

BELLS OF HAPPINES

Documentary game from the place where wild roses grow
but the superstars don't go. Bar one exception ...



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feature-length movie created for cinemas, length 62 minutes

first run on:	June 19, 2012
produced by:	ŽUDRO
co-produced by:	punkchart films, RTVS
starring:	Mariena Mirgová, Roman Lacko, Adriana Lacková, Miro Čonka and inhabitants of the settlement Víťaz
screenplay and directing:	Jana Bučka, Marek Šulík
cinematography:	Štefan Bučka
editing:	Peter Kotrha
dramaturgist:	Jan Gogola Jr.
sound recording:	Jakub Fišer
sound mixing:	Bohumil Martinák
sound design:	Dušan Kozák
assistants:	Tereza Michalová, Lena Kušnieriková
distribution:	FILMTOPIA Ltd.
distribution format:	DCP, Blue Ray, DVD

Development and production of the film was financially supported by Slovak audiovisual fund.

This film was produced with the support of the project Ex Oriente Film 2011, the Institute of Documentary Film in Czech Republic (awarded with the prize – Golden Funnel)

Website with the trailer and photgallery: http://www.zudro.sk/?page_id=869

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synopsis A)

Mariena and Roman are cousins. Despite the fact that each of them has her or his family, children and everyday life they are freaks in a settlement in which they live. They share one passion which has little to do with their everyday life – admiration of singer stars Karel Gott and Dara Rolins. They collect and exchange newspaper clips from tabloids, they rehearse together songs from the repertoire of their idols and borrow their identities under which they are known by their relatives and neighbours. In spite of all expectations Mariena is Karel and Roman is Darinka (i.e. girl is male singer and boy is female singer). One day they decide that they will sing their favourite hit The Bells of Happiness (“Zvonky šťastia”) and they will send it to them together with their own video-clip on the DVD. In this project they are accompanied by documentarists Marek Sulík and Jana Bučka. Thus there arise a mutual play in which roles of protagonists and film-makers are exchanged but also those of media stars and simple people from socially weaker classes.

synopsis B)

Pregnant Mariena and her cousin Roman live with their families in a poor Roma settlement in Eastern Slovakia. They admire two Czecho-Slovak pop stars – Karel Gott and Dara Rolins. They like their life style and their songs. They decide to send them a DVD with the video-message and Roma remix of their hit The Bells of Happiness (“Zvonky šťastia”). The film traces the process of shooting this message on the background of their life in the settlement.

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Marek Šulík

He was born in 1974. He graduated at the VŠMU in Bratislava in the subject of documentary film. He is active at this academy present as a pedagogue. He works as a film and television editor and director of documentary films. As an editor he worked e.g. on the films by Peter Kerekes (66 Seasons - "66 sezón", Cooking history - "Ako sa varia dejiny"), by Mišo Suchý (Home movie, Pictograph), by Róbert Šveda (Demons - "Démoni"), by Filip Remunda (Meeting with Film - "Setkání s filmem"), by Jaro Vojtek (Out of the Circle - "Z kola von") and others. As a director he worked e.g. on the documents The Unwanted Children - "Nechcené deti", Diana or the Way into Showbusiness - "Diana alebo cesta do šoubiznisu", The Seven Magical Years - "Sedem magických rokov", The Journey of Magdaléna Robinson - "Cesta Magdalény Robinsonovej, Cigarettes and Songs - "Cigarety a pesničky" (The prize for the best documentary film, Seefest Los Angeles 2012, the main prize GRAND PRIX, Arts&Film festival Telč), Cans of Time - "Konzervy času", Peter Župník

Jana Bučka

She was born in 1981 in Nitra. She graduated at the DAMU in the subject of acting in Prague and at the VŠMU in Bratislava in the subject of documentary film. She attended studies as visiting student in Spain, Mexico and Romania. Filmography: Cigarettes and Songs - "Cigarety a pesničky" (The prize for the best documentary film, Seefest Los Angeles 2012, the main prize GRAND PRIX, Arts&Film festival Telč), "Couchsurfing", "Mamma who born me", "National Identity" - "Národná identita", "Camino"

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DOCUMENTARY GAME OF ILLUSIONS AND REALITY

Interview with the directors Marek Šulík and Jana Bučka

Everything started with an ethno-musicological research in which Marek Šulík cooperated with ethnographer Jana Belišová. He invited a student of documentary direction Jana Bučka to help him. They were collecting new Roma songs and they were taking care of video-documentation. It resulted in the creation of the DVD Neve gil'a and the film "Cigarettes and Songs" – "Cigarety a pesničky". They visited as many as 50 settlements which made a deep impact on them in the form of a strong social and emotional experience. They also started to feel a need to deal with the so-called "Roma problem", which means why they are what they are like, why they are poor or how could one deal with their problems, what are solutions of their problems.

This quest finally resulted in your second film from Roma environment with the title "Bells of Happiness" – "Zvonky šťastia". How did you find your protagonists Mariena and Roman, alias Karel and Darinka?

Marek: Some stories we have encountered during this project were really very interesting. And it seemed to us that it would have been a great pity not to deal with them in any way anymore. We began to think about a film with a working title Stories of Fear. The primal question which we asked ourselves and on which this film should have been based was what prevents Roma to come out of the vicious circle of poor life, lack of education, race prejudices etc. And what would they need to break this circle. We managed to receive a grant for the development of a new project and started to visit settlements and speak with Roma. We looked for people who would have wanted to change their situation. Gradually by using selection we reached four stories depicting various attitudes, from the stage of total resignation and inability to change anything up to someone who absolutely breaks this vicious circle, steps out of it and radically changes one's life situation.

Jana: However, then we invited into this project dramaturgist Honza Gogol'a and we attended three week-long stages of the workshop Ex Oriente Film, an international workshop of authorial documentary film which supports its development and financing in the whole region of Central and East Europe. Both Gogol'a and Ex Oriente persuaded us that it is better to choose one protagonist

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instead of too dissociated concept. And we also realized that what we made up, that is people who would be able to take fate into their hands, is in fact only our projection which these people could make true only with our help. At last we chose one protagonist – Mariena. She won our interest by her statement that if she sometimes would get a film camera into her hands, she would have shot a real film about Roma.

Marek: Another from our starting points was a famous Roma film *Gypsies Go to Heaven* which functions in our cultural awareness for a long time. We with our dramaturgist Honza Gogol'a liked the idea to make something like a remake of this film, a kind of documented theatre in which an old story based on a stereotypical perception of Roma would gain new content in contemporary cultural reality. We based our idea on this point and we asked financial support for the development of this project. We eventually gained this grant.

Jana: Only with that reservation that after some time we again ran across the problem with two film-making crews out of which one should have been recording the process of creation and the second one life in the neighbourhood settlement. It is again more our own construct than something Mariena would have shot for herself.



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though we did not know what we would shoot. It looked quite helpless since during two hours of shooting they only lamented over their situation that they did not have money even for shoes.

Marek: It started to look so much like a typical "film on Roma", which made us feel quite unhappy.

Jana: Finally we remembered that some time ago Mariena told us about idols she with her cousin Roman admire - he admired Darinka Rolincová and she Karel Gott. So I asked them if they could try to imagine for a moment what it would be like if they lived the life of their idols.

Marek: We suggested them to imagine that they were Karel and Darina and that they should have talked to each other like these idols. Immediately they both became animated, jumped into their roles, gained full energy and they began to play. They started to live lives of other people isolated from their everyday Roma problems. As in a live TV transmission we could follow a contrast of unpleasant reality and a dream which they would want to live and into which they are now "incarnated". So we decided to build the whole film "Bells of Happiness" on this contrast. Our film went through so many changes that finally it was awarded with the prize Golden Funnel in the workshop Ex Oriente for the biggest progress in the stage of development.

Jana: In the beginning we came with something and finally we end up with something completely different. (laughter) We then shot that trailer in half an hour.



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How was later functioning the interactive play with Mariena as a film-maker who was supposed to shoot "the real film on Roma" during your shooting? Did you develop later also this motif?

Jana: Yes. For example, we lent them a video-camera for a month because we wanted them to record in the meantime a daily life in the settlement without our presence. However, when we came back we found the camera in a pawnshop. When we got hold of the camera, we found out that there had not been recorded anything on it apart from some family party.

Marek: The whole film is built on two plot lines. The first one is a constructed story line in which two Roma from the settlement pretend they are their pop idols, they decide to sing a remake of their song and to send them their message in this way. Although, as a matter of fact, even this story was based on them. They themselves claimed how they liked Karel and Darinka and how they would have liked to meet with them one day. We as if only pushed them towards this particular step. Thus we returned to the original concept based on the assumption that if you want something you must also do something in order to gain it. We forced them to do something real and to become aware of the energy which is necessary to spend on fulfilling of any dream. On the other hand, in the film there are constantly present real cultural facts and life, real "non-acted" reactions of protagonists, authentic climax of the whole story, simply something which is not possible somehow "to enforce" for the needs of the story.



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"Bells of Happiness" has an open ending. Mariena and Roman send their idols remake of their hit. Should this story have any continuation in reality? What are your expectations and what are expectations of the protagonists of the film?

Marek: Well, they have completely different idea what the world works like. They really think that that Karel with Darina could really sometimes come to see them in the settlement. And actually why couldn't they? Also I basically think that. But...

Jana: I personally wanted very much that we shot even Karel with Darina themselves, to have them sit in the same way as Mariena with Roman sit and that it would have been a part of the film. We always hesitated between two basic solutions. The first one would be to leave the film only in a plane of a dream of our protagonists which is in a way stronger. On the other hand, we clearly saw that our audience would have been interested in what followed later. We tried several times to contact both Darina and Karel but only Darina replied and without one of them it would have made no sense.



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Let us come back to the theme of "film on Roma". You mentioned that you got scared when the project started to look like a typical "film on Roma". Why did you then decide to shoot with Roma and plan to stick with this theme?

Jana: I am little bit in a different position than Marek since I was invited to the projects I had not made up only when they were already running. Similarly in the case of the previous film Cigarettes and Songs as in the case of the film Bells of Happiness. As each documentarist, I have always strived to go to Roma and to make a "Roma film". I would not feel a "whole person" if I had not experienced that. As far as particularly Bells of Happiness is concerned, I was attracted to this project that it would be a completely different film on Roma than I have seen so far. That it would be about Roma who would not complain and cry but would start to act. On the one hand I have to admit that the more I have experienced with Roma the more reservations about them I have. But on the other hand their isolation from the world is also good. They are really like children from the aspect how they live for the present moment. And only children are able to play so freely. And exactly this playfulness was a great contribution for our film.

Marek: I was really held in a different situation. I was very glad that I could go with Jana Belišová to the settlements in East Slovakia because I had spent several years only by editing films and I had been isolated from the world. Although I liked my work, I felt I missed a direct contact with reality. People from settlements and from lower social classes are for every documentarist a precious material because they are very open. Dušan Hanák used to say that people who are very poor or also in some other sense in the bottom, have nothing to lose. They do not have a need to cover anything, to play games with you, simply to lie to you. It is different when you move in a society who already knows what media mean, that thanks to them they can lose something or somebody can reproach them for something.

Jana: To put it in one sentence, those people are more authentic.

Marek: When we speak about those unexpected changes, so I can mention at the end how we came to the settlement to shoot the trailer and we found out that Mariena was pregnant. We were afraid that Mariena would not have so much strength in order to direct a demanding theatrical

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project. A lack of finances, Mariena's pregnancy, Ex Oriente, all that forced us to take a different way. Originally I was happy that I would at last make a film with a normal production and under normal financial conditions and finally we had to manage its production so to speak as if we wanted to make bricks without straw". And we found out that it was possible. Only on condition that "bricks" cannot be too big. At last it appeared that any obstacle can turn into a positive thing if you approach it in a right way. Similarly as Mariena's pregnancy, which is, after all, an important element of the story.

In the ending of the film there occurred also a kind of conflict among your protagonists. It seems that also this played into your hands...

Marek: Exactly. We have liked the motif of man who based his life on some illusion. That illusion suddenly breaks apart and he remains helpless facing life, which he must lead without that illusion. Also the film Bells of Happiness is conceived exactly in this way. On the play with building of hope and desire, while at the end this play is betrayed. The film as a medium confesses its presence and it is unveiled that it is at the same time our filmmakers' game and their life game. A barrier between a real life and a life of dreams is definitively broken down.

