



**ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY LIVES
THE CINEMA OF MÁRTA MÉSZÁROS**

Adoption (Örökbefogadás)

+ Pre-recorded intro by Selina Robertson, Club des Femmes
(Mon 12 Jul only)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Márta Mészáros's best-known film, *Adoption*, tells the story of a 43-year-old factory worker, Kata (Katalin Berek), who yearns to have a baby with her married lover. Kata's desire to raise a baby on her own meets with constant rejection and patronising.

Mészáros herself avoids any moralising: the complications of the affair are just a backdrop. Mészáros instead pays close attention to her protagonist's surroundings: her meagre apartment in the suburbs, her numbing job at the factory. Yet Kata isn't fazed; she doesn't judge her existence as drab or unsatisfying. Despite her short dark hair and slim figure she's no poster-waif.

Her toughness attracts a young girl, Anna (Gyöngyvér Vigh), who has been in and out of homes for troubled teens. Their bond awakens in both a sense of solidarity. With Kata's help, Anna marries to get away from her oppressive family. Anna's friendship, in turn, reinforces Kata's conviction that she's ready for single motherhood. Like the first part of *My Diary trilogy*, *Adoption* was filmed in black-and-white, and its simplicity in setting and set design and presence of non-professional actors lend it a strong documentary feel. *Adoption's* focus on self-realisation echoes the feminist zeitgeist of the 1970s.

Ela Bittencourt, *Sight & Sound*, March 2019

As important as Kata's long-standing, secret affair with Jóska is to *Adoption*, it's really a film about maternal love, and a rumination on its gravity. Clocks tick, relentless and insistent. This is more than a reminder that Kata is up against an internal timer if she wants to biologically conceive a child. It attunes us to the more existential issue of how we prioritise and focus our lives. A certain stigma of the 'woman's picture' that hung to the work of Mészáros earlier on in Hungary, even as she garnered awards recognition abroad, failed to acknowledge how bold and singular her perspective on matters such as love, marriage, domestic life and motherhood is. In its embrace of alternative pathways of tenderness, which dynamically move to fill the loveless gaps left by failed institutions, her cinema is bracingly unconventional. [...]

Many of the exchanges in *Adoption* take place outside the home, in restaurants — a public, social sphere. This is significant, as the film reimagines options outside conventional family units, in the more uncertain terrain of experimental meet-ups and realignments outside relationships locked down by formal contract or blood ties. Kata's encounters with Jóska occur in a mood of tense transition, as their needs diverge. It's with Anna that, after prickly beginnings (the teen simply strolls into Kata's house, asking if she can use her home for trysts with her boyfriend, since they have nowhere to meet), she finds warm solidarity. On a night out, they drink cognac and smoke

together, leaning in to one another with laughter as they ignore the attentions of the men around. They could be mother and daughter; they could be the best of friends — from the outside, it's unclear, and between them, it's as if they are trying each other on for size, adopting roles that produce the kind of closeness they are, through circumstance, lacking.

Extracts from the Blu-Ray booklet essay by Carmen Gray for the Second Run release of *Adoption*. Reproduced with kind permission of Second Run and the author

Adoption won the Golden Bear for the best film at Berlinale. A significant reason for the global success enjoyed by Márta Mészáros is that in this 'pseudorealistic' film taboos such as the disadvantaged situation of women, extramarital relationships, intimacy and sexuality, the position and relations of young people being brought up in state-run institutions, the appearance of generational gaps in society and the erosion of traditional family structures are all examined from the viewpoint of women. This tone and choice of topic was totally new in contemporary Central European filmmaking.

'The Hungarian director, a woman, has come up, not with a drama but with a low-key, reticent everyday story that is full of tenderness and hope. In a succession of filmed-to-the-life occasions, Kati Berek makes her mark as a sort of Budapest Annie Girardot: quiet, strong, and true.' (*Berliner Morgenpost*, 9 July 1975)

Eszter Fazekas, *Restored Films of Márta Mészáros*, National Film Institute Hungary – Film Archive

The core relationship in *Adoption* is between two women: 43-year-old Kata, conscious of a loudly ticking biological clock, and troubled teenager Anna. Their relationship is a two-way process, with Kata simultaneously trying to mould Anna while quietly admiring her fiercely independent spirit.

The international acclaim that followed its Berlin Film Festival Golden Bear led to Mészáros regularly being described as a feminist. Although she no longer rejects this as emphatically as she once did, 'it's not that I'm unhappy with the label, but I'm rather indifferent towards it. It's just not accurate. A film is either good or bad. The audience either gets the meaning or it doesn't. For a long time, I didn't even understand what feminism meant. I wasn't making films about feminism, I was making films about people.'

Michael Brooke, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2021. With thanks to Márta Mészáros, Jákob Ladányi and the Hungarian National Film Archive.

Selina Robertson is a freelance film programmer and writer who works part time at the Independent Cinema Office. She is a PhD candidate at Birkbeck College, and her research interest focuses on the intersection between queer feminist film historiography, memory and the cultural archives of feminist and LGBTQ+ film exhibition histories and screening practices in the UK 1970s-1980s. In 2007, she co-founded Club des Femmes, a queer feminist film curating collective whose most recent curating project 'Lesbian Camp: Yes its F**cking Political' took place at the Rio Cinema, East London in June 2021.

ADOPTION (ÖRÖKBEFOGADÁS)

Director: Márta Mészáros
Production: Mafilm Studio Hunnia
Head of Studio: Miklós Köllö
Production Manager: György Rózsási
Additional Assistant Director: Ferenc András
Screenplay: Gyula Hernádi, Márta Mészáros, Ferenc Grunwalsky
Story Editor: Miklós Vásárhelyi
Cinematographer: Lajos Koltai
Camera Operator: Gyula Kovács
Editor: Éva Kármentő
Music: György Kovács
Art Director: Tamás Banovich
Costume: Zsuzsa Vicze
Sound Director: György Kovács

Cast

Kati Berek (*Kata Csentesné*)
Gyöngyvér Vigh (*Anna*)
Péter Fried (*Sanyi*)
László Szabó (*Jóska*)
Flóra Kádár (*Jóska's wife*)
János Boros (*Anna's father*)
Erzsi Varga (*Anna's mother*)
István Kaszás (*institute director*)
Árpád Perlaky (*physician*)
István Szőke
Anikó Kiss
Zsófi Mészáros
Irén Rácz
Judit Felvidéki
Erika Józsi
András Szigeti
Magda Horváth
Gábor Szűcs

Hungary 1975
87 mins

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Adoption (Örökbefogadás)

Mon 12 Jul 18:00 (pre-recorded intro by Selina Robertson, Club des Femmes); Thu 22 Jul 20:30

Nine Months (Kilenc hónap)

Tue 13 Jul 17:40; Sun 25 Jul 12:30

The Two of Them/Two Women (Ők ketten)

Wed 14 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 18:10

The Girl (Eltávozott nap)

Fri 16 Jul 20:50

Binding Sentiments (Holdudvar)

Sat 17 Jul 15:20

The Heiresses (Örökség)

Sun 18 Jul 15:20; Tue 27 Jul 20:30

Don't Cry, Pretty Girls! (Szép lányok, ne sírjatok!)

Sun 18 Jul 18:40

Riddance (Szabad lélegzet)

Wed 21 Jul 21:00

Diary for My Children (Napló gyermekeimnek)

Sat 24 Jul 14:10 (+ pre-recorded extended intro by Márta Mészáros);
Wed 28 Jul 17:50

Diary for My Loves (Napló szerelmeimnek)

Sat 24 Jul 17:30; Sat 31 Jul 20:30

Diary for My Father and Mother (Napló apámnak, anyámnak)

Sat 24 Jul 20:45; Sat 31 Jul 14:40

The restorations in this season were made from the original camera negatives, original magnetic tape sounds and positive prints, supervised and presented by the National Film Institute Hungary – Film Archive. The restorations were carried out at the NFI Film Archive and Filmlab.



In cultural partnership with



Hungarian Cultural Centre, London

Adoption (Örökbefogadás) directed by Márta Mészáros will be released by Second Run on Blu-ray on 12 July.

It will be available from **BFI Shop** in person and online shop.bfi.org.uk. We are offering BFI customers £3 off orders of the film with the promo code MARTA3OFF (enter code at the checkout).

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