

Motherhood: the oldest profession in the world

The plight of a nation through the struggle of one Romanian woman

Romanian director Peter Calin Netzer's tragicomic debut feature *Maria*, screening in competition Wednesday, captures the plight of an impoverished woman who turns to prostitution to support her children.

Melanie Goodfellow

Set in Romania in 1996, some seven years after the fall of dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu, *Maria* revolves around the struggle of an ordinary young woman to support her seven children amid the difficult transition from Communism to Capitalism.

Holed up in a basement with her seven children in a dilapidated block of flats, *Maria* desperately tries to make ends meet. Her husband Ion has practically abandoned the family, turning to drink following the loss of his Communist era job as a factory foreman.

The film takes inspiration from the true story of a real-life *Maria* whose plight was captured in a Romanian television documentary in the mid-1990s.

"She was the subject of a reportage on Romanian television for a talk show in 1996. Her story captured the public's imagination," says 28-year-old Netzer. "I made a short taking inspiration from this story which went on to win a number of prizes."

Karl Baumgartner of Cologne-based Pandora Film – co-producer of seminal Eastern European films such as Bakhtiar Khudonazarov's *Luna Papa* and Emir Kusturica's *Underground* and *Black Cat White Cat* – saw the short and asked Netzer to make a longer feature version.

Like many of the Eastern European works screening in Locarno, such as Goran Radovanovic's *Casting* and Pjer Zalica's *Gori Vatra*, *Maria* mixes



Romanian actress Diana Dumbrava plays an ordinary woman who falls into prostitution to support her family.

humour and comedy to capture a population struggling to reconstruct its country in a post-Communist age.

Baumgartner brought in Serb screenwriter Gordan Mihic, whose credits include *Black Cat White Cat* as well as *Time of the Gypsies*, to help Netzer elaborate the story.

"I went to Belgrade to work on the script with Mihic," says Netzer. "We wanted to create a tragicomedy rather than a drama. We tried to tone down the melodrama."

"It was quite difficult. He doesn't speak English and I don't speak much Serbian but we share the same Balkan humour and mentality," he adds.

Mihic introduced a number of comic characters into the plot such as Milco, a close friend of Ion who is constantly dreaming up improbable money making schemes.

"It was tough combining these characters with *Maria*'s story. I don't know if it works," says Netzer.

Scenes of *Maria* prostituting herself in a truckers' parking lot or a man set-

ting fire to himself at a protest against the economic situation alternate with Milco trying to make a bit of extra cash by having sex with a burly female Dutch lorry driver.

The dreariness of all their lives is heightened by the grainy, dark look of the film.

"We didn't want the image too clear or clean. It wouldn't work with the subject," says Netzer.

"During post production, we washed out the colours, heightened the contrast and gave the film a more granulated look."

Diana Dumbrava, best known for her work in the theatre back home, makes her screen debut as *Maria* alongside popular Romanian actors Horatiu Malaele, Serban Ionescu and Luminita Gheorghiu.

Maria's story dates back to 1996 but Netzer says the situation in Romania has not improved since then.

"If anything it has got worse," he says. "If you watch the five o'clock news you see only stories like these. The gap between rich and poor has widened. There's no middle class."

The condition of *Maria*'s family, meanwhile, has not improved either. The eldest daughter now works as a prostitute in the parking lot that *Maria* once frequented while one of the sons has turned to crime.

Maria

Fev 13/08 14.00
rpts 14/08

aujourd'hui

All That Jazz

Entretien avec
Franco La Polla

page 4

Les marins perdus

Retour sur terre

page 6

Premier jour

Touchantes tranches de vie

page 6

Cremaster

The metaphysics of gender

page 11

Cantata de las

cosas solas

Se réapproprié le
regard

page 13

Morte Densa

Danse macabre

page 13

The Murder of Emmett Till

Rough justice in
Mississippi

page 14

CHANGEMENTS DE PROGRAMME

Une projection supplémentaire de *Skinhead attitude* est prévue le 13/08 à 11.00 au Rialto 1.

Une projection supplémentaire de *Mission en enfer* (en version française) est prévue le 13/08 à 16.00 à l'Hôtel Muralto (entrée libre).

Le programme *In Progress* du 14/08, comportant *Forty Below*, *Too Dark for Night*, *Glass Hour*, *Petite mémoire*, *Fermo del tempo*, *Oblivia*, *EMN 40*, *120 mt. S.L.M.*, *Point de vue*, annoncé à la Sala à 19.30 aura lieu au Palavideo à 18.30.

Violentes dérives

Le programme de ce mercredi est profondément marqué par la violence, violence physique, politique, violence des sentiments, de la solitude, de l'abandon. «*Maria*», présenté par Calin Netzer en Compétition Internationale, retrace l'itinéraire d'une jeune femme, qui, dans une Roumanie perturbée, va de douleurs en déceptions. Dans la même section, les personnages des «*Marins perdus*», de Claire Devers se débattent pour s'inventer un port d'attache. La violence se radicalise en Compétition vidéo avec «*Morte Densa*», le nouveau film de Kiko Goifman et Jurandir Muller, qui rapporte les discours, le vécu de meurtriers ordinaires. Violence banale transformée un événement politique, dans «*The Murder of Emmet Till*»,

réalisé par Stanley Nelson, qui replace dans son contexte historique le meurtre d'un jeune noir, qui devint dans les années cinquante le point de départ du mouvement pour les droits civils aux Etats-Unis. Dans «*Los Rubios*», Albertina Carri se penche également sur la coercition érigée en système, en revisitant l'histoire de ses parents kidnappés en 1977 par l'armée argentine. C'est également un monde particulièrement cruel que dépeint Federico Fellini, avec son formidable sens de la mesure, dans son adaptation baroque des mémoires de Giacomo Casanova, qui sera projeté sur la Piazza Grande à l'occasion du dixième anniversaire de la disparition du maestro de Rimini.

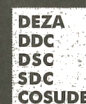
avec la subvention de:



Repubblica e Cantone del Ticino



BUNDESAMT FÜR KULTUR
OFFICE FEDERAL DE LA CULTURE
UFFIZIU FEDERAL DA CULTURA
SWISS FEDERAL OFFICE OF CULTURE



Città
di Locarno