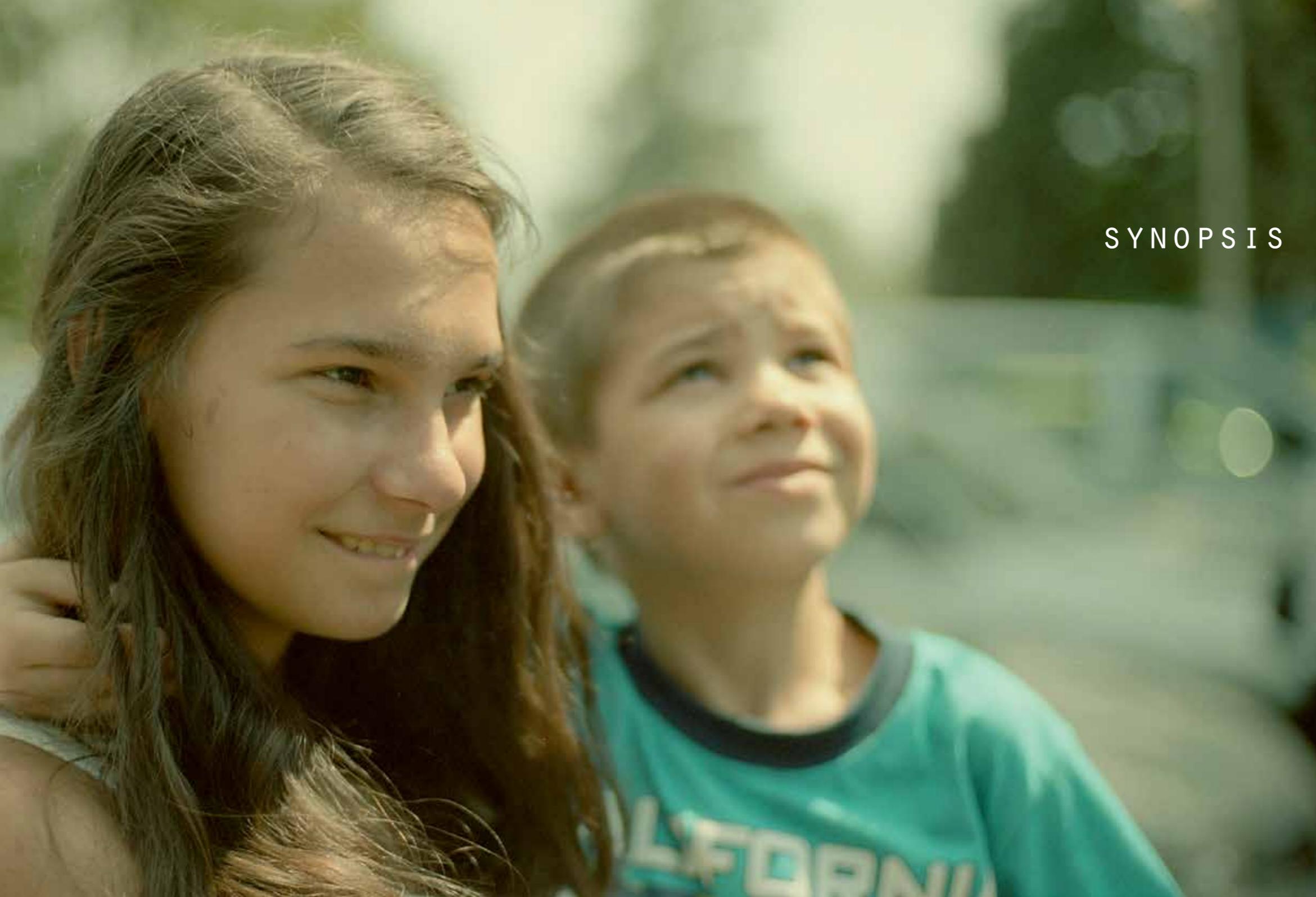




CLIN D'OEIL FILMS PRESENTS
IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH A PRIVATE VIEW

WAITING FOR AUGUST

A FILM DIRECTED BY
TEODORA ANA MIHAI



SYNOPSIS

Georgiana Halmac turns 15 this winter. She lives with her six brothers and sisters in a social housing condo on the outskirts of Bacau, Romania. Their mother Liliana was forced to leave her family behind to go to Turin, Italy, to earn money. She won't be back before summer. During their mother's absence, Georgiana has been catapulted into the role of head of the family, responsible for her siblings. Her adolescence is cut brutally short.

Caught between puberty and responsibility, Georgiana moves ahead, improvising as she goes. Phone conversations with her mom are her only guidelines. Intimate scenes from the daily life of the seven siblings show us – in an uncensored, fly-on-the-wall style - how real events are experienced and interpreted with great imagination by the children.

You can't help being amazed by their ingenuity, while also realizing how precarious their daily equilibrium is.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My name is Teodora Ana Mihai. I was born in Bucharest in 1981, during the Ceaușescu era. My parents fled Romania in 1988 and were granted political asylum in Belgium. I stayed behind as a guarantee for the secret services that my mom and dad would return: it was the only way for them to flee the country. In the absence of prospects, parents sometimes take risks whose consequences are difficult to calculate in advance.

In the end I was lucky: about a year later, after diplomatic interventions, I was able to leave Romania too and was reunited with my parents. But that one-year absence during my childhood left a significant mark on me.

I remain in close contact with my country of birth, intrigued and preoccupied by its current fate. It's this connection with Romania that made me realize that, in a way, history is repeating itself there. The difference is that children are no longer left behind for political reasons, but for economic ones. The impact on the child though, remains the same.

The economic migrants are occasionally given a voice by the media, but we hardly ever hear from the young ones left behind. That is why I wanted to tell their story - the story behind the story.

But telling the story of children who are left behind by their parents is a delicate matter. It is a taboo in practically all cultures, as no one is proud of ending up in such circumstances. It was not an easy task to find a family who

were not only expressive enough, but who also agreed to be filmed in an open, uncensored way. Luckily, after many months of searching and numerous interviews, I finally met the Halmacs. Their story particularly touched me; fortunately, they agreed to share their everyday life with me and with the broader public. The Halmac kids literally claimed my empathy. Every single one of them is a real 'character', with a fascinating and well-defined personality that I just wanted to get to know better.

Having said that, I was of course also confronted with a crucial question: who was the main character in this story? Who was holding this family together in the mother's absence? The answer came quite naturally: Georgiana, who was about to turn 15 when we started filming, had obviously taken over the parental responsibilities. She was the new point of reference for the rest of the siblings, despite her age.

As I started following Georgiana, I discovered an extremely strong, uninhibited teenager who accepted her new 'head-of-the-family' role with humility, without considering herself a victim. But she did possess the realization that she — like the rest of her siblings — should have the right to a normal, more protected childhood.

I felt privileged to be allowed into their lives to tell their story of courage and resilience. After spending so much time together we all became like family, which gave this film its intimacy and, I believe, also its strength. Getting to know the Halmacs truly enriched my life.



'(...) A beautifully crafted vérité film that reveals its central characters through the details of everyday life. With balance and nuance it shows a family dealing with the stress created by harsh economic realities. However, what makes *Waiting for August* truly special is that, by the time it's over, you will have laughed, cried, and become one of the family'

– from the *Hot Docs Jury report* (Tom Quinn, Gordon Quinn, Anna Eborn)

'(...) For walking into a home almost unnoticed and drawing a complex and round portrait of seven siblings, boys and girls, fending on their own, under the rule of the eldest daughter, a 15-year-old, herself still at school, and the hands-on reign of a satellite mother, and for doing so, with much detail and sensitivity. For avoiding the condescending and pity traps. (...) For its outstanding editing, for its cinematic approach, from the wide opening and closing, to a two room apartment. For the subtle flow between seasons and holidays, challenges and victories at home and at school throughout a tangible cycle of a year. For the longing for the month of August'

– from the *Karlovy Vary International Film Fest Jury report* (Philippa Kowarsky, Oskar Alegria, Tomáš Bojar)

'Over nearly a year, filmmaker Teodora Ana Mihai in her remarkable debut follows Georgiana through the seasons as she cooks, cleans, studies, socializes, and takes care of her Romanian household while their mother works in Italy to provide for them. (...) It's an intimate look into the world of some charming children, all of whom become unique individuals by the time the film ends. They are cleverly introduced one evening while Georgiana cooks and their mother calls and speaks to each in ascending order of age. Their situation is not uncommon, it would seem, but there is an optimistic tone throughout as no one seems resentful or heartbroken; they miss their mother, yes, but they all seem to understand the situation they are in. The emotions run the gamut, and it's at times as winning and hysterical as it is heartbreaking and tense.'

- Anthony Marcusa, *Scenecreek.com*

'The film's been on my radar since Hot Docs, where it won Best International Feature, and it's a subtle stunner. (...) *Waiting for August* ends up being less a tale of one family's struggle in a faraway foreign land, and more a universal look at the brave resilience of impoverished children everywhere, who grow up without ever having known what it means to be young and carefree.'

- Lauren Wissot, *Filmmaker Magazine*

REVISITING THE PAST

History is repeating itself in Romania, says Teodora Ana Mihai. When Mihai was a child, her parents fled the Ceaușescu regime, leaving her behind until they could settle and send for her. Now kids are being left behind because of economic migration, as hundreds of thousands of people leave the country annually to work abroad. They are often referred to as the 'home alone generation'. Mihai's new award-winning film *Waiting for August* spends several months in the life of one such family.

The Halmac family live on the outskirts of Bacău, a mid-sized city in eastern Romania. *Waiting for August* introduces us to the family's seven children, whose mother has already left for Italy where she is a domestic worker. Seventeen-year-old Ionut is the oldest, but it's his younger sister Georgiana who is in charge of the brood, cooking, cleaning and getting everyone off to school in the morning, including herself.

The stalwart Georgiana easily becomes the focus, as the camera follows her both in and outside the apartment while she negotiates a life hovering between adolescence and adulthood.

Waiting for August has enjoyed a tremendous debut, receiving both the Best International Feature award from Toronto's Hot Docs and the Best Documentary Film from the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. It also received a special mention at Visions du Réel in Switzerland earlier this year. It is Mihai's debut film and shares many parallels with her own life.

The writer/director was seven years old when her parents left Bucharest. 'The proof that they would come back – that was me,' explains Mihai, now 33. But to be safe, Mihai's parents told her that they were going on vacation and would be back in two weeks. 'I was in good hands with my aunt and uncle,' she says,

INTERVIEW



TEODORA ANA MIHAI

Teodora Ana Mihai was born in Bucharest, Romania, in April 1981 under Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship. In 1989 she came to Belgium and was reunited with her parents, who had fled the year before.

In junior high, the opportunity arose to study in California, where her aunt's family had emigrated. Teodora completed the last two years of high school at the French American International High School in San Francisco. Soon, inspired by her father's previous passion for photography and the artistic environment of San Francisco she found what she wanted: to tell stories through images and sounds. It all started with film and video workshops geared toward teenagers, which led to a true passion for the seventh art.

Teodora went on to study film at Sarah Lawrence College in upstate New York. Upon returning to Belgium, she first started working in the industry as a script supervisor and assistant director followed by a stint in the TV industry. However, the desire to work on her own projects was so strong that she decided to shift focus and dedicate herself entirely to this. After directing the award-winning documentary *Waiting for August*, she is now developing a docu-fiction film about teenage orphans of the Mexican drug war, in collaboration with the Mexican writer Habacuc Antonio de Rosario.



'but eventually I started asking questions, so they explained the situation to me as simply as they could and told me I couldn't talk about it.'

Mihai's parents were granted political asylum in Belgium. 'Of course everyone in my family had to pretend they didn't know anything about my parents' plans because there could have been repercussions for them. International phone calls were monitored, so my parents had a code sentence that they used to let us know that they were able to stay in Belgium. They said, "It's beautiful, but it rains a lot".'

Mihai was eventually reunited with her parents in Antwerp, where she still lives. But she in fact spent several formative teenage years in the United States, where the same aunt and uncle wound up after also fleeing Ceaușescu. 'My parents wanted to give me the opportunity to study English and have an experience that would really broaden my horizons,' she says.

She was there for her final two years of secondary school and was then accepted to Sarah Lawrence College in Yonkers, just outside of New York City, where she studied film. In her final year she won

the prestigious Thomas J Watson Fellowship, which allowed her to travel throughout Europe and India to study Roma identity.

Mihai returned to Belgium to explore work opportunities at precisely the moment that her father was diagnosed with cancer. Her parents had divorced, and her mother was living back in Romania. Mihai helped take care of her father and younger brother. She was 24 when her father passed away and her brother was 13. Rather than make him go to Romania, she took care of him while working on various projects as a script supervisor.

Waiting for August, then, is an intensely personal film for Mihai. 'I was old enough, but I didn't really know how to guide a teenager,' she explains.

And, although she could relate to Georgiana in this small way, she mostly has strong feelings that go further back in her life – about parents who have to leave and children who have to stay. 'I made the movie because I felt like history was repeating itself. My parents left for political reasons; now parents are leaving for economic ones. But the children are still being left behind. I thought it was time to talk about it. It's the story of so many



families. I don't know one Romanian family that doesn't have someone abroad. Someone is always somewhere else sending money back. It can break these families, and that is just really incredibly sad.'

Still, it wasn't easy for Mihai to find a family on which to base her documentary around. 'It's taboo to leave your children on their own, even though it happens quite a lot,' she explains. 'To talk about it is already difficult, but to let it be filmed is a big step further. I was very, very lucky that this family understood that there was no reason to be ashamed, that only through steps like this will the situation change.'

What Mihai chose to leave out of the film is almost as interesting as what she leaves in. For instance, she shot scenes of the mother leaving for Italy but decided not to use them. 'It was a very touching moment, but I soon realised that I had to leave it out and really concentrate on telling the story of the kids. It was important to make the point that there is no adult there.'

Similarly, there is no mention of a father or where he might be. 'That was a tough one,' admits Mihai. 'But in this case the father hasn't been with them for six years, and they were used to that - used to not talking about his absence. So I chose not to force it. The important thing is to realize that's he's not there and that they needed to move on and figure things out for themselves.'

And they do, with much greater success than anyone might imagine. Yes, the kids often stay up too late, and indeed, they



do things mom probably wouldn't allow, such as swing on the doors and play with knives. Ionut appears to spend the entire eight months playing computer games. But when their mother returns, they are all safe and sound.

And that's thanks to Georgiana who, at 15, plays mother and housewife, mentor and big sister, all wrapped into one. 'When the mother left,' explains Mihai, 'she delegated her responsibilities to Georgiana specifically in her absence. It's true, her older brother was in a computer phase, but nothing was delegated to him.'

It's also not a new situation for Georgiana or the other kids. It's not the first time - nor will it be the last - that the mother must leave the country to make enough money to support them. Previously, a caregiver was hired to help but the whole family found her inadequate, so this time around they decided to take care of themselves.

Although Mihai became interested in cinema in secondary school, particularly through an art and cinema club led by San Francisco based artist Ronald Chase, it was even earlier that her interest in the arts was sparked: her father was a keen photographer. 'He wanted to become a photographer or even a filmmaker,' explains Mihai, 'but under the regime he feared he would end up having to make propaganda, so he took an office job. But he did photography as a hobby; his passion for it was intact.'

Mihai is now in Mexico working on her next project. 'It's about teenage orphans in a very dangerous zone of Tamaulipas. It's home to a drugs cartel, and the residents live with violence every day. Lots of kids have lost their parents who either got mixed up with the wrong people or were collateral damage.'

But Mihai is, as are so many documentary filmmakers, still busy with her last project, too. The story of *Waiting for August* hasn't ended just because the film's finished. After finishing shooting in the summer of 2013, she invited Georgiana to come visit her in Belgium and also took her to Paris. 'I just wanted to thank her,' she says. 'I wanted to give her an opportunity to be able to do something she would not otherwise be able to do.'

Interview by Lisa Bradshaw (July 2014)



PRODUCERS



CLIN D'OEIL FILMS

Clin d'oeil Films, the main producer of *Waiting for August*, is a young and dynamic production company run by Antoine Vermeesch and Hanne Phlypo. The company focuses on creative documentaries and author-driven films initiated by innovative and creative filmmakers.

With a wealth of experience in filmmaking and post-production, Antoine and Hanne work closely with the filmmakers, giving them every possible support during the creative process.

In 2010, the company produced *Silent Stories* directed by Hanne and Catherine Vuylsteke, followed by *Houses With Small Windows*, a short fiction film directed by Bülent Öztürk (selected for the prestigious Orizzonti section of the Venice Film Festival and nominated for a European Film Award), as well as *The Art of Becoming* (directed by Hanne and Catherine, which was nominated for the Ensors (the Flemish film awards) and won the RTBF Award and the Grand Prix at the Festival des Libertés. In 2014, the company produced the documentary series *Fanaticos* directed by Damien Chemin (released on both RTBF, VRT & the online platform of the Belgian newspaper De Morgen) and released *Waiting for August*.

Several projects are currently in development and production, notably *Aunty* directed by Manu Gerosa (in co-production with One World DocuMakers – selected for the Dok.incubator workshop), and *Samuel In the Clouds* directed by Pieter Van Eecke (which won best pitch at Good Mooov 2014).

A PRIVATE VIEW

A Private View is an independent Belgium-based film company co-owned by writer/producer Jean-Claude van Rijckeghem and producer Dries Phlypo. Jean-Claude co-founded the company in 1994.

Initially, A Private View focused on producing children's films such as *The Ball* (1999), the opening film of the Berlin Kinderfilmfest; and *Science Fiction* (2002), both directed by Dany Deprez. They also co-produced *Bonkers* (2006) directed by Martin Koolhoven; *Dunya & Desie* (2008) directed by Dana Nechushtan; *Eep!* (2010) directed by Ellen Smit; *Taking Chances* (Nicole Van Kilsdonk, 2011); and the Oscar-nominated short *Na Wéwé* (Ivan Goldschmidt, 2011).

A Private View has been successful at the Belgian box office, producing dramatic comedies such as *Long Weekend* (2005) directed by Hans Herbots; *A Perfect Match* (2007) directed by Miel van Hoogenbemt; *The Over The Hill Band* (2009) by Geoffrey Enthoven; as well as multi award-winners *Moscow, Belgium* (by Christophe van Rompaey, 2008) and *Oxygen* (2011) directed by Hans Van Nuffel. Their most recent production is *Marry Me* (2014), directed by Kadir Balci.

WAITING FOR AUGUST



AWARDS AND HONORARY MENTIONS

HOT DOCS 2014 - Best International Feature Documentary
KARLOVY VARY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2014 - Best Long Documentary
VISIONS DU RÉEL FESTIVAL, NYON - Honorary Jury Mention

OTHER FESTIVAL PRESENTATIONS (SELECTION)

MOSCOW INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (June 2014)
CAMDEN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (September 2014)
BERGEN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (September 2014)
ASTRA FILM FESTIVAL (October 2014)
GHENT FILM FEST (October 2014)
INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL AMSTERDAM (IDFA, November 2014)

US THEATRICAL RUN*

LOS ANGELES, ROYAL (11523 Santa Monica Blvd.), starting 3 October 2014
NEW YORK, QUAD CINEMA (34 West 13th St.), starting 10 October 2014

* up-to-date info on www.waitingforaugust.be

CREDITS

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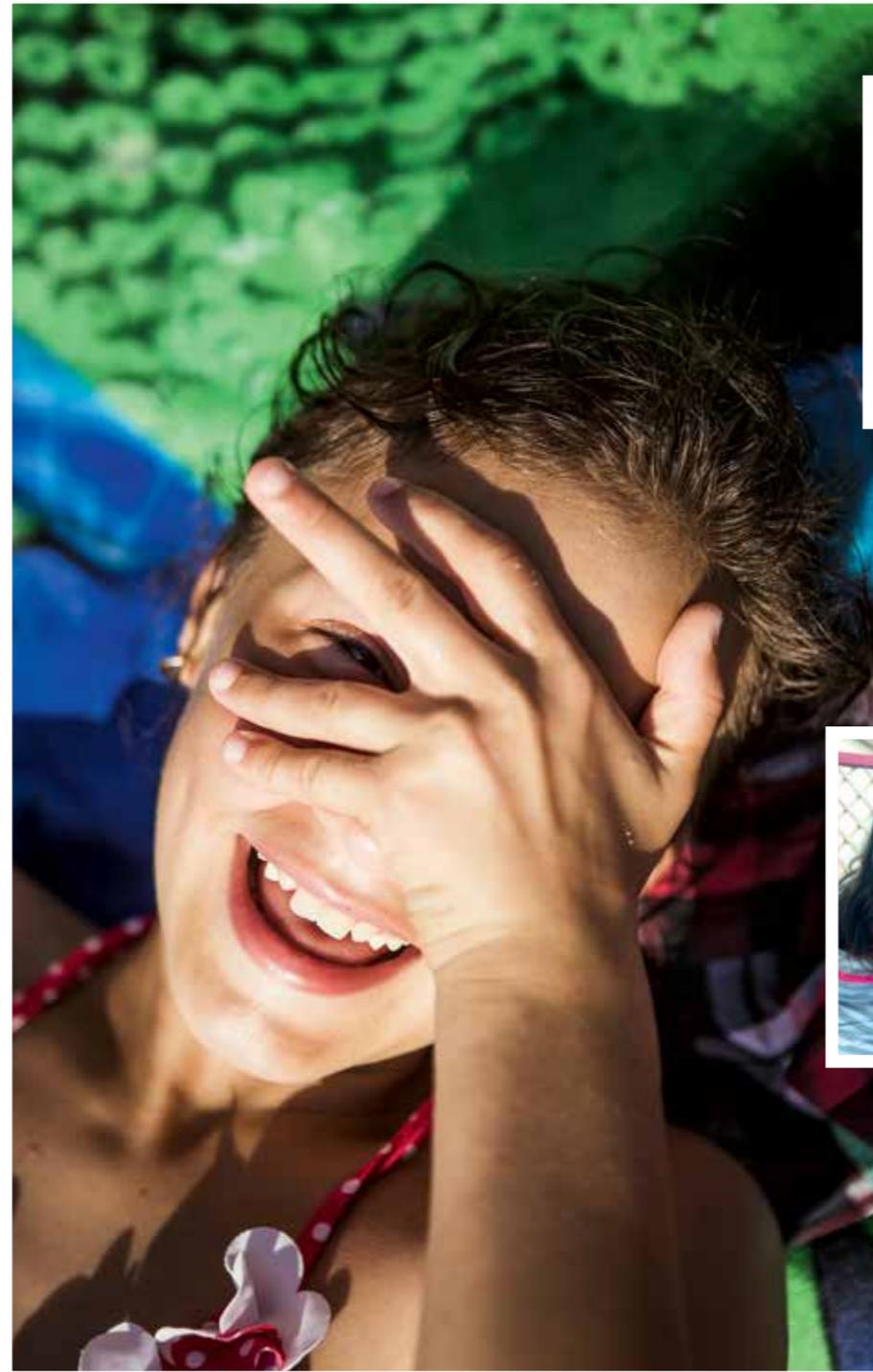
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Family album

August 2014 - Teodora Ana Mihai organized a holiday at the seaside with the whole Halmac family. 'I decided that I wanted to spend part of my prize money from Hot Docs together with them,' Mihai explains, 'and the little ones had never seen the sea. They'd never been on a holiday together. So I thought it would be a very nice and memorable experience. We had an amazing time!'

Holiday photos by Ionut Dobre and Teodora Ana Mihai



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