

LAUGH & CRY: BALTIC COMEDIES – October 15-18, 2020



Chasing Unicorns

Õie is a recently unemployed young woman from a small town in Estonia – a country where founding start-ups is considered a national sport – with big dreams of creating... a pretty bicycle helmet. She accidentally stumbles across witless, but jovial Tõnu who has not only bankrupted every company he has ever set up, but has outright been advised never to start one again. Their chance meeting kicks off a series of events that take them on a journey from sleeping on a couch in Tallinn, to sleeping in designer chairs and being waited on by robots in San Francisco. Õie's enthusiasm and determination to make it in the hyper-masculine world of start-ups is balanced out by Tõnu's insider know-how as their pitches for funding become increasingly ambitious. Based on real stories and director Rain Rannu's personal experiences in the tech industry, Chasing Unicorns is a fast-paced and lighthearted look at a truly Estonian phenomenon.

Original title: Ükssarvik

Director: Rain Rannu

Runtime: 107 min

Language: Estonian with English subtitles

2019 - Estonia



Nearby

Luīze and Kaspars meet by chance on a road trip on their way to celebrate Līgo (Latvian Midsummer's Eve). She is trying to escape her annoying neighbors and a nagging sense of malaise, while he is trying to escape his failing marriage. They're both young, full of life, and... lost. They both want to become artists, but are unsure quite how to live their lives. The film spans three Līgo celebrations, and maps three years of a relationship in which light banter mixes with honest arguments, witty road trips with wild parties. Winner of Best Screenplay at the Latvian National Film Awards in 2019, Nearby is an empathetic, personal view of what it's like to be young and in love today.

Original title: Blakus

Director: Alise Zariņa

Runtime: 83 min

Language: Latvian with English subtitles

2019 - Latvia

North American Premiere



The Castle

Monika is a 13-year old singer. She has just arrived in Dublin from Lithuania and lives in a small apartment on a bustling housing estate with her mother, Jolanta, and grandmother who has dementia. Even though Jolanta is a talented pianist, she works hard at a local fish factory. Money is scarce, and she ends up selling her daughter's prized keyboard. Unlike her mother, Monika refuses to give up on her musical dreams and is convinced that the mother-daughter duo will get their big break. After performing at a funeral, Monika's dreams finally seem to be answered when they are invited to play at a place enticingly called The Castle, but Jolanta refuses instead accepting a promotion at the factory. With single-minded determination Monika embarks on an endless series of schemes to buy back her keyboard, and ultimately get to The Castle. The Castle is a fresh look at economic migration, and a heartwarming tale of three generations of women and their eclectic neighbors.

Original title: Pilis

Director: Lina Lužytė

Runtime: 90 min

Language: Lithuanian and English with English subtitles

2020 - Lithuania / Ireland

North American Premiere

STRESS & RELEASE: BALTIC THRILLERS – October 29 - November 1, 2020



Pretenders

Anna and Juhan are a couple in their early thirties. After a personal crisis, they decide to take some time off and borrow a friend's summer house by the sea. What should be a great opportunity for the couple to relax and reconnect instead makes them increasingly resentful as their confined intimacy becomes oppressive. Matters are further complicated when they invite another couple, Erik and Triin, to stay with them after a storm destroys their tent. Over dinner, more and more similarities between the two couples come to the forefront. Not liking what she sees, Anna decides to distract herself by pretending she's the owner of the house. As they move deeper into this deceptive game, real arguments erupt and both couples finally go a step too far. As the storm rages outside and their guests refuse to leave, Anna and Juhan find themselves cornered.

Original title: Teesklejad

Director: Vallo Toomla

Runtime: 102 min

Language: Estonian with English subtitles

2016 - Estonia / Latvia / Lithuania

North American Premiere



Foam at the Mouth

Two years after losing his leg in a car accident, former policeman Didzis spends most of his time training his three beloved police dogs: Gina, Boss and Dargo. Frustrated, his estranged wife Jana, a doctor at the local sports school, embarks upon a risky affair with one of her students. After one of their secret nighttime rendezvous, Jana hits a rabid wild boar and unwittingly spreads the virus to Didzis' three dogs. The accident unleashes a series of events in which Didzis' suspicions and jealousy make him blind to the dogs' increasing aggression. As the three members of this toxic love triangle begin to circle one another, the dogs break free and begin to terrorize the town. Love mixes with fear as Didzis decides to take matters into his own hands. Foam at the Mouth is the thrilling third film of director Jānis Nords (Amateur and Mother, I Love You, NYBFF 2018).

Original title: Ar putām uz lūpām

Director: Jānis Nords

Runtime: 85 min

Language: Latvian and Russian with English subtitles

2017 - Latvia / Poland / Lithuania



Invisible

After spending 10 years in isolation in the Carpathian mountains, former dancer Jonas decides to re-join society and pretends to be blind in order to enter a televised dance competition. He is paired with Saulė, and they become the show's most popular dancers. At the same time another man, Vytautas, who has also spent 10 years in isolation is released from prison for murdering his wife, Marija. Past events will not let either of them go as the two men's stories intertwine and they come ever closer to a violent confrontation with the past. Vytautas struggles with the ultimate question - whether to seek revenge, or forgiveness. Invisible is a visually taught and masterfully edited film that knows how to make every beat count. After its world premiere at the San Sebastian Film Festival in 2019, Invisible has played at multiple festivals across Europe, including the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival.

Original title: Nematoma

Director: Ignas Jonynas

Runtime: 90 min

Language: Lithuanian and Ukrainian with English subtitles

2019 - Lithuania / Latvia / Ukraine / Spain

North American Premiere

LOOKING INWARD & FORWARD: BALTIC SHOWCASE – November 12-15, 2020



Truth and Justice

Based on the five-volume book series by A.H. Tammsaare, Truth and Justice follows the young and hopeful Andres in late 19th-century Estonia, as he arrives with his wife and his wife Krõõt to establish a new life on a farm bought on loan, Robber's Rise. Initially ambitious about their plans to transform the desolate and neglected land and raise an heir, Andres and Krõõt are beset by challenges: nature refuses to bend in their direction; an uncooperative neighbor becomes a vicious rival; and Krõõt gives birth to daughters instead of sons. As Andres struggles to find the right way across a series of misfortunes, the dream of nurturing a prosperous farm on Robber's Rise turns into an obsession. And in his desperate search for truth and justice — from the court, to the tavern, to the Bible — he may end up sacrificing more than he had ever planned. This year's Estonian selection for the best international feature film Oscar category, Truth and Justice is a sweeping epic about an uncompromising man whose exacting vision becomes his downfall.

Original title: Tõde ja õigus

Director: Tanel Toom

Runtime: 149 min

Language: Estonian with English subtitles

2019 - Estonia

New York Premiere



Oleg

Oleg is a young Russian-speaking butcher from Latvia who doesn't have Latvian citizenship. With the desire of making more money, he sets his sights on Europe and eventually arrives in Brussels hoping to get a job at an abattoir. Alone in a new country, he is unjustly fired and unable to find new work when he falls in with a couple of Polish guest workers, tempted by their promises of construction work and a passport. Oleg soon comes to realize that he's in over his head and finds himself in an increasingly claustrophobic position. Gritty and uncompromising, Oleg highlights the perilous situation that migrant workers and stateless citizens can quickly find themselves in as industrious criminals fill in the gaps in local social systems. Premiering at Directors' Fortnight as part of the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, Oleg is director Juris Kursietis' (Modris) second film.

Original title: Oļegs

Director: Juris Kursietis

Runtime: 108 min

Language: English with some Russian, Polish, Latvian, French and Flemish

2019 - Latvia / Belgium / Lithuania / France



The Lawyer

Life is slowly passing corporate lawyer Marius by and he spends most of his time at dinner parties and chasing young lovers. After the death of his estranged father, Marius finds himself looking for answers and finds himself developing a surprising connection with sex-cam worker Ali - a bisexual Syrian refugee stuck in Belgrade. Relieved at finally having something to focus on, Marius throws himself into helping Ali seek asylum in a more LGBTQ+-friendly country in Europe. Marius travels to Belgrade, which deepens the men's connection and tests their personal and physical borders. What started as a distraction, has blossomed into a tricky love affair leading Marius to question his privilege and his priorities. The Lawyer is a unique Lithuanian drama that premiered at the 2020 BFI Flare Film Festival.

Original title: Advokatas

Director: Romas Zabarauskas

Runtime: 97 min

Language: Lithuanian and English with English subtitles

2020 - Lithuania