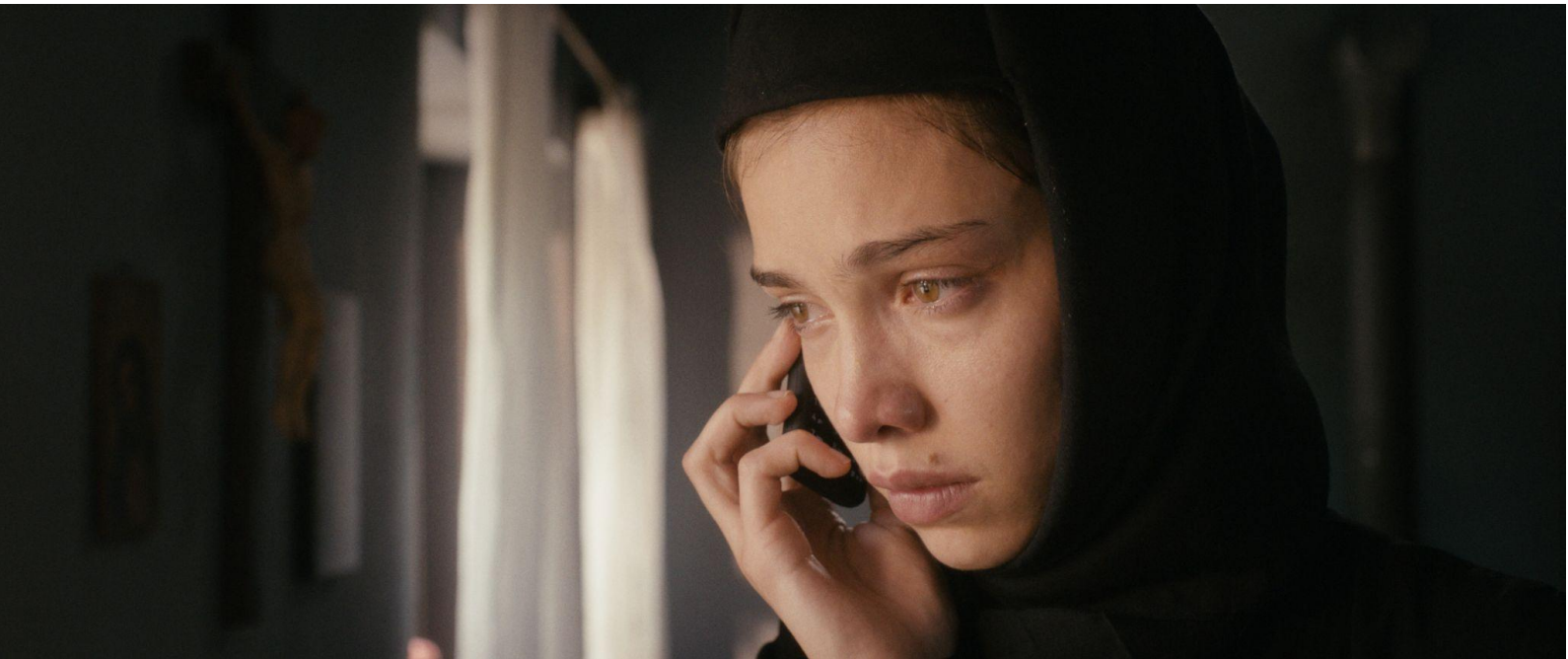


MIRACLE

a film by
BOGDAN GEORGE APETRI



118 minutes | Romania, Czech Republic, Latvia | Romanian with English subtitles
5.1 Surround Sound | Aspect Ratio 2:39:1



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SYNOPSIS

One afternoon, in a rural Romania convent, young nun Cristina (Ioana Bugarin), sneaks out to embark on an enigmatic journey. She wanders all around town, worriedly searching, but is seemingly unable to solve her problem or find who she is looking for. Out of options, Cristina returns in the evening only to meet an unexpected fate on her way back to the isolated convent. Determined to understand what happened to her, police detective Marius Preda (Emanuel Pârvu) retraces Cristina's journey, step by step, through all the places she visited. In a perfectly mirrored structure, his investigation uncovers revelations leading not only to the unfathomable truth behind Cristina's mysterious actions, but possibly, to an actual miracle as well.

DIRECTOR – BOGDAN GEORGE APETRI

Bogdan George Apetri is a Romanian filmmaker, born on February 2, 1976 in Piatra Neamt. In 2010, he directed *OUTBOUND*. The film screened and won awards at prestigious festivals (Locarno, Toronto, Warsaw, Rotterdam, New Directors/New Films, Thessaloniki, Viennale). In 2019 he directed *Unidentified*, which won the Special Jury Prize at the Warsaw International Film Festival.

MIRACLE is his third feature film.

As a producer working in the U.S., Bogdan produced many films that won awards at the Sundance Film Festival, were selected at Cannes and other major festivals and were distributed around the world.

He teaches Directing at Columbia University in New York.

FILMOGRAPHY:

FEATURE FILMS

MIRACLE – Drama; 2021, Romania/Czech Republic/Latvia

Director, Writer, Producer

Starring: Ioana Bugarin, Emanuel Parvu, Ana Ularu, Vali Popescu, Valeriu Andriuta

UNIDENTIFIED – Drama; 2020, Romania/Czech Republic/Latvia – Director, Writer, Producer

Starring: Bogdan Farcas, Dragos Dumitru, Vasile Muraru, Emanuel Parvu, Ana Popescu

- Warsaw International Film Festival (Poland) Official Selection
- Jury Award for Best Actors (Bogdan Farcas and Dragos Dumitru)
- Goa International Film Festival (India) Official Selection
- Thessaloniki International Film Festival (Greece) Official Selection
- Transilvania International Film Festival (Romania) Official Selection
- "Nor In" International Film Festival (Italy) Official Selection

OUTBOUND – Drama; 2010, Romania/Austria – Director and Writer

Starring: Ana Ularu, Mimi Branescu, Andi Vasluianu, Oana Flora, Cristi Olesher

- Locarno International Film Festival (Switzerland) Official Selection
- Swiss Critics Boccalino Award for Best Actress (Ana Ularu)
- Toronto International Film Festival (Canada) Official Selection
- New Directors/New Films Series (New York, USA) Official Selection
- Thessaloniki International Film Festival (Greece) Official Selection
 - Golden Alexander Best Feature Film Award
 - Best Actress Award (Ana Ularu)
 - Greek Film Critics Association Award
- Warsaw International Film Festival (Poland) Official Selection
 - Special Jury Award for Best Screenplay
 - FIPRESCI Award
 - Best Actress Award Special Mention (Ana Ularu)
 - Ecumenical Jury Award Special Mention
- Viennale International Film Festival (Austria) Official Selection
 - FIPRESCI Award
- Vilnius International Film Festival (Lithuania) Official Selection
 - Best Film Award
- Transylvania International Film Festival (Romania) Official Selection
 - Best Romanian First Film Award
- Cinema City International Film Festival (Serbia) Official Selection
 - Best Director Award
 - Best Actress Award
- Annonay International Film Festival (France) Official Selection
 - Grand Jury Prize
- Taipei International Film Festival (Taiwan) Official Selection
 - Special Mention

SHORT FILMS

LAST DAY OF DECEMBER – Short Film; 2006, Romania/USA – Director, Writer and Producer

A VERY SMALL TRILOGY OF LONELINESS – Short Film; 2006, Romania/USA – Director, Writer and Producer

CROSSING – Short Film; 2003, USA – Director, Writer and Producer

THE ARRIVAL OF THE TRAIN AT THE STATION – Short Film; 2002, USA – Director, Writer and Producer

CORNY – Short Film; 2002, Romania/USA – Director, Writer and Producer

DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

MIRACLE runs for almost two hours, but is composed of only forty-two sequence shots, including a stunning 16-minute long shot near the end of the film. How did you settle on the structure for this film, and how did you tackle this narrative setup cinematically?

A: The decision to shoot every single scene of MIRACLE as a long sequence shot didn't come from outside of the film – on the contrary, it sprang forward from its very heart, from its most innermost core. I very rarely – if ever - imagine shots and camera movements when writing the script, but in this particular case, I knew from the outset that the film requires these uninterrupted sequences where time flows unobstructed and is never manipulated by cuts. I don't want to reveal too much from the story but the viewers will realize at the end of the movie why the natural flow of time is so incredibly important in this film. And the realization comes almost in a shocking way. I can't imagine this story shot in any other way – in fact, it would simply not function if it was filmed differently.

In any case, the cinematic approach never resulted from a pre-conceived formalism, or cinematic philosophy, or desire to follow in the footsteps of the now iconic Romanian “neo-realism” signature style – in fact, for me at least, it almost marks the end of the road for it, in a personal way of course. While on the surface the film borrows some of the trademarked cinematic patterns of the Romanian New Wave, it actually blows them up right back in your face at the very end, putting the audience face to face with a much deeper filmic and emotional truth. My film is not about style, not for a single second – its form is built in into its very meaning. One cannot go without the other.

Your films are known for very strong performances, often delivered by new-coming actors. How did you cast this particular project, and what were some of the challenges encountered with long dialogues and especially with very complicated *mise-en-scene* sequences?

The casting process was extremely long and difficult, because of the unusual circumstances surrounding this particular project. MIRACLE is actually part of a larger trilogy set in my small town in Northern Romania. The stories are self-contained and completely independent – you can fully understand and appreciate each movie without seeing any of the others. However, the world of the three stories is the same; the locations and characters are the same – just as in Balzac's novels, main characters in a film can become secondary characters in the next one, and little stories link and find connection points across different movies. The first two films – UNIDENTIFIED and MIRACLE – were actually filmed at the same time, and also cast at the same time. Choosing actors for two movies took me six months and it was truly a grueling process. The unexpected bonus is that the third movie – to be shot next – is now basically cast already.

The challenges on set were also multi-faceted because we shot the two films simultaneously (we shot one film for four days, then we shot the next film for two days, then moved back to the first film for three days and so on until the end). In fact, some days, we shot scenes from one film until lunch, and scenes from the second film after lunch. It wasn't hard physically but creatively it was exhausting, because the two movies have completely different cinematic approaches, as dictated by their separate stories. My mind constantly switched from one story to the next, day after day, and it was challenging to keep track of so many threads.

In terms of the long and intricate *mise-en-scene* sequences – in particular for MIRACLE – the process is akin to finding the right shape for a complicated dance. First you need to find the essence and the truth of every important moment, regardless of the camera or the blocking for the actors. And then you keep adding the other layers – the pace, the rhythm, the shots, the transition between them, the movement, the *mise-en-scene*. You rehearse it with actors, you refine it, you find new ideas, you change it, you evolve it. It's hard work, especially for shots that last several minutes and end up being highly choreographed – but it allows for discovery at every step, and was always designed together with my amazing DP Oleg Mutu.

This elaborate work and painstaking cinematic approach were not done to reach a certain "realism", but to elevate each and every dramatic moment to its real emotional and filmic potential. And in this case, the uninterrupted sequences are fundamental to the entire construction of the film, its core theme, leading all the way to the devastating conclusion at the end – which turns the world upside down, almost literally.

What does the title refer to? What is a "miracle" for you?

In this film, I meant it plainly, and not at all metaphorically. Without going too deep into talking about certain definitions – from Spinoza and Voltaire to Hume and beyond – I invite a miracle into my film quite literally. Viewers can accept it or not, of course, it's up to them. But it's a violation of the laws of nature as we understand them, in the truest sense of the word. And by extension, it's a transgression of the basic laws that make cinema work. Paradoxically, the cinematic medium itself, when used in a particular way, is the very reason a miracle can be articulated and conveyed to the viewers.

You live in New York where you produce Sundance-winning American films, yet you direct movies in your native Romania. How do you manage to split your filmmaking career across two continents, and how does that affect your style?

It's actually very easy. Twenty years ago, when I left Romania to study film directing in the U.S., I felt I went to the other side of the world. Now, the world seems much smaller. I jump into a plane and I feel I am taking the bus – I can fly from Bucharest in the morning and reach New York in the afternoon. Distance is never a problem.

As for my moviemaking career, I don't feel I am an American filmmaker, and I don't feel I am a Romanian filmmaker. I feel I am simply myself and I am working towards telling my own personal stories in my own personal ways. Of course, your experiences make you who you are, they undoubtedly leave a mark on your creative process. But these are things best left unchecked and un-analyzed. When being creative, the best thing is to find a flow and let yourself be carried by the wave. Directors subconsciously make films they themselves want to see on the screen, so as long as my instinct tells me I am going in the right direction, I put my focus on the scene, on the movie, on the inner truth of a moment. Is it a genre film? Is it a Romanian film? Is it a faster-paced American film? I never think in those terms.

From the US, though, I think I have gained a huge respect for storytelling itself – the skills needed to tell a story in a truthful but also interesting way, the craft of moviemaking in all its minutiae, the desire to engage the audience at every moment (regardless of the scale of the film) - while trying to stay away from the beaten path and always striving to find ways to tell stories in unexpected, new ways. I'm very interested not just in stories, but in the ways one can tell a story. Sometimes, this gets lost in the US.

You've opted for a rather controversial pivotal scene at the midpoint of the film. What was your approach with this particular part of the story?

I can certainly see how one could find that particular sequence controversial.

First, however, I would point out that the scene is at the base of the whole dramatic structure – without that scene, there is no movie, no premise upon which to build anything. Cut that scene, and the movie doesn't exist. So it's a must-have unit - MIRACLE would be a completely different movie without it.

And secondly, the scene is not shot in a shocking way - quite the contrary. There was never any desire to make it into a “controversial” scene that would keep people talking about the film. I would ask anyone who was deeply touched by that scene to watch the film again, and pay close attention to the way it was shot, the direct relationship to the end of the film, the visual and cinematic connections to the other units of the story. It's a scene done with artistry and respect for cinema and the audience as a whole, and not one a scene designed to shock the viewers in order to gather attention onto the film for the wrong reasons.

Ten years ago, precisely, your first film (OUTBOUND) premiered in Locarno. Now you come out with basically two films at once. What's next? Will you keep directing Romanian films?

Not necessarily. It's hard to plan your life as a film director because new things spring up very often and they hijack your life. You think you're going to do this film, but an offer comes along for another film and if the stars align, you decide to make that instead first. So, everything else changes afterwards, almost like domino pieces.

In any case, I need to finish the third film from my Romanian trilogy, so yes, I'll direct at least one more film in my native country. But I live and work in New York City, where I teach film directing at Columbia University. So, I will start directing in the United States as well.

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

THE EAST COMPANY PRODUCTIONS

THE EAST COMPANY PRODUCTIONS is a Bucharest based film production company founded in 2016 by Oana Iancu and co-owned by Bogdan George Apetri. THE EAST COMPANY PRODUCTIONS co-produced the feature films "ÎNTREGALDE" (2021) by Radu Muntean, that premiered in Cannes at Quinzaine des Réalisateurs, and "MIKADO" (2021) by Emanuel Pârvu, that will premiere in San Sebastian. Its first main production, "MIRACLE" (2021) by Bogdan George Apetri is going to have its world premiere at the 78th Venice International Film Festival.

The two co-owners intend to produce the works of established Romanian art-house film directors and new-comers alike. They are also interested in co-producing foreign auteur films of high artistic value.

CINEART TV PRAGUE

CINEART TV PRAGUE was founded in 1992 by Viktor Schwarcz. CINEART is one of the leading production companies on the Czech market concentrating on the production of feature films theatrically distributed. It has produced 25 feature films by now, and its aim is to develop and produce 7 feature films within the next 3 years. The producer and company's owner Viktor Schwarcz is well-known and respected for his support of directors shooting their feature film debuts. CINEART TV PRAGUE has also successfully produced commercial spots (presented in Cannes) and music videoclips (directed by top Czech directors Jan Sverak and Filip Renc and awarded as the best spots of the year).

TASSE FILM

Founded in 2011 TASSE FILM is mainly focused on producing high quality fiction films, working with both established directors as well as discovering new talents and bringing them to international market. Company's latest titles include films like "Oleg" by director Juris Kursietis (Latvia, Lithuania, Belgium, France) and Finish coproduction "Dog's Dont Wear Pants" both selected for Director's Fortnight in Cannes 2019.

Supported by Czech Film Fund

CAST

Ioana Bugarin as CRISTINA TOFAN
Emanuel Pârvu as MARIUS PREDĂ
Cezar Antal as BATIN
Ovidiu Crișan as AGENT MACARIE
Valeriu Andriuță as ALBU
Valentin Popescu as DOCTOR IVAN
Marian Râlea as DOCTOR MIHĂESCU
Nora Covali as SISTER MINA
Natalia Călin as MOTHER SUPERIOR SEBASTIANA
Cătălina Moga as SISTER SOFIA
Ana Ularu as DOCTOR MARCU
Olimpia Mălai as SECRETARY LIZUCA
Vasile Muraru as CHIEF INSPECTOR
Mircea Postelnicu as RADU
Dan Grigoraș as TICU
Bogdan Farcaș as FLORIN ISPAS
Bogdan Tascu as CIPRIAN BORDEI

CREW

Director: Bogdan George Apetri	Set Designer: Mihaela Poenaru
Scriptwriters: Bogdan George Apetri	Editor: Bogdan George Apetri
	Colorist: Tomáš Chudomel
Producers: Bogdan George Apetri, Oana Iancu	Re-recording Mixers: Karel Zámečník, Jiří Klenka
Co-Producers: Aija Bērziņa, Viktor Schwarcz	Sound Engineer: Mărtiș Rozentāls
Executive Producers: Minodora Șerban	Assistant Director: Constantin Donici
	Casting Director: Cătălin Dordea
DOP: Oleg Mutu	Script Supervisor: Alina Apostu
Production Manager: Alexandru Iliescu	Costume Designer: Liene Dobrāja
	Make-up Designer: Bianca Boeroiu
	Hair stylist Designer: Bogdan Lazăr

