



NEW RELEASES

Never Gonna Snow Again

To visit Małgorzata Szumowska's Warsaw apartment is to meet one of the stars of the Polish director's latest film, *Never Gonna Snow Again*: a charismatic British bulldog named Borys, who, having made his appearance, heads straight to the sofa for a snooze. 'Borys was very happy making the film,' Szumowska says, laughing. 'He had amazing companions in his bulldog costars. And everyone gave him their lunch.'

Dogs have frequently featured in Szumowska's cinema: from the huge hound Fredek, owned by the therapist/spiritualist Anna (Maja Ostaszewska) in the director's Berlin Silver Bear-winning *Body* (2015), to Cygan, the canine companion of Mateusz Kościukiewicz's metalhead protagonist in *Mug* (2018). But *Never Gonna Snow Again* is the writer-director's most pooch-filled project yet. 'I grew up with dogs and I've always had a strong relationship with them,' Szumowska tells me. 'They're family. I'm sentimental about them. I tend to believe that they're innocent creatures who often end up reflecting back humans' problems and issues.'

The 'problems and issues' explored in *Never Gonna Snow Again* by Szumowska and her long-time collaborator Michał Englert (who earns a co-director credit here for the first time) are ones experienced by a very specific sector of Polish society, with the events unfolding on a wealthy residential estate outside Warsaw. Part sharp-eyed social satire, part sincere spiritual drama, the film's influences range from Sam Mendes's *American Beauty* (1999) to Pasolini's *Theorem* (1968) to Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), but it possesses an uncanny tone all of its own.

Its gated community of McMansions is inhabited by various types of competitive and consumerist middle- and upper-middle-class characters who are burdened by illness, dissatisfaction and malaise. Shot in steely tones, with windows and reflections used particularly expressively to convey a sense of both the physical proximity of the neighbours' houses and the emotional distance of the inhabitants themselves, the film continues the concern with community dynamics that permeates *Mug* and Szumowska's English-language debut, the cult drama *The Other Lamb* (2019). It also develops what critic Savina Petkova has previously identified as the director's preoccupation with 'individual suffering and the social significance of care'.

On her very first visit to the estate where the film was shot, Szumowska was surprised by the scale of the development, which has become popular among some members of a Polish generation caught between memories of the communist past and wholesale embracing of the capitalist present. 'These residents really want to be cut off from social problems, from poverty. The paradox is that we're hearing stories that kids there are having major issues with alcohol and drugs,' says Szumowska who, with characteristic wit, casts her own son, Maciej Drosio, in the film – as a chemistry prodigy putting his skills to use with some neighbourhood drug-dealing. 'Perhaps it looks like freedom, but I think they're creating a trap for themselves.'

Into this moneyed milieu, *Never Gonna Snow Again* introduces an outsider figure, Zhenia, a Russian-speaking Ukrainian masseur (played by Alec Utgoff, who was cast after Drosio encouraged his mother to watch the actor as

Dr Alexei in Season 3 of *Stranger Things*). He provides his services mostly to the estate's eager women but also to a couple of its men – Łukasz Simlat's cancer-sufferer and Andrzej Chyra's belligerent ex-soldier – as well as to one of Borys's canine co-stars, a flatulent bulldog diagnosed by his highly strung owner (Katarzyna Figura) as 'apathetic'.

Zhenia, it becomes clear, has 'magic hands' in a literal sense, possessing special skills of empathy and awareness that enable him to take others 'deep inside themselves' and alleviate their pain. Spread out on his folding bed, the clients find themselves hypnotised into a contemplative dream state – visualised as a forest space similar to the one from which we see the protagonist mysteriously emerge in the film's sci-fi-tinged opening sequence.

A highly visual director, Szumowska often builds her films from a particular, isolated image. The starting point for *Never Gonna Snow Again* was, she says, the image of 'a guy travelling around with a bed, a bit like [Polanski's 1958 short] *Two Men and a Wardrobe*.' Zhenia, she admits, was based in part 'on a Polish guy in Warsaw who gives massages to a few of my friends, including [*Ida* and *Cold War* director] Paweł Pawlikowski. That masseur definitely knows some secrets, but he's always trying to be discreet.' Changing the nationality of the protagonist was key, however: 'It felt much stronger to have someone from outside, a guy who's not part of the society, because then the movie has a totally different dynamic. It's clearly about people who are super-wealthy and someone at the opposite end of the social scale.'

The community depicted in *Never Gonna Snow Again* doesn't want to cut itself off from the magical Zhenia, though. A complex mixture of responses is evident in the first, very funny, scene that shows Zhenia with a client, as affection, condescension and desire merge in the remarks made by Maja Ostaszewska's housewife Maria to the watchful outsider. 'I'm very tolerant, too tolerant probably,' she chirps, with regard to immigration, while carefully differentiating Zhenia from the foreign Uber Eats couriers with whom she simply 'can't communicate'. 'You're different, you're wonderful,' she reassures him.

In this way, the film highlights and satirises – and perhaps also endorses – the much critiqued notion of the 'exceptional immigrant': the new arrival possessing special skills that distinguish them from the herd and thereby make them an acceptable addition to the society.

Never Gonna Snow Again has been charged with easy mockery of its suburban subjects, too. But despite its wintry setting, the new film emerges as one of Szumowska's warmest works, boasting a beautiful Kieślowski-like climax that plays out to the strains of Polish pianist Hania Rani's luminous composition 'Glass'. Szumowska previously used the piece in 'Nightwalk', her queer-themed 2020 contribution to *Women's Tales*, a series of short films produced by the fashion brand Miu Miu, and in *Never Gonna Snow Again* it serves as the culmination of a dreamy classical soundscape, one that contrasts with the pop and rock more frequently employed in Szumowska's films. 'I love pop music and the energy it can bring to a scene,' Szumowska says. 'My son will catch me listening to Justin Bieber! But pop wasn't right for this film, which needed something more contemplative.'

Citing her ongoing creative partnership with her ex-husband Englert (her cinematographer and co-screenwriter since the pair met at Łódź Film School in the 1990s) as an example of productive male/female collaboration,

Szumowska believes that the current emphasis on female filmmakers has become ‘a bit artificial’ but that ‘it’s better that this wave is happening than not’. She is positive, too, about contemporary Polish cinema generally, highlighting the provocative work of Agnieszka Smoczyńska, Jan Komasa and Jagoda Szalc as among its brightest hopes. ‘We’re part of Europe, whatever the current government might want to do about that,’ Szumowska says. ‘So it’s important that filmmakers here have a broad outlook, telling universal stories with roots in Poland. That’s our power.’

Alex Ramon, *Sight and Sound*, November 2021

**NEVER GONNA SNOW AGAIN
(ŚNIEGU JUŻ NIGDY NIE BĘDZIE)**

Director: Małgorzata Szumowska

In collaboration with: Michał Englertem

©: Z.o.o. Lava Films Sp, Match Factory GmbH,
Mazowiecki Instytut Kultury, Kino Swiat Sp. z.o.o.

Production Companies: Lava Films, Match Factory Productions

In co-production with: Kino Swiat, Mazowieckim I Warszawskim

Funduszem Filmowym, DI Factory, Bayerischer Rundfunk

In association with: ARTE

And the financial support of: Polskiego Instytutu Sztuki Filmowej,

Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Deutscher Filmförderfonds,

Polsko-Niemieckiego Funduszu Filmowego, Cinecopro Award

Producers: Agnieszka Wasiak, Mariusz Włodarski, Viola Fügen,

Michael Weber, Małgorzata Szumowska, Michał Englert

CASTING: Magdalena Szwarcbart

Written by: Małgorzata Szumowska, Michał Englert

Director of Photography: Michał Englert

Stills Photography: Jacek Drygala, Wolfgang Ennenbach

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Janusz Bykowski, Volker Lorig

Editors: Agata Cierniak, Jarosław Kaminski

Art Director: Jagna Janicka

Costume Designer: Katarzyna Lewinska

Make-up: Waldemar Pokromski

Hair: Kaeper Raczkowski

Sound: Marcin Jachyra, Marcin Kasinski, Kacper Habisiak

Re-recording Mixer: Filip Krzemien

Stunt Co-ordinator: Grzegorz Jurek

Cast

Alec Utgoff (*Zhenia*)

Maja Ostaszewska (*Maria*)

Agata Kulesza (*Ewa*)

Weronika Rosati (*Wika*)

Katarzyna Figura (*Gucci*)

Lukasz Simlat (*Wika's husband*)

Andrzej Chyra (*captain*)

Krzysztof Czeczot (*Maria's husband*)

Poland-Germany-Netherlands 2020

113 mins

A Picturehouse Entertainment release

NEW RELEASES

Never Gonna Snow Again (Śniegu już nigdy nie będzie)

From Fri 22 Oct

Petite Maman

From Fri 26 Nov

Rebel Dykes

From Fri 26 Nov (+ Q&A Fri 26 Nov 18:20)

RE-RELEASES

The Outsiders: The Complete Novel

From Fri 22 Oct

Seven Samurai (Shichinin no Samurai)

From Fri 29 Oct

Naked

From Fri 12 Nov; Sat 13 Nov 17:20 (+ Q&A with director Mike Leigh,
David Thewlis and Lesley Sharp)

EDGAR WRIGHT'S LONDON AFTER DARK

Passport to Shame (AKA Room 43)

Mon 18 Oct 20:50; Sat 13 Nov 18:10

Peeping Tom

Tue 19 Oct 20:30; Sat 6 Nov 18:20

Beat Girl

Fri 22 Oct 20:40; Sun 31 Oct 16:20

West End Jungle + Look at Life: Market Place

+ Look at Life: Rising to High Office

Sat 23 Oct 20:40; Sat 20 Nov 14:40

The Pleasure Girls + Look at Life: Members Only

Mon 25 Oct 20:50; Mon 29 Nov 18:20

Frenzy

Wed 27 Oct 20:45; Fri 19 Nov 18:30

Darling

Thu 28 Oct 20:30; Sat 20 Nov 13:20

Bitter Harvest + Look at Life: Coffee Bar

Fri 29 Oct 18:00; Tue 9 Nov 20:45

The Small World of Sammy Lee + Look at Life: In Gear

Sat 30 Oct 20:30; Sat 6 Nov 20:45;

Tue 23 Nov 14:30

Primitive London + Look at Life: Goodbye Piccadilly

Mon 1 Nov 20:50; Thu 25 Nov 20:50

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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