

ZHALEIKA

a film by ELIZA PETKOVA



ABOUT THE FILM

Original title	ЖАЛЕЙКА
International title	ZHALEIKA
Production Country	GERMANY
Production year	2016
Shooting location	BULGARIA
Type	FEATURE
Genre	DRAMA
Length	92 MIN
Original material	ARRI AMIRA
Image speed	24 FPS
Screening format	DCP
Aspect ratio	1:2,35
Sound format	DOLBY 5.1



LOGLINE

A young girl refuses to mourn and is ostracised by society.

SYNOPSIS

Lora, a 17 years old girl, has to deal with her father's death. In the small Bulgarian village where time seems to stand still, her family and the villagers expect her to give herself over to grief. From now on, she must wear black, not listen to any music and observe various mourning rituals. However, Lora wants to keep on enjoying her youth but her desire to live a normal life is disrupted by the judgment of others, who force her to play the role of an orphan.

CAST

Lora	ANNA MANOLOVA
Maria	SNEZHINA PETROVA
Todor	MIHAIL STOYANOV
Yana	MARIA KLECHEVA
Stoyan	STOYKO IVANOV
Elena	BOYANA GEORGIEVA
Asya	ASYA POPOVA
Thomas	MÁRTON NAGY

CREW

Scriptwriter/Director	ELIZA PETKOVA
Cinematography	CONSTANZE SCHMITT
Sound Recording	HANNES MARGET
Costume Design	WARIS KLAMPFER
Gaffer	DAVID SCHMITT
Production Design	HRISTINA DYAKOVA JANET IVANOVA
Producers	SVETOSLAV DRAGANOV TIM OLIVER SCHULTZ CÉCILE TOLLU-POLONOWSKI
Executive Producer	ANDREAS LOUIS



1st Assistant Director	PETAR PETROV
Production Assistant	TSVETA ERMENKOVA
Camera Assistant	MALTE SIEPEN CRISTINA AMATE GARCIA
Production Runner	GALIN POPOV VESSELIN DENEV
Catering	DIMITRINKA SEMKOVA
Editing	HANNES MARGET ELIZA PETKOVA
Sound Design	HANNES MARGET JOSCHA EICKEL
Foley Artist	PETER ROIGK
Colour grading	CHRISTINE HIAM CONSTANZE SCHMITT
Sound Mixing	SILVIO NAUMANN



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Zhaleika is a very personal film based on my experience of mourning within Bulgarian society. What do tears mean, when they perform a moral duty? What happens to a human being when the pity of others becomes suffocating?

In Bulgaria, a lot of children find themselves in the position of having to bend over their grandparents' coffin and leave a farewell kiss on their cold, dead forehead. Around the coffin, people dressed in black are drenched in tears and shout. They touch the hands and feet of the dead, they cross themselves and shoot their arms in the air. Those are images that stick with you. They are both grim and poetic at the same time. First comes the outcry and then the silence. In this film, I wanted primarily to look at the silence, that silent look that other people give you. I want to look at how something that you have no choice but to live through is brushed under the carpet and becomes a taboo.



ELIZA PETKOVA
Scriptwriter/Director

Eliza was born in 1983 in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria. After completing an MA in Philosophy and Modern Japanese at the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, she worked as a freelance filmmaker in Berlin, where she first chose to focus on documentary films. In 2011, she joins the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie (DFFB) to study directing. She has made a variety of films, which have been shown at various festivals. In 2015, her short "Abwesend" ("Absent") was nominated at the Festival de Cannes for the Cinéfondation. "Zhaleika" is her first feature film.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

2016	ZHALEIKA (GER, full-length feature), DCP, 92 min.
2015	NABELSCHNUR (GER, short film), DCP, 27 min.
2015	HARMONIA (online series), www.cinemanda.com
2014	ABWESEND (GER, short film), DCP, 13 min.
2014	ZUR RECHTEN ZEIT (GER, short film), DCP, 22
2013	MEIN SOHN (GER, doc-fiction), HD (.mov), 17 min.
2012	IM KREIS (GER, documentary), HD , 16 min.
2011	WILLKOMMEN ZUHAUSE (Kosovo / GER, documentary) , HD, 70 min.
2010	STILLE POST (Bulgaria, documentary), HD , 52 min.

Find more information about her filmography at: www.cinemanda.com



CONSTANZE SCHMITT Director of Photography

Constanze was born in 1985. After completing a BA in Audiovisual Media (Camera) at the Beuth Hochschule Berlin, she is now studying Cinematography at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB). In 2011, she received the camera/photography award at the Festival International des Ecoles de Cinéma (HUY) for the film 'Rummel' by Benjamin Teske.

HANNES MARGET Sound Designer

Born in 1983 in Freiburg, from 2005-2012 Hannes studied Engineering at the Fachhochschule Düsseldorf and at the Robert Schumann Hochschule Düsseldorf, with a major in piano jazz. His thesis is dedicated to "Sound Engineering in art-house films". Since 2008 he has worked as a freelance sound recordist, foley artist and sound designer for motion pictures and documentaries.



set photo ZHALEIKA © S. Draganov



WARIS KLAMPFER Costume Designer

Waris was born in 1985. After completing an apprenticeship in bespoke tailoring, she started working at the Schauspiel Köln theatre. She then became an assistant on several opera productions, and worked with Anna Viebrock among others. Since 2009, she has studied at the UDK Berlin. Her work on the set of "Zhaleika" is part of her finals at the Universität der Künste.

set photo ZHALEIKA © S. Draganov



SVETOSLAV DRAGANOV Producer

In 1999, Svetoslav founded Cineaste Maudit Production. In 2001, he received an award for the best Eastern-European film for the documentary "Life is wonderful, isn't it?". "Young at Heart" won the Prix Europa, Berlin in 2003. In 2005, "Amateurs" was awarded the Golden Rhyton for the best Bulgarian documentary,

as well as the critical awards. "Life Almost Wonderful" competed in 2013 at the IDFA in Amsterdam, won the Golden Rhyton 2013, and was awarded a special price by the jury at the Sofia Film Festival 2014, as well as ZagrebDox.

TIM OLIVER SCHULTZ Producer

Born in 1988 in West Berlin, when he was 12 years old, Tim discovered the film industry through acting. After graduating from school, he began working for production companies as a freelance producer on various projects in Vienna and Berlin. In 2009 and 2010, he studied Filmmaking in Vienna and worked as Executive Producer on several documentaries and docudramas.

Since 2011, he has studied Film and TV Producing at the DFFB and produced a range of features and documentaries. The films he has produced have been shown in Cannes (Cinefondation), Amsterdam (IDFA), Dresden, Oberhausen (receiving a special mention from the jury), among other places.



CÉCILE TOLLU-POLONOWSKI Producer

Cécile was born in 1984 in France. After studying German literature in Tübingen, Berlin, Moscow and Paris she completed an MA in Cultural Management in Nantes und Saarbrücken. Since 2007, she has worked as an Organisation Manager and Programme Consultant for the Forum at the Berlinale. She has been a student in Film

Production at the DFFB since 2011. Her past work experience includes jobs at 23/5 (Hans-Christian Schmid & Britta Knöller), Katuh Studio, and Match Factory Productions among others.



INTERVIEW WITH ELIZA PETKOVA

Zhaleika is your first full-length feature film. How did it come about? How long have you been thinking about the project?

The process of dealing with death has always been important to me as a theme, ever since I was a child. A lot of scenes in the film have an autobiographical character, and are based on my personal memories and my own subjective assessments. After deaths in my own family, I was conscious that we are positioned as victims in relation to death, given titles such as 'orphan'. The only way I saw to have a voice was to reject that position instead of accepting it. But that choice, in a society where that sense of victimhood is expected, has consequences. So for me, this film isn't about how we mourn, so much as how we mourn out of a sense of social duty and moral norm. I take an interest in how inflexible the structures of our society are in terms of moral values and codes of behaviour and how they bend the nature of the individual towards conformity.

I wrote the first draft of the script two years ago, and the actual work on the film, including its realisation, took place within those two years. For me, it was clear from the beginning that the film should be shot in Bulgaria, my home country and that we had to find a place where this way of dealing with death still exists.



Your last short was classically shot and in a scenic way. Can you tell us more about the particular form of Zhaleika and about your background as a documentary filmmaker?

It seemed wrong to me to go into this village with a full cast of actors and use the village as a merely background scenery. In order to avoid that, it was important to make the village one of the main characters of the film. I didn't want the inhabitants to play scripted roles but to use their own voice in the film. That's why we took the decision to make the film a semi-documentary: a big part of the film consists of documentary shots, the acting is based on improvisation and many inhabitants of the village became part of the story. In the case of the village shopkeeper who appears in the film, all her parts were shot in her work place, in her work clothes. The mourners were real grieving women from the village. We followed people in their professional day-to-day lives in documentary fashion, and the same people can be seen playing secondary roles in the fictional scenes.

How do you develop your films? Did you script any of the dialogue?

To begin with, we had a totally regular script with scripted dialogue. I asked the actors to use them as a general direction rather than learn them by heart. Consider what themes are developed in each scene? How are the characters positioned towards each another? What are the points of conflict? These questions were what we were primarily interested in and were the basis of the improvisation. During rehearsal we wouldn't necessarily rehearse scenes from the book, we dealt with situations that were not part of the story.



Together with the actors, who showed amazing commitment, we pushed every single scene in new directions, so that the internalisation of the character by the actor could be as detailed and comprehensive as possible. It is what made the improvisation possible.

How did you choose the location, Pirin? Why did you decide to make it the setting of your film? Do you have a connection to it?

I came across the location by chance, in the summer of 2012, while I was out mountain hiking. The village attracted me straightaway and I felt a strong desire to make a film there. Later, I discovered that another film had been shot there 20 years ago and I realised very little had changed in that remote place since, apart from the fact that many people had died and many houses had fallen apart. With the thought that in 20 more years, the village would probably only consist of abandoned houses, I felt the need to create something like a contemporary document for it. When I visited the village for the second time in the summer of 2014, together with my DOP Constanze Schmitt, both of us knew for a fact that it would be the ideal location for our story.

How did you find your cast? And how was working with the people from the village? How much did the main actress add to your character – how did you prepare her for the role?

I got in touch with the various actors in various ways. I found the main actress, Anna Manolova, through an online casting. I was in Thailand at the time. My Internet connection was bad and I had received applications from 40 actresses already. I was beginning to think it would be impossible to find the right girl for the role.



Then I received Anna's application and I knew I had found my Lora just by looking at her photo. We met two weeks later in Sofia and my gut feeling grew stronger. It was her first time in front of the camera, as it was for Mihail Stoyanov's, who I met the same way. I saw the actress Snezhina Petrova on stage in the National Theatre in Sofia and I knew immediately that she should be playing the mother. I was very lucky to have her on board despite her many commitments. Márton Nagy (the only foreign role in the film) had worked with me on several projects before. I found the ordinary people, who represent by far the majority of the cast, in all sorts of ways. Lora's younger sister in the film was played by my niece, in a role I had in mind for her from the very beginning. Lora's father was played by Stoyko Ivanov, who is one of my good friends' dad. One of the most important roles is the grand-mother's, played by Maria Klecheva, who I met in the village. Most supporting actors were cast and hired in the village.

Is music as important to you as to your main character?

Music is extremely important to me. Ironically, I could picture myself living in a world without films, but not without music.

How was working with your DOP given the semi-documentary aspect of your film? There are documentary scenes, but there are also many improvised scenes, which require a lot of trust.

I trust Constanze Schmitt completely, professionally as well as privately. I was lucky to have completed other projects with her, which was a very good basis for our current collaboration



since we worked a little differently this time around. In prior collaborations, everything was precise and planned in great detail. We knew every inch of the image resolution, sometimes even weeks before we started shooting. With Zhaleika though, some of the shooting locations were found only a day or two before the actual shooting, so the DOP had to develop the picture language independently and search for the right location for each scene. She worked with the camera autonomously and it was the right decision to make for this project. This is also true of the other departments. Each and every member of the team bore a huge responsibility, as a lot of scenes emerged in the moment. There was a lot of unexpectedness and everyone had to be open and flexible for us. A lot of decisions were made impulsively.

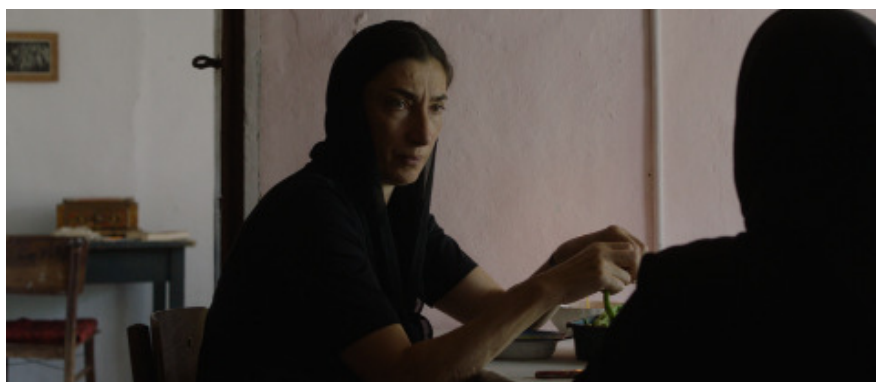
What does Zhaleika mean?

A zhaleika is a mourning item used to signal that you are grieving. It can be a mourning scarf that you wear on your head or around your neck, or a ribbon that you tie to your door. It is the black piece of fabric that demonstrates to other people that you are in mourning.

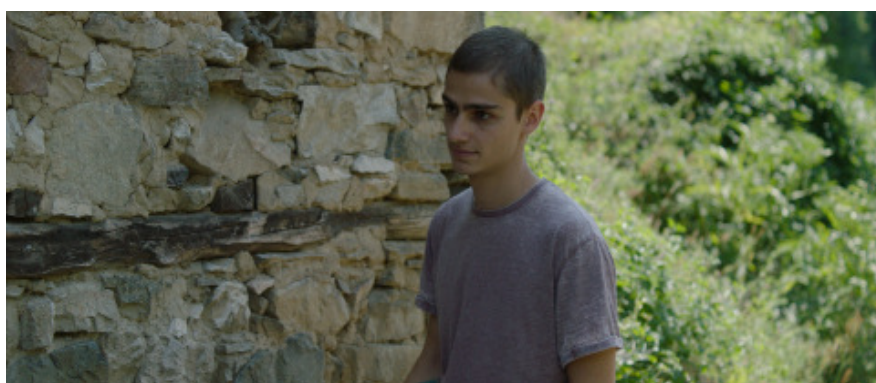
FILMSTILLS CAST



Anna Manolova



Snezhina Petrova



Mihail Stoyanov

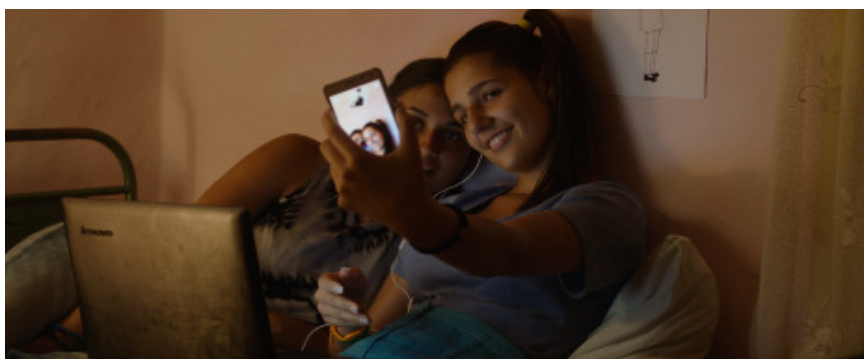


Stoyko Ivanov

FILMSTILLS CAST



Maria Klecheva



Boyana Georgieva



Asya Popova



Márton Nagy



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