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DOCUMENTARY SELECTION



HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD
SARAJEVO FILM FESTIVAL 2019

THE EUPHORIA OF BEING

A FILM BY RÉKA SZABÓ



CAST AND CREW

Director	Réka Szabó
Cast	Éva Fahidi, Emese Cuhorka, Réka Szabó
Producer	Sára László, Marcell Gerő (<i>Campfilm</i>), Réka Szabó (<i>The Symptoms</i>)
Production	The Symptoms, Campfilm
Co-producer	László Jancsó (<i>4Cut Post Digital</i>), Szabolcs Győrffy (<i>4Cut Post Digital</i>), Philippe Fontenoy (<i>Pom'Zed</i>)
Executive producer	Flóra Kovács (<i>The Symptoms</i>), Jonathan Halperyn (<i>Hero Squared</i>)
Line producer	Melinda Erdős
DoP	Claudia Kovács
Editor	Sylvie Gadmer, Péter Sass
Composer	Balázs Barna
Sound designer	Rudolf Várhegyi
Editing Studio	Pom'Zed
Sound Studio	4Cut Post Digital
Individual Supporters	Gábor Almási, Aron Fischer, Indiegogo donationst
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SYNOPSIS

Éva Fahidi was 20 years old when she returned to Hungary from Auschwitz Birkenau. She was all alone, 49 members of her family were murdered, including her mother, her father and her little sister. 70 years later, aged 90, Éva is asked to participate in a dance-theatre performance about her life.

Réka, the director imagines a duet between Éva and the young, internationally acclaimed dancer, Emese. Réka wants to see these two women, young and old, interact on stage, to see how their bodies and their stories can intertwine.

Éva agrees immediately.

Three women – three months – a story of crossing boundaries. Whilst key moments of Éva's life are distilled into theater scenes, a powerful relationship forms between the three women.





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Throwing all caution to the wind, I asked a 90-year-old Holocaust survivor to create a dance theatre piece with me. I wanted everyone to see Éva Fahidi and to provide a space for her traumas in a dialogue with a young dancer, Emese. Where would the boundaries of understanding, of finding common ground lie? Would they be able to slip into each other's skin? Can we ever learn from the past? This rehearsal period was one of the most profound periods of my life. The film takes us on a journey through the history of the 20th century, through loss, the power of dance, the ageing body, love, a relationship across a 60 year age gap, and life's hidden strengths.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

The Euphoria of Being functions on several levels simultaneously: on the one hand it's a documentary, yet it can also be seen as a portrait, and moreover one can see the obvious connection with theatre, dance and performance art. What was the starting point and how were these layers built on each other?

When I first heard Éva Fahidi speaking about the story of her life in public, I sensed a raw honesty glowing from every sentence of hers and an astoundingly open-minded attitude with which she faces her traumas, and that's when I decided to create a dance-theater performance with her. The thought itself seemed absolutely crazy – how can you build an entire performance and devise a whole process of rehearsals around a 90 year-old performer who has never been on stage before? But Éva said yes immediately and I realised one month before the start of the rehearsals that whatever happens, this is going to be something really special, and that we absolutely have to film this process. That's the starting point of the movie. All that we - Claudia Kovács, our cinematographer, and I - knew from the beginning was that the film would focus on Éva, so viewers would experience everything from her perspective. I had to simultaneously pay attention to how the rehearsals would lead to a theater premiere and how we could put a film together from the recorded materials.

For the latter, I had to view things from a very different perspective which was something I would only learn during the shooting, and when we were getting close to the premiere of the performance, I really wasn't able to think like a film director anymore. I only realized we had something really rich and complex when I was watching the rushes after the premiere.

What do you think is the reason behind this complexity and richness, what does Éva's personality add to this?

We can see a whole life transformed into a series of theatrical scenes and the language is not just - or even predominantly- verbal, but it comes from the body, the movements. One can perhaps find other Holocaust survivors with the same level of mental agility, sarcastic sense of humour and clarity of vision; and you can also find 90-year-old women who can raise their legs up to their ears and others who have an incredible personality full of love, hope and empathy. But to find all these attributes in one single person... that's what makes Éva genuine and so unique. The complexity of the performance and the movie comes from this incredible combination that allowed me to work with her as I usually do: the way the emphatic power of the body colors the words and vice versa, how words can enrich the meaning of every movement.



Were you aware of the richness of Éva's personality or did this become obvious during the rehearsals?

Éva was about 70 years old when I first met her. I found her life-affirming attitude, her intelligence and cheeriness astonishing. I also knew that she'd been dancing all her life. However, I didn't know what she was capable of physically. I could not have imagined her amazing levels of endurance, her really open-minded approach to problematic situations, and all the very conscious decisions that she made during all of the rehearsal process.

How did you find Emese Cuhorka, your other main performer?

I knew from the beginning that I'd like to have a dialogue between Éva and a young dancer. I really wanted to find out how two generations can connect with one another; if Éva's life experiences could ever fully be transmitted to a young woman and also whether Éva, with the weight of her own past, could really truly be interested in a young woman's problems. Emese came to my mind quite early on, we've worked together several times before. Aside from being an excellent, unique dancer, Emese is very sensitive and creative, and loves to explore untrodden paths. Somehow I had this idea that they're quite similar, not just physically; I imagined some kind of soul resonance between them. When I first saw them together, I knew it was going to work.

You had to direct a theater play while you were shooting a film. How did you find the balance?

During the rehearsals it was extremely difficult to divide my concentration. I could only really focus on the film after the premiere, and I had ideas to shoot scenes only for the sake of the film. By the end of the movie I wanted to submerge into a surreal, symbolic world. Speaking of which, most of the editing process was excruciating. When you have to re-watch a whole procedure of rehearsals and see all your directorial failures reappear and laugh in your face...When I work on stage, I am constantly striving to bring the performers into a genuine and personal performance state - that is nevertheless separate from the private persona – a state in which they are beliÉvable. I work with a real, living human being there. During the editing I was shocked to realise that there was only the "dead" rushes to work with. I was basically creating a new reality, one which could so easily become fake, incomprehensible or uninteresting. Of course this must be a basic experience for all filmmakers.

What did this cooperation mean to you, what was it like to follow this evolving relationship between two people?

For me it was a defining and profound experience. During the four months of the rehearsal period, we'd spend 3 to 6 hours together every day, so we became intertwined physically, spiritually and mentally as well. With Éva, you always sense the struggle against fate and circumstance so strongly that it makes you confront your own life choices, and become aware of where you perhaps had narrow escapes. A connection and convergence beyond words evolved between Emese and Éva, and it was really heart-warming to follow that process so closely.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

RÉKA SZABÓ (Budapest, 1969) graduated in mathematics and informatics, meanwhile she fell in love with contemporary dance. Now she is the artistic director of The Symptoms, one of the most significant contemporary dance-theatre companies in Hungary. The company recognizes no generic boundaries. They treat everyday problems that preoccupy all of us, addressing these themes in a deeply personal tone. All of this is wrapped in a vision that is grotesque, self-ironic and poetic at the same time. After directing two experimental short films, *The Euphoria of Being* is her first feature-length documentary.





DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

THE EUPHORIA OF BEING

83' feature length documentary

Production Company: Campfilm and The Symptoms, 2019

MOURNING

10' dance-film

Production Company: Laookon Film Group and The Symptoms, 2014

Awards:

Best Hungarian Dance Film – 27th Mediawave Festival (2017)

Best Dance Film - 27th Mediawave Festival (2017)

Special Prize of the Student Jury - 27th Mediawave Festival (2017)

Audience Award – Bucharest International Dance Film Festival (2017)

Dance On Screen Audience Award (2018)

SHADOW MOVIE

11' dance-film

Production Company: The Symptoms, 2010

Awards:

Best Experimental Film – 42nd Hungarian Film Week (2011)

Best Experimental Film – Timishort Filmfestival (2012)



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