, the premiere of which is planned for Latvian Independence Day – November 18, 2018.

 Kristīne Sīmsone

# Discovering Latvia's potential

Accessibility, convenience, professionalism of local film crews, and low risk – this is how foreign producers describe the filmmaking opportunities in Latvia.

**T**his view of the filmmaking process in Latvia can actually be empirically verified and has become even more true in 2017, when a great number of co-financed projects were implemented in Latvia.

In fact, two films recently filmed in Latvia (co-financed by the National Film Centre of Latvia and using the services provided by Film Angels Studio) premiered at the Cannes Film Festival: Sergei Loznitsa's *A Gentle Creature* in the In Competition section and György Kristóf's *Out* in the Un Certain Regard section.

The available co-funding in Latvia has remained stable at approximately EUR 2.5 million, when taking together the resources of the National Film Centre and the Riga Film Fund. However, considering that nowadays nearly all European countries offer co-funding modules for foreign film productions, it's clear that the availability of financial resources (up to 25% of a film's production expenditures accrued in Latvia) is not the most important factor in making decisions. So

the professionalism of local crews and the reasonable costs in the country.

## Keeping up with the work

Aija Bērziņa and Alise Ģelze, the producers at Tasse Film, stress the great variety of locations available in Latvia as one significant aspect of foreign projects' interest in the country. "Riga has a very well-conserved and authentic historical environment. Furthermore, the city has a certain Nordic flair, and in many places the architecture looks quite Scandinavian," says Bērziņa.

Together with Ģelze, her co-owner at Tasse Film, Bērziņa produced the coming-of-age drama *Mellow Mud* (directed by Renārs Vimba), which won a Crystal Bear at the Berlinale in the Generation 14 competition in 2016. Currently, the two young women are not only helping local film directors make their ideas come true; they are also actively involved in foreign film projects being filmed in Latvia. They have had a busy autumn – between September and November they were involved in three nearly consecutive film productions.

**O** The happy film crew of the co-production *Out* by György Kristóf (Slovak Republic), filmed in Latvia and selected for Cannes IFF



why do project leaders return and confidently state that they want to film again in Latvia? The producers from Film Angels Studio and Tasse Film, the two studios most actively involved in European projects in Latvia in 2017, explain why. They begin by saying that the expectations of foreign filmmakers working in Latvia for the first time are often exceeded – they are frequently surprised by

When asked how a comparatively small company like Tasse Film manages such a large work load, Bērziņa and Ģelze explain that they've refined their working procedures and develop a precise schedule for each project, which ensures that things move forward smoothly, quickly and independently. They also point out that it is easy to get all the required administrative permits,



which facilitates the process. In addition, neither Riga nor other locations in Latvia are overloaded with film crews, as is sometimes the case in other European capitals and can lead to delays in filming.

### Small country, great choice

Although covering only an area of just under 65,000 square kilometres, Latvia offers a range of diverse environments that have been “left behind” by various different foreign powers over the centuries. Here one can easily find the right filming location for a variety of moods and historical eras. For example, film crews from neighbouring Russia and projects involving storylines placed in a (post) socialism setting often choose Latvia because of its Soviet architectural heritage.

Recently Tasse Film was involved in the filming of *The Humorist* (a co-production between Russia’s Metrafilms, Czech Republic’s Sirena Film and Tasse Film) in the Latvian resort town of Jūrmala. Journalist



Agnese Zeltiņa

### Funding resources available for foreign film productions in Latvia:

Total amount of co-funding from the Latvian state and support from the Riga Film Fund: approximately EUR 2.5 million; applications for co-funding can be submitted all year long.

#### Main criteria for granting co-financing:

- the film is fully or partly made in Latvia;
- services of Latvian-registered persons and legal entities are used in the making of the film;
- total expenditures are at least EUR 700,000 for feature or animated films and at least EUR 140,000 for documentary films;
- on the day of submitting the project application, the foreign producer can show funding for at least 50% of the film’s total projected costs;
- co-financing cannot exceed 25% of the total costs;
- films (including animation and documentary films) are intended to be shown in cinemas or on television.



Michael Idov’s debut as a film director is an autobiographical tale set in Jūrmala in the mid-1980s and tells about a Soviet comedian and the decline of his career. Though Jūrmala has kept up with the times, it still possesses an air of the past, from the wooden architecture typical of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to the Dubulti railway station, which is a

distinctive example of 1970s modernism. The sites reminiscent of Jūrmala’s time as a Soviet-era seaside resort also offer intriguing filming locations.

The Sonata – a supernatural thriller directed by Andrew Desmond that is a co-production between France’s The Project, Great Britain’s Featuristic Films, Russia’s

CTB Film Company and Tasse Film – also recently explored Latvia's potential for historical locations. It was shot in various locations all over the country, including castles in varying states of preservation from the Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Gothic eras. It is noteworthy that the production of *The Sonata* included a number of renowned local professionals, for example, cinematographer Jānis Eglītis and costume designer Rolands Pēterkops (MAREUNROL'S).

The third foreign production Tasse Film was involved in this year is Czech director Michal Hogenauer's relationship drama *Outside* (a co-production between Czech Republic's Negativ Film Productions, the Netherlands' Circe Films and Tasse Film). Latvian artist Laura Dišlere was also a part of the production team. Bērziņa and Ģelze stress that it is important to them to be part of the creative processes of film projects. Both participate also as co-producers and evaluate potential cooperation projects carefully,

Leblanc and Dedio previously worked with the experienced Latvian production company Film Angels Studio (established in 2002) while shooting Sergei Loznitsa's *A Gentle Creature* in the Daugavpils area. They recently returned to Latvia to film the TV series *Age of Iron*, which tells about the Thirty Years' War, one of the most destructive conflicts in European history. When meeting them on Day 15 of the 20 days they had allocated for filming in the iconic Riga Cathedral, the producers told me that, as when making their first film here, they were pleasantly surprised by the Latvian team's professionalism and efficiency. "People here do things without verbosity, everybody knows the task entrusted to them," said Leblanc.

Their successful previous cooperation and the positive dynamic they experienced in Latvia were a significant factor in the producers' return to Latvia for filming. If companies like Slot Machine and LOOKS Film & TV, whose wide scope of work, regular international activity and filmography are



taking into consideration their artistic qualities and potential to appeal to audiences.

### Professionals to come back to

Carine Leblanc (a producer at France's Slot Machine) and Gunnar Dedio (a producer at Germany's LOOKS Film & TV) also stress the high standards of local Latvian producers.

### Support for minority co-production films (administered by the National Film Centre of Latvia):

**Total amount available: EUR 300,000**

- Tenders are held once a year in May.
- For a bilateral co-production, the financial investment of the Latvian side must be at least 20%, for multilateral co-productions it must be at least 10%.

well recognised in venues such as Cannes, come back to Latvia for their productions, that is a strong indicator of the high level of quality of the services available here. Thus the small Baltic country's competitiveness on a European level increases from year to year.

Returning to *Age of Iron* – of course, the availability of locations appropriate for a 17<sup>th</sup>-century setting played an important role when selecting Latvia. Leblanc and Dedio say, only half-jokingly, that the unrenovated state of some historical buildings plays right into the hands of the film's artistic needs and authenticity. Dedio points out another advantage: much shorter distances between filming locations than elsewhere in Europe. Within half an hour one can get to very diverse locations, or, for example, to the airport.

Both producers express their interest in returning to Latvia with a new project. However, they believe that the creation of a co-financing fund could further increase interest from abroad (currently the National Film Centre supports minority co-productions with EUR 300,000 annually). Dedio also believes that visibility would be further

## Useful information:

Information about co-financing from the Latvian state:

[filmlatvia.lv](http://filmlatvia.lv)

National Film Centre of Latvia:

[nkc.gov.lv](http://nkc.gov.lv)

Riga Film Fund:

[filmriga.lv](http://filmriga.lv)

increased if Latvian partners put forward more cooperation projects

in which the story actually takes place in Latvia. This would complement the current practice, in which Latvian locations are used to replicate other European landscapes and architecture.

## Ready for more

Tasse Film's Aija Bērziņa and Alise Ģelze are convinced that Latvian cinema professionals have the capacity to deal with an influx of foreign projects while ensuring the same level of quality and efficiency of services. They elaborate that the available infrastructure is most suited for European projects – both films and TV series, which has become a very promising genre. Film Angels Studio's producer Jānis Kalējs agrees that at this stage it is not yet realistic to ensure the infrastructure and services required for large-scale Hollywood productions. At the same time, it should be mentioned that a number of substantial non-European projects have recently chosen to film in Latvia and use the services of Film Angels Studio, for example, the Chinese production *Chinese Zodiac* and the South Korean film *My Way*.

Representatives of both Latvian studios share the view that the professionalism and competence of local teams increases noticeably with each project, thus expanding the range of available professionals. Latvia's centenary film programme also contributes to an increase of human resources. A total of 16 cinematic works are being produced in the framework of this programme, including two feature-length animation films, which is a previously unexperienced level of production in Latvian film history. As part of the production process, new on-set professionals and animators are being trained, which will further increase Latvia's capacity to work with local and foreign cooperation projects. ■

## A selection of films and TV series filmed in Latvia:

### **Invincible (2001)**

Director: Werner Herzog

Latvian producer: Jānis Vingris, EHO Filma

### **Honey Baby (2004)**

Director: Mika Kaurismäki

Latvian producer: Jānis Vingris, EHO Filma

### **Wallander. "The Dogs of Riga" (2012)**

Director: Esther May Campbell

Latvian producer: Sergei Serpuhov, Baltic Pine Films

### **In the Fog (2012)**

Director: Sergei Loznitsa

Latvian producer: Vilnis Kalnaellis, Rija Films

### **The Man Who Saved the World (2014)**

Director: Peter Anthony

Latvian producer: Guntis Trekteris, Ego Media

### **A Gentle Creature (2017)**

Director: Sergei Loznitsa

Latvian producer: Jānis Kalējs, Film Angels Studio

### **Out (2017)**

Director: György Kristóf

Latvian producer: Ivo Ceplevičs, Film Angels Studio

# LV100



**IMANTS STRADS**  
(sculptor Kārlis Zāle in the creative-documentary  
*Ievainotais jātnieks / The Wounded Rider*)

**AKVELĪNA LĪVMANE**  
(grandmother in the feature *Vectēvs, kas bīstamāks par datoru*  
*Grandpa More Dangerous Than Computer*)

**ASKOLDS SAULĪTIS**  
(director of the documentary *Astoņas zvaigznes / Eight Stars*)



Gatis Rozenfelds

# Ambitious amplitude



Kristīne  
Matīsa

Year by year Latvian film professionals are raising their skills level by working on national productions and participating in international co-productions. A number of Latvian films are currently under development that impress with their complex decorations and sets as well as with the number of actors and extras involved.

## THE PAGAN KING | NAMEJA GREDZENS

**Director** Aigars Grauba

**Producer** Andrejs Ēķis

**Studio** Platforma Filma | Sales consultant caroline@canoe.film  
Production manager zanda.senkova@gmail.com

**National premiere** January 17, 2018

**Photo** Lukas Salna

**A** historic film-legend about the events that took place on Latvian soil in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the young leader Namejs united the local tribes in battle against the Crusaders sent by the Pope in Rome. The film was shot in English and major roles were given to foreign actors: the Swedish actor Edvin Endre (known for the TV series *Vikings*, 2014–2016), the English actor James

Bloor (known for *Dunkirk*, 2017) and the Lithuanian actress Aistė Diržiūtė (known for *The Summer of Sangaile*, 2015; winner of the Shooting Stars Award at the Berlin International Film Festival).

The total budget for the film exceeded 2.5 million euros. A large set was constructed, including an ancient Semigallian settlement and an artificial body of water for filming the boat and ship scenes. More than 300 costumes and reproductions of ancient jewellery and weapons were made for the battle scenes, which involved several hundred extras.







# BLIZZARD OF SOULS | DVĒSEĻU PUTENIS

**Director** Dzintars Dreiberģs

**Producer** Inga Praņevska

**Studio** Kultfilma | [info@kultfilma.lv](mailto:info@kultfilma.lv) | [www.kultfilma.lv](http://www.kultfilma.lv)

**National premiere** November 2019

**Photo** Pēteris Vīksna, Beate Olekhte, Maksis Kotovičs, Vilnis Slūka

**T**his film is based on a popular Latvian historical novel of the same name, written in 1933–1934. The book revolves around the experiences of the author, Aleksandrs Grīns (1895–1941), who fought as a young man in the First World War and in the newly founded Latvian Riflemen units. Over the years, his almost-autobiographical novel has become a national treasure for Latvians. Its cinematographic adaptation is perceived to be a patriotic act, especially considering that Latvia celebrates its centennial in 2018.

Most of the action in the film takes place on the front lines. The battle scenes are being created in collaboration with the Latvian Armed Forces and filmed at the Ādaži Military Base, which is the main training ground for the Latvian army. Over 700 extras have already taken part in the filming of the mass scenes, with the involved volunteers demonstrating a great level of enthusiasm. Filming began in May 2017, and the national premiere is planned for November 2019 – precisely 100 years after the Latvian Riflemen's victories in the War of Independence, which resulted in Latvia becoming a free and independent state.







# NOTHING CAN STOP US NOW |

## NEKAS MŪS NEAPTURĒS

**Director and producer** Andris Gauja  
**Studio** Riverbed | [info@riverbed.lv](mailto:info@riverbed.lv) | [www.riverbed.lv](http://www.riverbed.lv)  
**National premiere** 2019  
**Photo** Aija Melbārde

**A**ndris Gauja is a young and ambitious Latvian director. His first feature-length film, *The Lesson / Izlaiduma gads* (2014), became a relatively large event in Latvian cinema life, its proactive and original marketing campaign attracting an impressive number of viewers to cinemas. Gauja's second feature film, *Nothing Can Stop Us Now*, tells about a charismatic music producer who has turned a five-storey windmill into a recording studio. His

unrelenting nature creates a web of conflicts that results in a tragic finale.

The filming location – a grandiose recording studio – plays an important role in this production. The storyline foresees a number of dangerous episodes, in which the entire five-storey set is shown in a single frame. To allow filming in winter, a huge atrium was constructed in the studio, complete with several levels of balconies and a glass ceiling. The atrium was disassembled after the shooting session, but a similar set will be built in summer, this time in a rural landscape 80 kilometres from Riga. ■



January 22, 2018, marks what would have been Sergei Eisenstein's 120th birthday, and enough time has passed to truly understand his place in the world's cultural history. What role did his birthplace, the Latvian capital of Riga, play in his life and art? What reflections of Eisenstein's heritage – his

personality and his work – can be found in later Latvian cinema productions? This article will try to answer these questions.

# Traces of EISENSTEIN in Latvia



Dita Rietuma

It seems that everything is already known about Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948): genius director of world cinema, modernist of Russian (Soviet) cinema, author of revolutionary film-editing theories, his films recognised as masterpieces of world cinema.

But filmmakers around the world continue to try to come to terms with their relationship to Eisenstein (also in the form of biographical film), including several Latvian directors, who have found a long-lasting source of inspiration in his work.

Eisenstein was born in Riga and spent the first 17 years of his life there. It was in this city that his complex personality was formed. The city's most beautiful buildings – true gems of Jugendstil architecture – were designed by his father, Mikhail Eisenstein.

A fair-haired boy, a gifted illustrator, and a witty creator of caricatures depicting life in Riga at the turn of the century – a boy from Riga whose paths into the world are best revealed in his autobiographical text *The Boy from Riga*.

Eisenstein's autobiographical articles and the perfect drawings he produced in



## The Boy from Riga (The Good Kid)

Not a nipper, not a lad,  
But a boy,  
A twelve-year-old boy.  
Obedient, well-behaved, with scraped legs.  
A typical boy from Riga.  
A boy from a good family.  
That's what I was like at twelve.  
And I've stayed like that till a grey, old age.  
At the age of twenty-seven the boy from Riga  
becomes a celebrity.  
Doug and Mary [1] go to Moscow to "shake hands"  
with the boy who made *Potemkin*.  
In 1930, after a presentation at the Sorbonne,  
the joint efforts of Prime Minister Tardieu and  
M. Chiappe [2] could not throw the boy from Riga  
out of France.  
For the only time in his life, the boy from Riga signs a  
contract with a trembling heart, with Hollywood, for  
3,000 dollars a week.  
When they wanted to deport the boy from Riga from  
Mexico, twelve US senators wrote a letter of protest.  
And instead of deportation – a handshake with  
the president at one of the numerous festivities in  
Mexico City.

In 1939, the boy from Riga is everywhere in the American press about the screening of the film *Alexander Nevsky* at the White House, by request of the late Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In 1941, the first volume of the huge American Film Index appears – a survey of film publications during the first 40 years of their existence.

According to the foreword, the boy from Riga is merely number four.

First place has been taken by Chaplin, and second place by Griffith.

But our boy follows right after Mary Pickford, who is third.

<sup>1</sup> American film stars Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford.

<sup>2</sup> The Prefect of Police in Paris.

his childhood can help us to understand the forming of this genius director and the internal dramas that took place within him. They also give us an impression of Riga – what the city was like at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>

time about where Latvian culture reverberates in Eisenstein's work," says Kleiman. "He never separated himself from 19<sup>th</sup>-century Riga. Maybe he was not directly influenced by Latvian culture, but he was certainly very much influenced by the development of culture, poetry and architecture that took place in Latvia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this regard he certainly belongs to Latvia. The milieu in which Sergei's father, Mikhail Eisenstein, moved was open to different currents. Sergei Eisenstein was lucky to be born in Riga, which helped him to get a cosmopolitan background and world view early on in his life."



In the documentary fiction *Escaping Riga* (2014) by Dāvis Stmanis, Sergey Eisenstein plays tennis with the world-famous comedian Charlie Chaplin, even though such an event wasn't specifically recorded in 1930s.

century, when it was still part of the Russian Empire. The multicultural climate pulsed with Russian, German and Latvian "blood"; construction and architecture boomed as the dynamic industrial city expanded, with Eisenstein's father playing an important role in its growth.

Without doubt, Riga influenced the young Eisenstein's development. The cinema historian Naum Kleiman has spent much time researching the director's life and work; he is convinced that Riga offered a mix of conditions that made Eisenstein into what he became. Riga granted quality and refinement to his talent. "I have been asked from time to

Eisenstein was a gifted and lonely child (his parents were divorced) whose fate it was to live for 17 years in Riga and soak in its cultural richness before moving out into the world. In 1916 he left Riga to study in Saint Petersburg, and later he moved to Moscow to work in the world of theatre and cinema.

In Russia Eisenstein gained his first triumphant success with the film *Battleship "Potemkin"* / Броненосец «Потемкин» (1925), in which revolutionary ideals as well as radical editing techniques prevail. Then he conquered the world. He spent time in Hollywood, although this occasion did not result in the making of a film; and he went to Mexico, where ►

he recorded a considerable amount of material but was unable to convert it into a film during his lifetime. Eventually, he was forced to return to Stalinist Russia, where he balanced on a knife's edge between life and death.

Confrontations with the Soviet regime intensified as Eisenstein's desire to create experimental, intellectually challenging cinema became ever less acceptable to the ruling system. The director's dramatic experience is reflected in his unfinished works, which were banned or destroyed by the Soviet regime. These are films like *Old and New* (Старое и новое, 1929) and *Bezhin Meadow / Бежин луг* (1936) as well as the Mexico project *¡Que viva Mexico!*, the unedited material of which was taken away from him and he himself forced to return to Stalinist Russia.

Eisenstein's most magnificent work as a director is the finale of his own life, his death. He had used his own works of art (the envisaged trilogy *Ivan the Terrible / Иван Грозный*) to provoke the tyrant Stalin, who had already destroyed many great talents. Eisenstein died at the age of 50. By that time he had already fallen deeply into disfavour with the ruling establishment.

"Sergei Eisenstein is celebrated as the theorist and practitioner of montage," writes David Bordwell, an influential cinema critic. The dynamics and logic of Eisenstein's editing and his theories on this topic have left a deep



*Even Alfred Hitchcock is said to have learned about editing techniques from Eisenstein and to have applied them in his work.*

influence on 20<sup>th</sup>-century cinema culture. Even Alfred Hitchcock is said to have learned about editing techniques from Eisenstein and to have applied them in his work. The same is true for commercial Hollywood, where Eisenstein's editing methods and skill at manipulating the viewer are widely used. Bordwell concludes that Eisenstein's editing



## Places in Latvia dedicated to Eisenstein

Eisenstein Communication Centre in Ķeipene  
Alberta Street in Riga – Art Nouveau buildings designed by engineer-architect Mikhail Eisenstein

techniques have even influenced 20<sup>th</sup>-century media language, including video clips and advertisements.

Eisenstein has richly influenced world culture, and his impact is not confined solely to his films. Sergei Eisenstein – the little boy from Riga – was the first director to show violence on

screen in shocking detail. One must agree with Bordwell's comments regarding *Battleship "Potemkin"*: "The [Odessa] Steps sequence was probably the most violent thing that anybody had ever seen in a movie." And he adds: "It's not usually recognised how often changes in film art are driven by showing violence." Eisenstein's genius cannot be secluded

from the violence he depicted in his films, and it cannot be denied that his films have changed the language of cinema and the art of filmmaking.

What is the relationship between Eisenstein and Latvian culture, including Latvian cinema? Latvia's most creative directors have from time to time tried to stress the connection between Eisenstein and Latvia. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century several documentaries were created about the legendary Riga-born director, and the editing techniques and cinematic language used in these productions were related to Eisenstein's own cinematic world. Most remarkable are the two films by Latvian documentary director

Ansis Epnars: *Sergei Eisenstein. Foreword* (1978) and *Sergei Eisenstein. Post Scriptum* (1978). In his film *Awakening / Atmoda* (1979) the remarkable director of documentary cinema Herz Frank also offered his view on Eisenstein's personality. In films such as *Eisenstein's Eden* (1998) Latvian documentary director Dzintra Geka has focused on Eisenstein's cinematographer Eduard Tisse, who was also born in Latvia.

Eisenstein was an eternal source of inspiration for director Augusts Sukuts, who was also the founder of the Arsenāls Film Festival and an admirer of performance and various attractions. In 2000 he organised an exhibition dedicated to Eisenstein in



Laila Pakalniņa's feature film *Dawn / Ausma* (2015), based on motifs from Eisenstein's *Bezhin Meadow*, offers a complex interaction with the legend



the railway station in Ķeipene, a small village located in the middle of nowhere 77 kilometres from Riga. Eisenstein had no actual link to this place, but this fact only encouraged Arsenāls' mystificators to invent a new chapter in the master artist's biography. Today several art objects have met in the area surrounding the small Ķeipene railway station, interacting in an associative and attractive way with Eisenstein's world of ideas. They are a living monument to the founder of the montage of attractions. Ķeipene is an extravagant destination for a cultural journey that is well worth visiting.



*Eisenstein is also present in recent Latvian cinema and Latvian filmmakers continue to draw inspiration from his creative heritage.*

## Eisenstein and Latvian cinema

**Sergei Eisenstein. Foreword and Sergei Eisenstein. Post Scriptum (1978, director Ansis Epners)**

These films by Epners reflect on Eisenstein's childhood years in Riga, his films and his era.

**Awakening (1979, director Herz Frank)**

The director of the film captured sculptor Igor Vasilyev at a moment of inspiration when creating a bust of Eisenstein in his studio.

**Eisenstein's Eden (1998, director Dzintra Geka)**

Contemporary Mexico and memories of the time when Eduard Tisse filmed Eisenstein's ¡Que viva Mexico! Latvian-born Tisse was the cinematographer for all of Eisenstein's films.

**Escaping Riga (2014, director Dāvis Sīmanis)**

A fact-based story about two outstanding personalities of the 20th century: Sergei Eisenstein and Isaiah Berlin, both of whom were born and spent their childhood in Riga.

**Dawn (2015, director Laila Pakalniņa)**

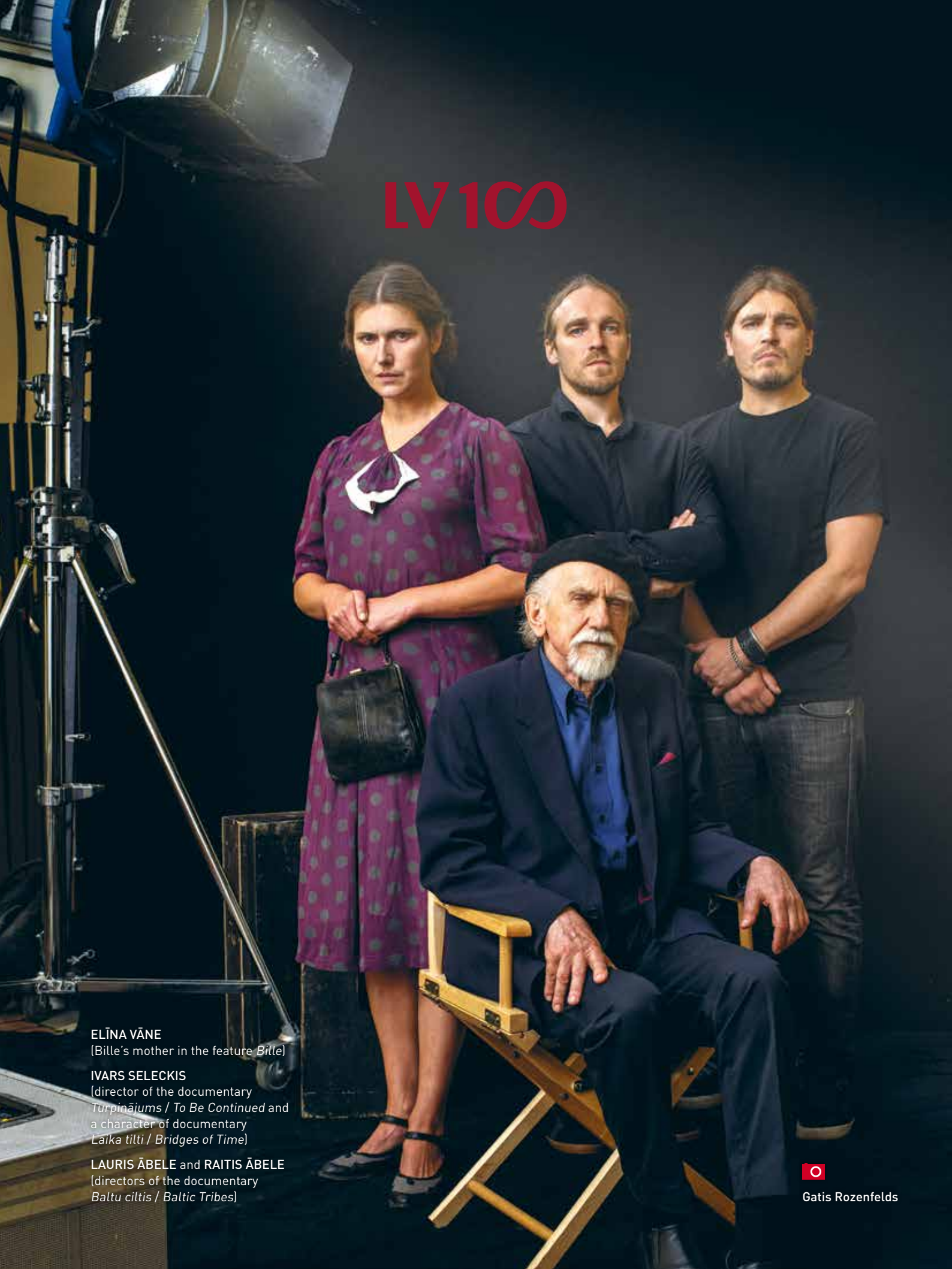
Based on a Soviet propaganda story about a Young Pioneer (the Soviet equivalent of a Boy Scout) named Morozov, who denounced his father to Stalin's secret police and was in turn killed by his family.

Eisenstein is also present in recent Latvian cinema, namely, in Dāvis Sīmanis' *Escaping Riga* (2014). This is a documentary fiction about the lives of two Riga-born geniuses – Sergei Eisenstein and Isaiah Berlin – and about their relationship with their home town, which they left and never returned to. This docudrama applies feature-film techniques to create an illusion of documentalism. This seemingly historic film uses practically no archival material; when it is used, it mainly serves the filmmakers as a stylistic key for the staging of particular scenes. For example, in one scene Eisenstein plays tennis with the world-famous comedian Charlie Chaplin. This episode was inspired by a photograph from 1930 depicting the two geniuses holding tennis rackets like musical instruments. The filmmakers did not want their film to suffer just because this specific event was never recorded. Instead, they simply put make-up on the actors' faces and reconstructed it.

Laila Pakalniņa's feature film *Dawn / Ausma* (2015), based on motifs from Eisenstein's *Bezhin Meadow* offers a complex interaction with the legend's creative heritage. *Bezhin lug* was destroyed during the Stalinist era, with photographs surviving as the only visual testimonies of the film. *Dawn's* visual style is influenced by this material, and the story closely follows Eisenstein's line of thought, while slightly generalising it: Eisenstein was speaking about the period of collectivisation that took place in Russia in the 1930s, but Pakalniņa adapted the story to the collectivisation that took place in Latvia in the late 1940s.

Latvian filmmakers continue to draw inspiration from Eisenstein's creative heritage. Both *Escaping Riga* and *Dawn* are without doubt some of the most interesting works in recent Latvian cinema, and they clearly relate to Eisenstein's radical talent. However, Latvian cinema has not yet produced a film about Sergei Eisenstein, the boy from Riga. It should. ■

# LV100



**ELĪNA VĀNE**

(Bille's mother in the feature *Bille*)

**IVARS SELECKIS**

(director of the documentary  
*Turpinājums / To Be Continued* and  
a character of documentary  
*Laika tilti / Bridges of Time*)

**LAURIS ĀBELE and RAITIS ĀBELE**

(directors of the documentary  
*Baltu ciltis / Baltic Tribes*)



Gatis Rozenfelds



# facts about cinema in Latvia

## How it all started

■ The first screening of a film in Riga took place on May 28, 1896, only five months after the first public presentation of films by the Lumière brothers. In this sense, Riga was ahead of many other cities in Europe.

■ The first film to be produced in Latvia was a patriotic story about the Latvian War of Independence, *Off to War* (*Es karā aiziedams*, 1920).

■ The Splendid Palace movie theatre in Riga was opened on

December 30, 1923, and was the first building in the Baltic states to be designed specifically as a cinema. The building has maintained this function for nearly 95 years and is still a popular cinema in Riga.

■ Latvia's first national hit, *The Fisherman's Son* (*Zvejnieka dēls*, director Vilis Lapenieks), premiered on January 22, 1940.

■ A new trend in Latvian film related to the Riga School of Poetic Documentary Cinema began in 1961 with two

documentaries: *The White Bells* (*Baltie zvani*, director Ivars Kraulītis) and *The Beginning* (*Sākums*, director Uldis Brauns).



The Fisherman's Son

■ The first puppet animation film in Latvia, *The Rooster's Crow* (*Ki-ke-ri-gū*) was produced by Arnolds Burovs in 1966, whilst Roze Stiebra created her first drawn animation, *The Rainy Day* (*Lietainā diena*), in 1969.

■ The Lielais Kristaps national film award was established in 1977, and the Riga Film Museum was established in 1988.



The Splendid Palace



Riga Film Museum

■ The Arsenal Film Forum was launched on September 23, 1988, and was the first Western-oriented event of its type in the Soviet Union. As an interesting aspect of the festival, the main prize was determined in a raffle. The festival was discontinued in 2012.

■ The National Film Centre of Latvia was established in 1991. Its main aim is to provide public funding to Latvian films, to preserve the national audio-visual heritage and to promote Latvian films abroad.

■ Latvia joined Eurimages in 2001 and has been a member of the EU Media programme since 2002.

■ Latvia's first multiplex theatre, Forum Cinemas, was opened in 2003 and remains one of the largest and most modern cinemas in eastern Europe, with six storeys and 14 auditoriums (two with balconies) seating from 96 to 600 viewers.

■ In January 2008, the feature film *Defenders of Riga* (Rīgas sargi, 2007, director Aigars Grauba, producer Andrejs

Ēķis) set a record as having the largest audience for a film since the restoration of Latvia's independence – 139,442 people in all. That was more viewers than for James Cameron's 1997 blockbuster *Titanic* in Latvia, which by that time had already spent almost a decade as the highest grossing film in the world.

■ The National Film Centre established the programme "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary", with financing of 7.5 million euros between 2015 and 2018. It will result in 16 high-quality films, including two feature-length animations, eight full-length documentaries and six feature films. Filmmakers from all



Defenders of Riga

■ The 27<sup>th</sup> European Film Awards ceremony was held in Riga in 2014, when the city was the European Capital of Culture.

generations and almost all of Latvia's film specialists are involved in the production of films for the programme.



## The situation today

■ Latvia covers 64,589 km<sup>2</sup>. It takes seven hours to drive from the easternmost point to the westernmost point of the country and four hours 19 minutes to drive from the northernmost point to the southernmost point of Latvia. ▶

■ Over one third of Latvia's nearly two million inhabitants live in Riga, the capital of the country. The city is located practically in the centre of Latvia, meaning that most locations in the country are quickly and easily accessible. Founded in 1201, Riga offers a diversity of architecture, with historical sites (Old Riga is a UNESCO World Heritage Site) as well as industrial and post-Soviet urban districts.



■ Riga is also the hometown of the Baltic Sea Forum for Documentaries, the Riga International Film Festival and the Baltic Pearl festival.



■ The Cinevilla film studio is a unique site for the production of films about the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the two world wars. Cinevilla

is not far from Riga (60 km from the Riga International Airport) and offers two pavilions, open-air sets, a city tram line, and a railroad with a steam locomotive.

■ Latvia has good airline connections with the biggest cities in Europe and around the world. Latvia enjoys the world's fourth-fastest internet, and there are many free Wi-Fi access points throughout Riga.

■ With almost half of its territory covered by forest, rich wildlife, almost 4000 lakes and 12,000 rivers and streams, Latvia is one of the greenest countries in Europe. With over 500 km



of coast line, Latvia also has plenty of sandy beaches. It is also home to the Ventas Rumba, the widest waterfall in Europe

and the main hero in Laila Pakalniņa's documentary short film *Waterfall* (Rumba, 2016), premiered at Visions du Réel (Nyon, Switzerland).

■ Small Latvian towns, such as Cēsis and Kuldīga, are attractive to filmmakers, including Werner Herzog, who shot scenes for his film *Invincible* (2001) in one of Latvia's most beautiful towns, Kuldīga. The town dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and has picturesque districts of wooden houses and cobblestone streets. There is also a large variety of churches, castles and fortresses in the country, from the floating wooden dwelling at Āraiši (Āraišu

ezerpils, 10<sup>th</sup> century) to the medieval castles in Bauska and Cēsis, the Baroque-style Rundāle Palace (18<sup>th</sup> century) designed by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli and Daugavpils Fortress, built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

■ The historical centre of Riga is comprised of three different urban landscapes: the relatively well-preserved medieval core, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century boulevards and green parks on both sides of the City Canal, and the former

suburban quarters with a network of streets and wooden architecture from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Outside the historical centre, industrial districts as well as Late Soviet modernist buildings can be found.

## Global awards for Latvia

■ In 1957, Latvian actress Dzidra Ritenberga won the Volpi Cup at the Venice Film Festival for her title role in the Ukrainian film *Malva*.

■ In 1990, the documentary *Crossroad Street* (Šķērsiela, 1988, director Ivars Seleckis) received the European Film Academy award for best documentary. The film also received the Joris Ivens Award at IDFA and the Robert Flaherty Award (BAFTA).

■ In 1995, Nils Skapāns' animated film *Let's Fly?!* (Lidojam?!), received the Crystal Bear at the Berlinale.

■ In 1996, the documentaries *The Post* (Pasts) and *The Ferry* (Prāmis) by Laila Pakalniņa won the FIPRESCI prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

■ A documentary by Juris Podnieks, *Is it Easy to be Young?* (Vai viegli būt jaunam?, 1986), became one of the most controversial films of its era and reached an audience of 28 million people worldwide.

■ Two short-film series with similar titles, *Ten Minutes Older: The Cello* and *Ten Minutes*

*Older: The Trumpet* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002. The shorts were made by 15 famous directors, including Jean-Luc Godard, Bernardo Bertolucci, Aki Kaurismäki, István Szabó, Wim Wenders and Jim Jarmusch. The films were dedicated to director Herz Frank and camera operator Juris Podnieks, who made the brilliant film *Ten Minutes Older* in 1978, which shows the passing of ten minutes as reflected in the face of a young child.



■ *Dreamland* (Leiputrija, 2004) by Laila Pakalniņa was



nominated for best European documentary, whilst her short *Fire* (Uguns, 2007) and two animated films by Vladimir Leschiov – *Insomnia* (Bezmiegs, 2004) and *Villa Antropoff* (2012) – were nominated for best European short film.

■ *Mother, I Love You* (Mamma, es tevi mīlu, 2013) by Jānis Nords received a Grand Prix at the Berlin International Film Festival (Generation Kplus) and the jury award for narrative film at the Los Angeles Film Festival. ▶



Mellow Mud

■ In 2016, a film by Renārs Vimba, *Mellow Mud* (*Es esmu šeit*), won the Crystal Bear for best film (14plus) at the Berlin Film Festival.

■ The feature-length animation *Rocks in My Pockets* (*Akmeņi manās kabatās*, 2014) by Signe Baumann received the FIPRESCI Award at the Karlovy Vary International Film festival.

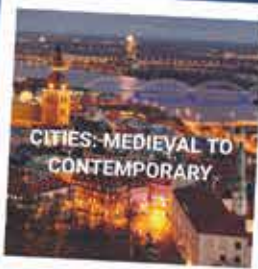
■ In 2017 Ieva Ozoliņa won the IDFA Special Jury Award for First Appearance in memory of Peter Wintonick for *Solving My Mother* (*Dotais lielums: mana māte*).



Solving My Mother



Rocks in My Pockets



CITIES: MEDIEVAL TO CONTEMPORARY



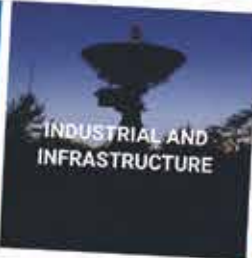
ART NOUVEAU



WOODEN ARCHITECTURE



SOVIET HERITAGE



INDUSTRIAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE



RURAL AND LANDSCAPE



PALACES AND MANOR HOUSES



CASTLES AND CHURCHES



INTERIORS: HISTORIC TO MODERN

### Why choose Latvia?

There are countless reasons why it's worth shooting a film in Latvia:

- Two incentive schemes with a total of up to 25% co-financing;
- Countless unique locations;
- Ability to serve as a double for any European city;
- Highly competitive production costs;
- Experienced English-speaking crews;
- Ease and flexibility in securing filming permits and locations;
- Easy access by air, land or sea – direct flight connections to the biggest cities in Europe and around the world;
- Four distinct seasons;
- Access to Eurimages funding.

