



PREVIEW

Olga

Director Elie Grappe on 'Olga'

Late 2015, after directing a short film on ballet dancing, I co-directed a documentary on an orchestra, being familiar with the world of the Conservatoire (music academy). I filmed a Ukrainian violin player who came to Switzerland just before Euromaidan. I was deeply moved at how upset she was when she told me about the revolution, and the way the images had affected her.

I found the connection between the various patterns that had appealed to me during my first short film: filming the passion of a teenager, her body in action, and confronting her personal issues with collective ones.

Exploring the potential link between geographical and personal borders. Making a film about exile, with a heroine who feels that she does not belong, torn between several loyalties and faced with a geopolitical situation beyond her. How can she reconcile her personal desires with the course of History?

Gymnastics, as does music or dance, embodies the effort that very young people may demand from themselves in the name of passion. It is both a collective and individual sport, echoing with Olga's dilemma.

Full of sounds and in constant motion, that discipline is quite cinegenic. With such a codified sport it is also interesting to film its gaps – breathing before performing a figure, the eyes, hesitations, mistakes. It is during those moments that you can sense the gymnasts' vulnerability, that is to say their humanity. And become aware of the risks that they take.

I film a discipline in which words are not central. Olga ends up in the country of a father she hardly ever knew and her French is quite poor. She might be chatty when using Skype with her mother or her friend Sasha but she keeps having mental blocks and getting her words mixed up when talking to Swiss people. Olga is a teenager, the age when identity is blurred, also in her very flesh since her body is changing while she is at the peak of her career as a gymnast.

For me the Euromaidan revolution is particularly fascinating to observe – the demonstrators came from all political sides and social classes. Within such a dislocated society it was an amazing surge of solidarity. To depict it I only used videos that the demonstrators made using their phones at the heart of the event. I was hit by the intensity, the presence of bodies in that footage, conveying a collective urgency to show.

From Switzerland where her training is taking place, Olga is haunted by the images of her city, which she no longer recognises. A high-performance athlete, she finds herself completely at a loss when faced with the events affecting the lives of her mother and relatives. When these videos sweep into her daily life as a gymnast, Olga finds herself in a floating world, a suspended moment in time, in a constant state of tension. And this conflict is staged in the film.

In Switzerland, Olga is both safe and far away from what is going on in her country. The Swiss Confederation, at the centre of Europe and yet not a part of it, claims a neutrality and a distance that Olga will never have.

Magglingen, a training facility for Swiss Olympic athletes, is located above Biel. It is an open-air, narrow plateau where winter is as beautiful as it is anxiety-inducing. Euromaidan footage tackles such a hushed, preserved wilderness throughout the film.

Olga only has her passion for gymnastics to hold on to. She is on trial within the Swiss team and to join it she needs to apply for citizenship. In Ukraine you lose citizenship if you apply for a foreign one. But does Olga want to choose?

Anastasia Budiashkina plays Olga. She is the key to the emotion of the film. For her part and the parts of the other gymnasts, I did not want to work with professional actors. I had to try and capture the truth in the actresses. Which is why I chose young elite athletes accustomed to the risks associated with training, to life within a centre and to the spectacular nature of a championship.

The girls who play Olga and Sasha are part of the Ukraine national reserve team. The trainers and some of the athletes –including Steffi and Zoé – are members of the Swiss national team. I met them all during the writing stage. With their testimonies I was able to make the screenplay richer and more accurate, even though the characters remained fictitious.

What I liked about these girls is the gap between their ideal of perfection and who they are outside their practice – teenagers flooded with emotions, with their strengths, fears and conflicting desires. They put their trust in me and went through this long shoot with amazing courage.

On the set I asked the actors to inhabit the situations using their own words, feelings and responses. My work involved suggesting a space in which they were free to surprise me, to add brighter and more ambiguous colours to the characters I had imagined.

Filming high-level athletes requires specific measures that match their significant amount of physical effort. For sequences involving gymnastics the shooting adapted to their training pace. Therefore fiction eased its way into situations that could have been part of a documentary.

Writing started in 2016. In 2020, shooting was suspended due to the coronavirus crisis and was finally completed nine months after it started. Today, at last, I am delighted to introduce you to *Olga*.

Production notes

OLGA

Directed by: Elie Grappe

Production Companies: Point Prod, Cinéma Defacto,

RTS - Radio Télévision Suisse

International Sales: Pulsar Content

Producers: Jean-Marc Fröhle, Tom Dercourt

Written by: Elie Grappe, Raphaëlle Desplechin

Director of Photography: Lucie Baudinaud

Editor: Suzana Pedro

Assistant Editor: Clémentine Lacroux

Art Directors: Ivan Niclass, Pascal Baillois

Costume Designer: Isabelle Boucharlat

Music: Pierre Desprats

Production Sound Mixer: Jürg Lempen

Re-recording Mixer: Simon Apostolou

Sound Editor: François Musy

Cast

Anastasia Budiashkina (*Olga*)

Sabrina Rubtsova (*Sasha*)

Caterina Barloggio (*Steffi*)

Thea Brogli (*Zoé*)

Tanya Mikhina (*Ilona*)

Jérôme Martin (*Adrien*)

Alicia Onomor (*Juliette*)

Lou Steffen (*Andrea*)

Alexandr Mavrits (*Vassily*)

Switzerland/France 2021

85 mins

Courtesy of 606 Distribution

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Preview: Inu-oh

Wed 30 Mar 18:15

Liv Ullmann in Conversation

Fri 8 Apr 18:10

TV Preview: Gerry Anderson: A Life Uncharted + Q&A with producer-director Benjamin Field and producer Jamie Anderson

Sat 9 Apr 15:00

Worzel Gummidge Restoration Screening + discussion

Sun 10 Apr 12:00

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 11 Apr 18:30

Preview: Benedetta

Wed 13 Apr 20:30

Preview: Bubble (Baburu)

Wed 20 Apr 20:30

NEW & RE-RELEASES

The Worst Person in the World (Verdens verste menneske)

From Mon 28 Mar

Paris, 13th District (Les Olympiades)

From Mon 28 Mar

Hive

From Tue 29 Mar

Cries and Whispers (Viskningar och rop)

From Fri 1 Apr

A Night of Knowing Nothing +

From Fri 1 Apr (+ Q&A with director Payal Kapadia on Sun 3 Apr 17:50)

Playground

From Fri 15 Apr (+ Q&A with director Laura Wandel on Thu 21 Apr 18:10)

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Relaxed Screening: Oska Bright Lights + intro and discussion

Tue 29 Mar 18:20

Member Picks: Marnie

Thu 31 Mar 18:10

Sonic Cinema: Shogun Assassin with DJ Cheeba Live Score + intro by Juice Aleem, festival director of AfroFlux

Fri 1 Apr 18:30

Silent Cinema: Kinoteka Film Festival Closing Night Gala:

Forbidden Paradise with live score by Marcin Pukaluk + intro

Sun 3 Apr 15:00

Member Salon: Cries and Whispers

Mon 4 Apr 20:15

Projecting the Archive: Little Friend + intro by Rosie Taylor, BFI National Archive

Tue 5 Apr 18:30

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview:

Small Body (Piccolo corpo) + Q&A with director Laura Samani

Wed 6 Apr 18:15

African Odysseys: Cold Case Hammarskjöld + discussion

Sat 9 Apr 14:00

Art in the Making: The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright + intro by Adrian Steel, Director of Collections and Programmes at RIBA

Tue 12 Apr 18:15

Experimenta: Illuminating the Wilderness + discussion with artists and makers from Project Art Works

Tue 26 Apr 18:15

Terror Vision: The Funhouse

Thu 28 Apr 21:00

BUG 62

Fri 29 Apr 20:45; Thu 5 May 20:45; Fri 6 May 20:45

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://www.bfi.org.uk/join)

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

Join the BFI mailing list for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

The British Film Institute is a charity registered in England and Wales No. 287780