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international
film festival
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2014

NEW DIRECTORS



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DONOSTIA ZINEMALDIA
FESTIVAL DE SAN SEBASTIAN
INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

MODRIS

PRESS KIT

SYNOPSIS

Modris is a normal 17-year-old with a girlfriend and some good pals at school. But his addiction to gambling makes his relationship with his mother difficult, especially since she keeps on reminding him that his father is in prison - so Modris must have inherited his bad genes.

Things come to a head in the middle of the Nordic winter when Modris pawns his mother's electric heater so he can play the slot machines. She betrays him to the police, and as he begins his adventures in the Latvian justice system, his relationship to the outside world changes. Soon Modris becomes determined to find the father he never knew.



MODRIS

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR



What was the inspiration for this story?
How did this story come to you?

A friend who's a lawyer told me about a case he worked on. It happened several years ago, but he couldn't forget it - and he blamed himself for not having done enough at the time. This story made a very deep impression on me, and it was in the back of my mind for a year or so.

One day in February 2011, I woke up and decided to write

The leading actor is not a professional;
how did you find him?

Latvia is a small country, and the cinema there is almost non-existent, so there was obviously no other choice. Now I am actually grateful for it.

We held extensive casting sessions over about a year, and during that time I saw about 1200 potential Modris. Somewhere in a corner of my head I knew exactly what I

a treatment based on these events. After that, everything happened very fast; the story impressed everyone I showed it to, and making it into a film seemed natural.

It took only 3 years from the first sentence till the premiere. The truthfulness of the story was the crucial factor.

was looking for, and in the majority of cases I knew the guy standing in front of me wasn't Modris after the first 10 seconds. Then one day this guy comes in and just does it.

He was natural, the camera didn't frighten him and he even improvised. And then everyone realized we had found Modris.

MODRIS

Are all the actors non-professionals?

The youngsters are; the rest of cast is professional actors who are actually well known in Latvia. Sometimes a Latvian may wonder why this very famous actor only appeared in one scene, but that was my approach - to help the

non-professionals by having experienced, confident actors around them. It made the environment feel natural, and to the non-professionals it seemed as though the pros were not acting.



The film feels very realistic, sometimes even like a documentary. How was that achieved?

As the story is based on true events, I also wanted the film to have that authenticity. You and I don't know what will happen in a day, in a hour or even in 5 minutes, so that was also the approach: the actors knew very little about what was going to happen on the shooting day. They hadn't read the script beforehand, and I gave them the scene we were about to shoot only an hour or so before the first take.

During the pre-production we had improvisation sessions with different situations that helped them to understand the

style of the character, and I also introduced them to some real life prototypes, but they didn't know the story. And then there was the camera. Our DoP *Bogumil Godfrejow* is fantastic with a handheld camera; he is the kind of person you call an actor's DoP. He understands emotions very well and he is so gentle with the actor that when the camera is rolling everything happens the way it should.

How is the story important in Latvia and to the rest of the world?

It doesn't matter whether you live in Latvia, Canada or India - the basic human relationships are the same everywhere.

This film is about relationships and power - between parents and their children, the state and its citizens. In the digital age we are always moving at high speed. Everything happens fast, and very often we forget what is most important. I think this film asks us to stop for a moment and think about where we are, what are we doing to our loved ones and ourselves.

This film shows how compassion and humanity is forgotten - maybe not intentionally, but because everyone tries so hard to do it right. When what we really need is to sit down and talk to each other.

It's a bit strange, but the importance locally has actually shifted during the last year. What is now happening in Ukraine also affects us very much. There is a sizeable Russian-speaking minority in Latvia, and every other day we hear people saying there could be a similar scenario in our country.

When I wrote the story I was also thinking about how these two communities live next to each other, and I realized there is no problem with that. In some places you can hear Latvian mixed with Russian, and everyone in the film understands each other. The problems are based in politics, and that's what is important - the gap between the ruling power and the individual. Then things like what is happening in Ukraine now would never arise.



DIRECTOR'S CV

Juris Kursietis (director/writer) started his career at the age of 20, when he worked for the Latvian Television news department as foreign news correspondent. At that point he was also taking his first steps in longer feature stories or mini-documentaries. In the 15 minute slots that went on prime time TV, he developed and directed from character stories to journalistic investigations. After 6 years in television he turned to cinema.

He went to the UK to do his masters in film directing at the **Northern Media School**. At the same time in 2007 and 2008 he worked as 1st assistant director on several feature films in Latvia. He graduated his film school with distinction and his graduation mid length (42 minutes) fiction film received attention in the UK and Latvia.

In 2008 he joined **Red Dot Media**, where since he has directed numerous TV commercials, directed full length documentaries, worked as a scriptwriter for feature films and shot his debut feature film **MODRIS**.



MODRIS

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Duration: 98 mins Format: 2K | 1:2.39 Cinemascope | colour
Dialogues: Latvian | Russian Countries: Latvia | Germany | Greece (2014)

CAST

Modris: Kristers Pikša Mother: Rēzija Kalniņa

CREDITS

Written and Directed by: Juris Kursietis Produced by: Vicky Miha | Juris Kursietis | Ingmar Trost
Director of Photography: Bogumił Godfrejów Edited by: Yorgos Mavropsaridis Sound: Leandros Ntounis
Original Music by: Līga Celma-Kursiete Set Designer: Aivars Žukovskis Make-up: Emīlija Eglīte
Costume Designer: Katrīna Liepa Line Producer: Aija Bērziņa Associate Producers: Iraklis Mavroidis | Angelo Venetis
Production Companies: Red Dot Media | Sutor Kolonko | Boo Productions Co-production Companies: 2|35 | Zupas Filma
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SUTOR KOLONKO



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MODRIS

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MODRIS