

- Screen International



- Variety

FATHER

[illegible]

 600

Gebaseerd op een waargebeurd verhaal. Michal en Zuska wonen met hun dochtertje Dominika in een rustige buitenwijk. Michal heeft een succesvolle baan, maar de druk op zijn werk neemt steeds verder toe. Op een ochtend brengt hij Dominika naar de crèche en stort zich op een hectische werkdag. Wanneer hij later wordt gebeld door zijn vrouw, wordt duidelijk dat er die dag iets ingrijpends is misgegaan.

Tijdens de daaropvolgende rechtszaak staat dit fenomeen centraal dat bekendstaat als het *Forgotten Baby Syndrome*, een vorm van tijdelijk geheugenverlies die onder extreme stress kan optreden. Terwijl Michal probeert te begrijpen wat er is gebeurd, komen ook zijn relatie en zijn toekomst onder druk te staan.

Korte synopsis

Wanneer een moment van tijdelijk geheugenverlies het leven van de vader Michal ingrijpend verandert, komt tijdens een rechtszaak dit fenomeen bekend als *Forgotten Baby Syndrome* aan de orde. Terwijl Michal probeert te begrijpen wat er is gebeurd, komen ook zijn relatie en zijn toekomst onder druk te staan. Gebaseerd op een waargebeurd verhaal.

Oneliner

Waargebeurd verhaal over een tragische fout van een vader die zijn leven en zijn huwelijk op zijn kop zet.

Achtergrond

Regisseuse Tereza Nvotová is geboren in Slowakije en is nu vooral woonachtig in New York. Ze won in 2022 de Gouden Luipaard op het Filmfestival Locarno voor haar film "The Siren". Het script van "Father" is geschreven door Nvotová en Dušan Budzak en is gebaseerd op de beproevingen van Budzak's beste vriend. Budzak: *"Mijn gedachten bleven teruggaan naar de dag waarop dit hem overkwam, wat een nogal saaie dag was – het soort dag dat we allemaal wel eens hebben. En dan verandert alles. Ik besepte dat het niet zomaar een vreselijk verhaal was. Dit zou mij ook kunnen overkomen"*.



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR TEREZA NVOTOVÁ

“Forgotten Baby Syndrome” is a macabre term, to put it mildly. It occurs in cars, when a baby is left, or indeed forgotten, and then suffers heatstroke, not uncommonly with a deadly outcome. What led you to this venture?

- The origin was equally unfortunate, as something similar happened to a close friend of Dušan Budzak, my co-writer. At first, I was a bit reluctant, but Dušan not only talked me into it, but also ignited an inspiration in me, not least in terms of getting this very personal perspective on something I had hardly thought about before. Now and again, we may see some article, and we may think that this was a really terrible parent, but we don't look at it in depth. Because if you do, you'll realise that most of the time, no one did anything out of carelessness. They actually believe that their child is somewhere else, not in the car. Then, hours after the fact, the parent realises what's going on. It's quite crazy when you look into it, but this is how our brain works, not just for certain people, but for any one of us – old, young, men, women. All of us can experience Forgotten Baby Syndrome. This realisation was the main trigger that made me want to make this movie because it raised so many questions inside me, about who we really are and how much control over ourselves we really have.

“Father” is not based just on one case, however.

- I kept reading about it, about that “forgotten baby syndrome.” It's hundreds of cases every year, all around the world,” she explains. So we had that personal connection because of Dušan, but then we moved away from it. All these stories were quite similar. Mostly, it happens to a very loving parent. To all kinds of people, old, young, coming from all social classes. If we would like to simplify it, I would say it's a memory failure. And now, with rising temperatures and more cars than ever, it's happening more and more often.” This year, I've already heard about three new cases – just in the region I'm from.”

Thinking about Gus Van Sant's “Elephant,” inspired by the 1999 Columbine High School massacre, I started to look for the right way to approach a difficult subject. Favoring long takes, I decided not to be too explicit. Encouraging people to come to the cinema will be one of the biggest challenges about this film. You can't lie to them. But I didn't make this movie to make anyone feel bad. I made it so that they can gain some perspective they didn't have before. And, hopefully, also feel some compassion.

When it happened to Dušan's friend, back in 2015, the society was so quick to judge him. They called him a murderer, a ‘bad father.’ But it's not really the case. Same goes for her protagonist Michal, played by Milan Ondřík. He's joined by Dominika Moravkova and Anna Geislerová. We look at others, feeling so righteous, and think: ‘There must have been something wrong with them.’” We like to think that if we always do the right thing, nothing bad will ever come our way. But he's a good dad and that's also what I wanted to say: this happens to good people.

Your visual approach in Father is striking. What led you to structure the film around long, continuous takes?

- For me the language of the film is as important as the story. I could not imagine this film in conventional episodic structure, because I think it would be like looking at a photo album from a funeral day. No one wants to see that kind of stuff. What I wanted to do is



something like a video game, but in very different circumstances that lead us deeper inside of ourselves. I wanted the audience to connect with the main character, immerse themselves in his world completely. And with these long shots I gave them no choice, because they live his life without interruption or distance.

The film has a strong sense of physical proximity, the camera seems to move with the characters, almost breathing with them. How did you work with cinematographer Adam Suzin to build that intimacy?

- I've had very thorough preparation – both with actors and with Adam. To make it look natural we created not only a plan of exact movements of camera and actors, but with certain scenes we scanned the location and recreated it in a 3D program where you can walk with the camera, different lenses, cranes or steadicams. With every shot we did a long rehearsal – some took days – to make it look natural and with no flaws. Sometimes the camera had to go from moving vehicle to steadicam to crane in one shot. It was a huge challenge for everyone, because we needed technical precision that goes hand in hand with the emotional authenticity of the actors. I feel like I went through another film school with this project.



You made the unusual choice to bring both your editor and composer to the set. How did that collaboration shape the final film?

- In my previous projects, the editing was crucial for the final shape of the movie and the editors were very close creative collaborators. With these long shots, I was pulling all of these possibilities away from the editing room. So, I invited Nikodem to the set – to do what he normally does in the edit, but instead of cutting, he would tell me if something lacked rhythm or didn't work in the scene, and I would adjust it right there. There are also moments when the character dissociates and we enter his inner world. In those scenes I wanted music and sound to take over, so having Jonatan, the composer, on set was very useful. He brought a pre-composed piece and even worked on it during shooting, shaping it



together with the scene so it became fully symbiotic. I loved that the image we shot didn't dictate everything else, but rather all the elements influenced one another organically.

What kind of preparation or rehearsal did this approach require from your cast, especially Milan Ondřík?

- We started with meetings with Milan and Dominika, the lead couple, where we went through the entire script. We talked about every small moment, every thought and feeling of the characters. Then Milan worked on his own, as he usually does, in his tool shed. During the shoot we also had rehearsal days with just the actors and camera crew, so we could connect the dots and make everything work for the camera. The biggest challenge was the scenes with the daughter — you can't really direct a two year-old. So Milan and Dominika spent half a year meeting with the girls beforehand, building a real relationship. We actually had two little girls, in case something didn't work out on the shooting day.

There's a powerful sense of presence in the performances, almost theatrical, but deeply grounded. How did you direct your actors to stay in that emotional flow across such extended takes?

- On set I don't really direct. Because we had such an extended rehearsal period, there was nothing to explain to anyone. I'm only helping the actors to get wherever they need to, because they don't see themselves. So I'm there to have their back, to help them tune their feelings where we all want it to go. Milan often says that it was the most difficult role he ever played. And it's no surprise for me – to truthfully play this role, he had to live through anyone's worst nightmare. He couldn't fake it, act it – he had to be it. I've never seen an actor so devoted to the role as Milan.

How did working in real-time, with minimal editing, influence your sense of rhythm and storytelling?

- I had to imagine the scenes visually already when we were writing the script and had to keep adjusting them to location and acting. I questioned every moment, whether the shot carries the feeling of the character, whether I'm connected or disconnected, whether I care about what's happening on the screen. That influenced everything – whether we had a camera on a crane or in Adam's handheld a few centimeters from the actor's face.

Can you talk about your collaboration with Pjoni and the role of music in the film?

- Many directors build a long-term bond with a cinematographer; for me, that bond is with a composer. Working with Pjoni is rare because we don't need much explanation. If I say the music should feel more liquid, or carry the sensation of cold air, or hold a fragile hope, he understands immediately. Still, our process on this film was new for both of us. We mapped the music already in the script stage, going through every scene to decide where it should appear and what it needed to carry. He composed variations that we even used during shooting, and some pieces he worked on directly on set. Later, in editing, we shaped the final soundtrack together, moving back and forth between the editing room and his studio. We were very careful to make the music powerful but never invasive; it shouldn't dictate emotions, but rather rise from inside the moment itself.



This isn't your first time working with emotionally intense material. How did your experience on *Filthy* or *Nightsiren* prepare you for this project?

- Very much. Everything that I knew, I knew from making these two films. But I don't want to repeat myself, I like the challenge. With *Nightsiren*, I was in the editing room for a year. It was exhausting. That may have influenced my decision to avoid that process, and instead make all the important choices before. To be honest, with every movie I feel like it can end up like a disaster, because I'm throwing myself into something that I don't really know. Emotionally intense materials are like a fuel for me – if I can feel it, it keeps me going, it inspires me in every aspect of filmmaking. Without it I wouldn't even know how to make it.

At what point did you realize that this wasn't just a film about loss, but a love story?

- I think it fully happened during the shooting, when I saw the characters alive, on the screen, and felt how the situation makes their relationship impossible - so hard to love, but much harder to stop loving.

What questions were you asking yourself as you developed the character of Michal?

- I didn't ask myself. I asked Dusan, my co-writer. For Michal's character we were inspired by Dusan's best friend, who lived this story. I don't think I would be able to write it without that. I was most curious about the moments that are usually not in movies or biographies – the moments in between. I think they show more truth about the characters, but also about us as humans. These are the moments when we're not in control, when no-one is looking and we can be ourselves.

You avoid sensationalism in telling this story. Instead, there's a quiet confrontation with guilt, memory, and fragility. Was that a conscious choice from the beginning?

- Yes. We know these kinds of stories only from sensational news articles. I wanted to say it in the exact opposite way. I didn't focus on the tragedy itself, but the inner struggle of the character to make sense of it.

How do you create empathy without justifying? Especially for a character like Michal?

- This was the biggest challenge for me while writing the script. I wanted to leave space for the audience to make their own judgements. So I was going back and forth with what should be said and what should be left out. But I knew that if I succeed, the audience will feel with Michal - who is also only building empathy with himself.

There's something very honest about how the film portrays a couple in crisis. How did you work with the actors to explore that emotional distance, and possible reconnection?

- We talked, we shared our personal stories, we rehearsed... And when something felt untruthful we changed it.



You've said that this story challenged your own sense of control and certainty. In what way did making *Father* change you?

- Well, I'm definitely a better filmmaker. And as a person - I hope I'm more open to forgive, to accept failures, including my own.

How do you hope viewers respond to the film, not just emotionally, but reflectively?

- I think we are now disconnected from ourselves more than ever. This film is also a call for acceptance of who we really are, with all our imperfections, not the image of who we want to be. Without that self-acceptance, we can't truly accept or understand each other, which eventually leads to polarized societies, rise of autocracy and wars... It all starts with feelings.

What lingers with you now that the film is complete?

- I'm still learning what this movie is about. I am drawn to stories because they raise questions in me, and I can't let go of them until I sort of relive them through the making of the film. This story is deeply existential, therefore I am still challenged by what it shows me about our very existence. It opens a space for doubt. But it also opens a space for love.



TEREZA NVOTOVÁ



Tereza Nvotová is een Slowaakse filmmaakster en actrice, geboren in Praag en woonachtig in New York. Ze studeerde af aan de Faculteit voor Film en Televisie in Praag (FAMU) in de richting documentaire. Naast haar carrière als actrice regisseerde ze verschillende documentaires voor de Tsjechische en Slowaakse televisie en voor HBO. Ze gaat de taboes van de samenleving frontaal te lijf, of het nu gaat om het blootleggen van de duistere banden van een politicus in "The Lust for Power" uit 2017, of het onthullen van seksueel misbruik dat

plaatsvindt binnen de familiekring in "Filthy" uit 2017. In "The Siren" (Světlonoc) uit 2022 verbeeldt ze de sprookjesachtige sfeer en de meest mystieke kant van het platteland van Slowakije. Deze film draaide op Filmfestival Locarno en won de Gouden Luipaard.

FICTIONS

Father (2025)

MOSTRA DE VENISE 2025 – **ORIZZONTI**

FESTIVAL LES ARCS 2025 – **Award Best Actor Milan Ondřík**

FESTIVAL ZURICH 2025 – **Award Best Film**

OSCARS 2026 – **Entree Slovakia**

FESTIVAL STOCKHOLM 2025 – **Award Best Film and Best Script**

FESTIVAL VARSOVIE 2025 – **Special Mention a Milan Ondřík**

FESTIVAL GOLDEN ORANGE D'ANTALYA 2025 – **Award Best Director**

The Siren (Svetlonoc) (2022)

FESTIVAL LOCARNO 2022 – CINEASTI DEL PRESENTE – **Award Golden Leopard**

FESTIVAL SITGES 2022 – **Best feature European Film**

Filthy (Spina) 2017)

FESTIVAL FEST 2017 – **Lynx d'Or**

FESTIVAL FILM VALLADOLID 2017 – **Best Film**

CZECH FILM CRITICS' AWARDS 2017 – **Best Film**

DOCUMENTARIES

The Lust for Power (2017)

Ježíš je normální! (2008)

SERIES

Krimunálka 5.C (2019)

A Year with Fulbright (2015)

CAST

Milan Ondřík (1980, Dolný Kubín - Slovakia)

He studied at Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (VŠMU) and began his acting career at the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra, where he remains a prominent member. In 2011, he joined the Drama Ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre (SND), where he performed in major productions including the title role in *Coriolanus*, directed by Diego de Brea.

His raw, emotionally authentic and psychologically nuanced performances have made him one of the most respected and sought-after Slovak actors of his generation. His film career took off with his subtle yet powerful portrayal in *Eva Nová* (2015, dir. Marko Škop), earning him his first Sun in a Net Award (Slovakia's national film award). He later collaborated with Škop again in *Let There Be Light* (2019), for which he received both the Sun in a Net Award for Best Actor and the Best Actor Award at the Karlovy Vary IFF.

Ondřík has demonstrated his range across genres in films such as *Shadowplay* (Peter Bebjak), *Goldilocks and the Glorious Losers* (Rasťo Boroš), *Restore Point* (Robert Hlož), and *We Have Never Been Modern* (Matěj Chlupáček). In 2024, he was nominated for two Sun in a Net Awards – Best Actor (*MIKI*) and Best Supporting Actor (*The Hungarian Dressmaker*), winning the latter.

His consistent excellence and contribution to Slovak acting were recently recognized with the prestigious Actor's Mission Award (Hercova misia) at Art Film Fest Košice 2024 – honouring his significant impact on contemporary Slovak theatre and cinema.

Dominika Morávková (1990, Bánovce - Slovakia)

She studied theatre acting at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. This year, she was nominated for Best Actress in a Leading Role for her performance as Hela in the film *The Sleeping Account* (*Spiaci účet*). Some of her other notable acting credits are *Filthy* (*Špina*, 2017), *Shadowplay* (*Stínohra*, 2022), *Terezín* (2023), and the Slovak TV series *Čas nádejí* (2024).

Aňa Geislerová (1976, Prague - Czech Republic)

Aňa Geislerová is a Czech internationally award-winning actress whose work has earned acclaim both at home and abroad. Her powerful performance in *Happiness* (*Šťěstí*) earned her prestigious Concha de Plata at the San Sebastián Film Festival in 2005, and she has since received numerous accolades, including five Czech Lion Awards. Aňa was honored as a Berlinale Shooting Star and received the Angela Award at the Subtitle Film Festival in Kilkenny. She is known by international audiences for her role in the historical thriller *Anthropoid*, where she starred alongside Cillian Murphy and Jamie Dornan, as CREDITS NOT CONTRACTUAL

well as for her performance in the acclaimed UK television series *The Ipcress File*, alongside Joe Cole and Tom Hollander. This year, she appeared in *Caravan* (*Karavan*), directed by Zuzana Kirchnerová, is premiering in the Un Certain Regard section at the Cannes Film Festival, where Aňa also serves as executive producer, further showcasing her creative versatility. She also completed filming *&Sons*, directed by Pablo Trapero, which is now in post-production. Aňa recently joined the L'Oréal family as an ambassador.



CAST

Milan Ondřík
Dominika Morávková
Aňa Geislerová
Martina Slúková
Dominika Zajcz
Peter Ondrejčka
Ingrid Timková
Peter Bebjak
Roman Polák
Jiří Konvalinka

- Michael
- Zuzka
- Eva
- Dása
- Dominika
- Juro
- Prosecutor
- Lawyer
- Judge
- New Manager

CREW

Director
Screenplay
Cinematography
Editing
Costumes
Original score
Art director
Costume Design
Sound
Casting
Make-up
VFX Supervisor
Producer

Production Company

- Tereza Nvotová
- Tereza Nvotová, Dušan Budzak
- Adam Suzin
- Nikodem Chabior
- Aneta Grňáková
- Pjoni
- Nina Feriancová
- Aneta Grňáková
- Marek Hart, Ivan Horák
- Tereza Libovičová
- Vladimír Wittgruber, Zuzana Wittgruber
- Michal Křeček
- Veronika Paštéková, Anton Skreko, Karel Chvojka,
Miloš Lochman, Marta Gmosińska, Mariusz Włodarski
- DANA E Production, moloko film, Lava Films

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