

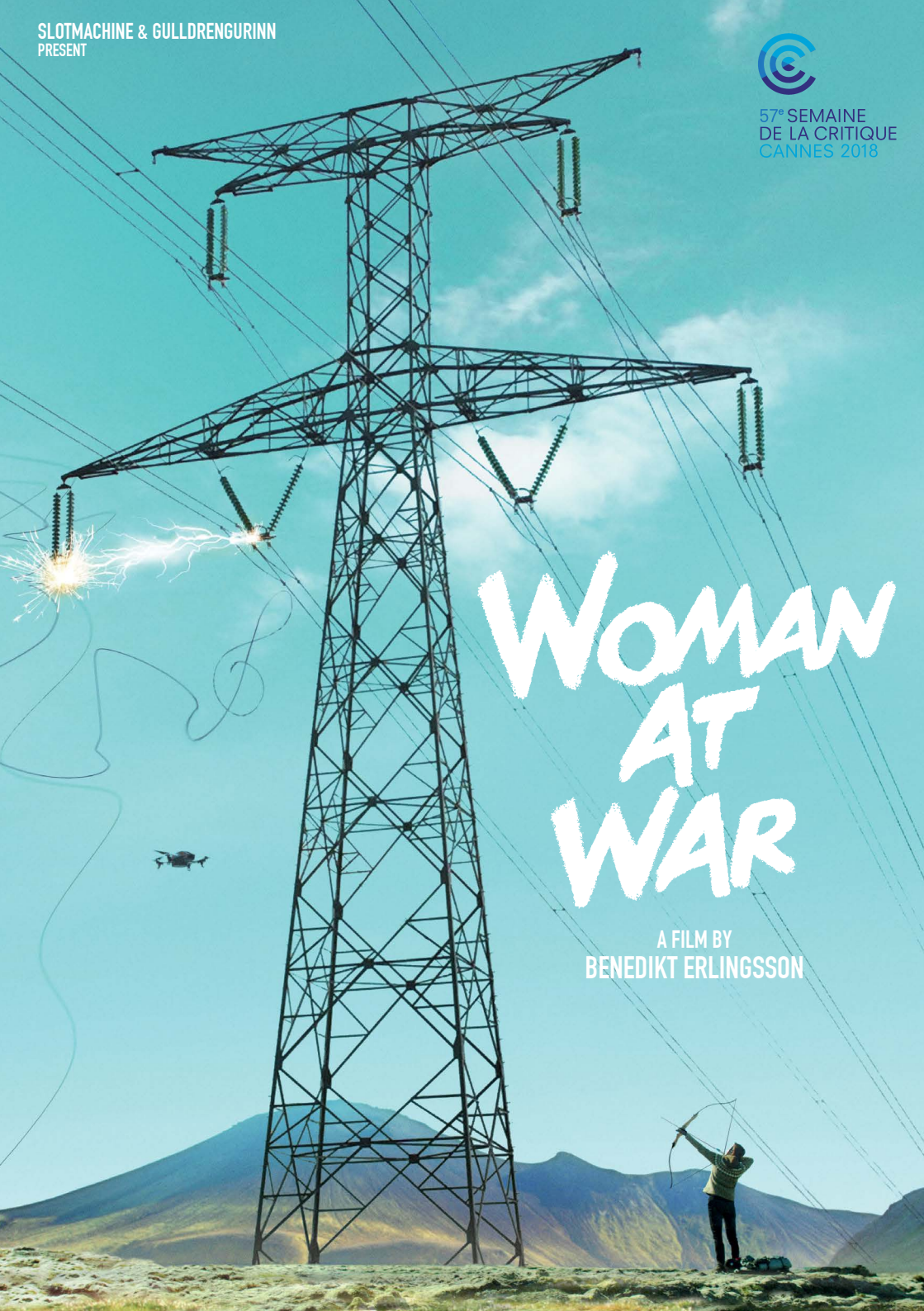
SLOTMACHINE & GULLDRENGURINN
PRESENT



57^e SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2018

WOMAN AT WAR

A FILM BY
BENEDIKT ERLINGSSON



PRODUCTION

SLOT MACHNE

10 rue Sainte Anastase

75003 Paris - France

+33 1 49 96 62 62

slotmachine@slotmachine.fr

www.slotmachine.fr

WORLD SALES

BETA CINEMA

Dirk Schuerhoff / Thorsten Ritter / Tassilo Hallbauer

Tel: + 49 89 67 34 69 828

Fax: + 49 89 67 34 69 888

beta@betacinema.com

www.betacinema.com

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

WOLF Consultants

Gordon Spragg, Laurin Dietrich, Michael Arnon

+49 157 7474 9724

hello@wolf-con.com

www.wolf-con.com

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Present

WOMAN AT WAR



SEMAINE
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ICELAND, FRANCE & UKRAINE / 100 MIN / 2:35 / ICELANDIC





SHORT SYNOPSIS

Halla declares a one-woman-war on the aluminium industry. She is prepared to risk everything to protect the pristine Icelandic Highlands she loves... Until an orphan unexpectedly enters her life.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Halla is a fifty-year-old independent woman. But behind the scenes of a quiet routine, she leads a double life as a passionate environmental activist. Known to others only by her alias “The Woman of the Mountain,” Halla secretly wages a one-woman-war on the local aluminium industry. As Halla’s actions grow bolder, from petty vandalism to outright industrial sabotage, she succeeds in pausing the negotiations between the Icelandic government and the corporation building a new aluminium smelter. But right as she begins planning her biggest and boldest operation yet, she receives an unexpected letter that changes everything. Her application to adopt a child has finally been accepted and there is a little girl waiting for her in Ukraine. As Halla prepares to abandon her role as saboteur and saviour of the Highlands to fulfil her dream of becoming a mother, she decides to plot one final attack to deal the aluminium industry a crippling blow.

This movie is meant to be a heroic tale set in our world of imminent threat. A heroic tale told as an adventure. A serious fairy tale told with a smile.

Our hero serves in this world as a kind of Artemis, the protector of the untouched and wild. Alone, facing a quickly changing planet, she assumes the role of saving mother earth and its future generations. Our point of view is very close to our hero's, which is how and why we access her inner life.

There is a book by Astrid Lindgren called The Brothers Lionheart, in which we have this dialogue between the two brothers:

But then Jonathan said that there were certain things you have to do, even if they were difficult and dangerous.

"Why is that?" I asked, surprised.

"Otherwise you're not really a person, just a little shit."

This is a film about a woman striving to be a real person.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



IN CONVERSATION WITH BENEDIKT ERLINGSSON

Both of your feature films, OF HORSES AND MEN and WOMAN AT WAR, show humanity on the losing end of an effort to tame or dominate nature. What makes this conflict, and our radical failure or foolishness, such a good source of storytelling and comedy for you?

I recently started thinking about the connections between my two films – OF HORSE AND MEN and WOMAN AT WAR. It's something that in a way I was not conscious of before this new film was finished. For me it's very clear that 'nature's rights' should in fact be considered on the same level as 'human rights' – and that's a thread I agree runs through both films.

To me it seems evident that Nature's rights should be strongly protected in all constitutions and defended by local and international laws. We need to collectively realize that untouched nature has an intrinsic right and necessity to exist, regardless of our human needs or our economic system.

I can for example imagine a more rational system in which 'we humans', if we wanted to spoil or use unblemished Nature for our own needs, we would need to go through a process, maybe something like a trial, in order to be allowed to do that.

These issues are really about the common good and the long-term interests of our existence as a whole. Just like the ability to take a person's freedom away and keep them inside a prison for life. So I think now is the right time to look at this kind of approach.

Add to this the strange paradox in some of our societies, the "State", which in democratic countries is an instrument created by the people for the people, can be so easily manipulated by special interests and against what's obviously the common welfare. When we look at the big, existential environmental challenge we face, and what has been happening, this becomes crystal clear.

And yes - it can also sometimes be a good breeding ground for comedy, like it is in my little country and in the film, but in many other countries there is only tragedy. I want to mention two heroes of mine here. Two real life women at war: Berta Cáceres from Honduras and Yolanda Maturana from Columbia. Both environmentalists fighting for "Life itself" and who for their troubles were murdered by dark forces with interests in the lands the women died for.

What's even worse in all of this is that the State seems not to worry about protecting them. It even seems that state-power in certain countries is actively fighting for the other side. Until we come to the situation where the environmentalist becomes an enemy of the state.

More than OF HORSES AND MEN, WOMAN AT WAR is a 'classic' narrative film with a clear story-arc for the main character. How did you decide on this direction for your new project?

Maybe vanity took me in this new direction. In light of the success of OF HORSES AND MEN there were some bitter comments and reactions in Iceland. Many told me that I had made a great "festival film" but that it was not a movie for real audiences. So even after OF HORSES AND MEN had also proved to be an audience success in certain countries, I think that somehow stuck with me. And possibly it played a part in why I decided my next feature would be a "Mainstream-Blockbuster-Story for Everyone" kind of a film.

Why did Halla's character need to be a woman?

I actually did not think about it in gender terms and what would be politically "right" or not. Actually it almost irritates me now how politically correct everything seems today... But that could maybe change tomorrow.

In this case, Halla's character came to me organically through the story and what the drama of telling that story demands.

IN CONVERSATION WITH BENEDIKT ERLINGSSON

How did you cast the main actress, Halldóra Geirhasdóttir?

Casting Halla was a long and a rough journey, and as often happens the right answer was right in front of my nose. Halldóra is a childhood friend and colleague of mine. Professionally, we kind of grew up as siblings, and she was my big sister. We started to work together on the big stage of the National Theater when we were 10 and 11 years old. And very early on in the creative process for *WOMAN AT WAR*, I had a flash vision of Halldóra playing Halla. But then I gave it up and started thinking about other actors who were also dear to me. I also had to work with the concept of the twins in the script, which I wanted to make sure felt organic.

But then fate brought Halldóra back to me, and I realized she was not just the obvious but also the right choice. As an actor she is a force of nature, and in the Icelandic theater she really is *THE ACTRESS* of our generation. Her spectrum of talent is so wide that I feel that calling Halldóra just an actress diminishes her, failing to describe the full spectrum of what she can do. Besides acting for the screen she is also the most famous clown and comedienne in Reykjavík theater and the go-to dramatic actress for the biggest repertory theatre in Iceland, where she takes on leading roles every season.

She has gloriously played male roles like “Vladimir” in *Waiting for Godot* and the knight himself in “*Don Quixote*” – a role that might even share some connection to the one she has in this film. And that’s just the beginning. She has also become famous for creating a kind of alter ego, a chauvinistic male ‘dick’ called “Smári” who performs in a duet called “Hannes and Smári.” There is now a cult around her and these male characters in the world of live Icelandic theatre. I think you could call Halldóra the Sarah Bernhardt of Iceland - if Sarah Bernhardt could live up to the comparison!

Was it a coincidence that she shares a name with the film’s hero?

Halla is a common name in Iceland, and one that carries with it quite a lot of historical and cultural reference. Halla and Eyvindur were the last outlaws in Iceland’s history, who are still famous for surviving on the run in the highlands for over 20 years back in the seventeenth century. They were real mountain people, sheep thieves and rebels, and many stories have been told about their exploits and struggles.

Around a century ago the Icelandic poet and playwright Jóhann Sigurjónsson wrote a play about them, “*Eyvindur of the Mountains*” that reached the international stage and toured successfully in several countries.

And exactly 100 years ago in 1918 Victor Sjöström, a Swedish filmmaker, made a film out of the legend called *THE OUTLAW AND HIS WIFE*, in which he played the lead role himself. So the name “Halla” does come with some nice baggage, at least for Icelandic audiences.

The film could be described as a drama, an eco-thriller, a comedy or all of the above. How did you think about genre while working on the film?

I never think about the genre of a film in my writing or my creative process, not at all. Come what may, genre is something to speculate upon after the child is born, so to speak. You don’t think about what kind of human being your child will become while you are making it. Or I don’t do that at least.

My co-writer Ólafur Egill Egillsson and I did not discuss film genre seriously at any point. The closest we came was just playing with words... “*Fairy Tale*” for example. That is a sexy word. And one that was also very helpful to us in crafting the narrative. For me it’s much more about going after the story, the mission, the pain, the abstract notion of whatever turns me on about the project and the story to be told. Both of us are very interested in dramaturgy,

IN CONVERSATION WITH BENEDIKT ERLINGSSON

the essence of all good stories. And I don't consider this film a comedy... I never "do comedy". Or never aim for comedy at least. If something is funny in the kinds of stories I tell, that's an extra or a side effect.

In terms of process I always go right for the pain...I'm looking for the pain of the author or the character and what that pain means. At the same time I don't like movies that are only about that one thing: "feeling the pain." For me starting there is more about genuinely understanding a story and it allows me to explore different directions.

Once we started outlining things with my DOP Bergsteinn Björgulfsson for example, the story also led us to play with the concept of an "action film."

And at what stage did the music weave its way into everything?

The music was there from the original first vision that led me to the movie. As I was dreaming and fantasizing about what I wanted to see in my next film, I saw a woman running down an empty street. She was running through the rain towards me until she stopped right next to me, dripping wet. Once I got a closer look at her, I could also see there was a three-piece band playing right behind her. Playing just for her and not at all for me. I listened closer until I could hear what the band was playing and it was the soundtrack to the woman's life.

How did you practically approach the collaboration with the musicians and singers, and was it a more in depth working process than usual?

We started developing the music early on, and we had to find out exactly what element the Band would be representing in the film. As we took that journey, this other music also kept appearing and pressing its way into the story. This

became the three Ukrainian female voices that make up Halla's choir.

With the music I wanted to keep "both a belt and suspenders on", as we say here in Iceland, in order to make sure I was flexible and not be trapped when we reached the editing stage. To do this, we test shot all the music scenes, and that was after we had already done full demo recordings for each and every piece of music.

Our end goal was to be able to record as much of the music as possible live on set. This created a challenge for everybody, not only the musicians but also the AD, the DOP and the entire sound department.

So the way we did it insured we had a lot of pieces to play with: we had the studio recordings, the live on set recordings and also more 'off-set' outdoor recordings, so we were able to work all of those in the end.

Davíð Þór Jónsson, the film's composer, has collaborated with me mostly in the theatre, and also wrote the score for OF HORSES AND MEN. Omar and Magnús, two of the band members, are old friends of Davíð who have a band together with Óskar, who is Ómar's brother. That band is called ADHD. They play completely different music than our band in the Film.

How does your background as an actor and showman influence the way you approach filmmaking as a director?

I'm adjusting to this new role of being the Filmmaker and yes, in some sense, my background has been helpful. At the same time I also see it as a handicap.

But I do like the question, because it also reveals how far we have come from the beginnings of filmmaking. How would Charlie Chaplin have answered it? Or Orson Welles? Would anyone have even asked them?

I look at myself as a storyteller who also wants to be a poet, so I'm stuck somewhere between these two approaches, which is like wanting to ride two horses at the same time. And by the way, that is possible. You just need the right training and the talent, just like the best circus artists.

FILM, BAND AND CHOIR

A DIRECTOR'S MEMORANDUM

Our film is a hero's tale.

Our hero is a musician.

The hero is saving the world.

The film has music.

The musicians performing the music are visible.

They are the inner forces that are battling within the hero's soul.

Why? The ancient Greeks believed that creative individuals were possessed by a demon (daimon) or rather that they were followed by a demon who inspired them with good ideas. That's why, according to Plato, Socrates' genius was down to his good demon. A daimon could therefore be a muse of sorts, whispering good advice into the hero's ear.

In Rome this idea was transferred to the genius, which each individual had as a kind of guardian angel, following him from the cradle to the grave. Some Romans were less fortunate than others when it came to their genius and would blame it for their mishaps and bitter fates.

The musicians and the Ukrainian choir then are demons of sorts, trying to imbue our hero with courage, power and good ideas. And just like a Greek chorus they can address the hero as well as the audience, and emphasise important decisions with a powerful dance act.

But there is another reason why I would like to make the performance of the music visible, and that has to do with the idea of "Verfremdung". This idea has been dedicated to Bertholt Brecht but goes back a long way in the history of theatre and show business.

You could say that every time a musician is on camera playing the "score", the film-maker is putting inverted commas around the scene, reminding us that we are right in the middle of a fiction and that behind all the pretence is some message or conclusion that the audience member must come to based on the spectacle.

You could say that through this device I want to come to an agreement with the audience about what sort of film this is and what laws it abides by.

It is a hero's tale in a world saturated by heroes' tales about heroes saving the world. I belong to a group of audience members, which might perhaps need a creative helping hand to be willing to submit myself to that sort of a tale.






BENEDIKT ERLINGSSON

Benedikt Erlingsson is an Icelandic director, author and actor. Erlingsson is well known as a stage director as well as for his roles in Theater, TV series and films. His solo performances are some of the most successful in the history of the Icelandic theatre and were performed on stage by Erlingsson himself for 6 years. *Of Horses and Men*, Erlingsson's first feature film as a writer-director, won over 20 international awards including the New Directors prize at the 2013 San Sebastián Film Festival and the 2014 Nordic Council Film Prize. Benedikt Erlingsson is a 2016 Gan Foundation for Cinema award winner.

A woman is lying on her back on a green floor, wearing a brown jacket, a patterned scarf, and black pants. Her arms are outstretched, and her legs are also outstretched. The floor is scattered with some small pieces of debris.

HALLDÓRA GEIRHARÐSDÓTTIR

Haldóra Geirharðsdóttir is an Icelandic actor, musician and theatre director who has a successful career on the stage as well as in TV and film. Born on August 12, 1968. She is best known for the TV crime drama CASE (2015), Ragnar Bragason's METALHEAD (2013), Benedikt Erlingsson's OF HORSES AND MEN (2012), and Ágúst Guðmundsson's THE SEAGULL'S LAUGHTER (2001). Haldóra has been nominated multiple times for her work on stage and screen most recently winning Best Supporting Actress for her role in METALHEAD at the 2013 Icelandic Edda Awards and Best Actress in the Icelandic Performing Arts Awards for her role as the dance teacher in the stage version of BILLY ELLIOT in 2015.



Cinematographer Bergsteinn Björgúlfsson, known as Besti, has an extensive list of feature films and TV series to his credit. Björgúlfsson shot Benedikt Erlingsson's first feature film *OF HORSES AND MEN* and has also worked on films such as *JULIA* by Matthew C. Brown, the hit Icelandic TV Series *TRAPPED* as well as features *JAR CITY*, *WHITE NIGHT WEDDING* and *THE DEEP* by Baltasar Kormakur among many other films. For his work on *OF HORSES AND MEN*, a black comedy portraying Icelandic country life and mostly starring horses, Björgúlfsson was recognized with the Tallin Black Night Award and the Icelandic Edda Film Award, both for Best Cinematography. He also won the Edda Award for Best Cinematography for his work on *THE DEEP*, a film that takes place in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean on a freezing winter night. *JULIA* also garnered Best Cinematography Awards at the NYC Horror Fest and the Orlando Film Festival. Björgúlfsson is also well known as a producer and director. His 2007 documentary *AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD* received the Edda Award for Best Documentary.

DOP BERGSTEINN BJÖRGÚLFSSON

PRODUCERS SLOT MACHINE

Slot Machine was founded by Marianne Slot in 1993. Beginning with *Breaking The Waves* in 1996, Slot Machine has been Lars Von Trier's regular French partner while developing its own editorial line focused on international auteur cinema. In 2013, Marianne Slot was named President of the French CNC's Cinémas du Monde commission based on this experience, a post she held for the next two years. Carine Leblanc joined Marianne Slot in 2015, and together they continue to pursue Slot Machine's commitment to challenging, boundary pushing cinema.

Slot Machine has collaborated with directors including Lars von Trier, Bent Hamer, Malgoska Szumowska, Thomas Vinterberg, Paz Encina, Lisandro Alonso, Albertina Carri, Susanne Bier, Emma Dante, Marian Crisan, Suri Krishnamma, Baltasar Kormakur, Hélène de Crécy, Juliette Garcias, Yeşim Ustaoglu and Lucrecia Martel. Recent productions include *A GENTLE CREATURE* by Sergei Loznitsa (Cannes Official Selection 2017, In Competition), *THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT* by Lars von Trier (Cannes Official Selection 2018, Out of Competition), the TV Series *AGE OF IRON* by Philippe Béanger in co-production with ARTE, ZDF and SVT and *VISION* by Naomi Kawase (In Post-Production).

"Fostering long term relationships with our directors and partners while also allowing talented auteurs, established or not, to bring their films to life is the primary aim of our work here at Slot Machine. Our sensibilities are also particularly attuned to women directors."



CAST

Halla / Ása	Halldóra Geirharðsdóttir
Sveinbjörn	Jóhann Sigurðarson
Pianist / Accordion Band	Davíð Þór Jónsson
Drummer Band	Magnús Trygvason Eliassen
Sousaphone Band	Ómar Guðjónsson
Ukrainian choir	Iryna Danyleiko
	Galyna Goncharenko
	Susanna Karpenko
Baldvin	Jörundur Ragnarsson
Juan Camillo	Juan Camillo Roman Estrada
Adoption agency lady	Charlotte Bøving
The Prime Minister	Björn Thors
Taxi driver	Hilmir Snær Guðnason
Greenhouse farmer	Jón Jóhannsson
Prison guards	Þorsteinn Guðmundsson
	Helga Braga Jónsdóttir
President of Iceland	Jón Gnarr
Stefanía	Vala Kristín Eiríkssdóttir
Prime Minister's aides	Hjörleifur Hjartarson
	Albert Halldórsson
	Eiríkur Stephensen
Orphanage matron	Olena Lavrenyuk
Nika	Margaryta Hilska

CREW

Directed by	Benedikt Erlingsson
Screenplay by	Benedikt Erlingsson & Ólafur Egill Egilsson
Producers	Marianne Slot, Benedikt Erlingsson, Carine Leblanc
Co-Producers	Serge Lavrenyuk, Bergsteinn Björgúlfsson, Birgitta Björnsdóttir
DOP	Bergsteinn Björgúlfsson
Set designer	Snorri Hilmarsson
Costume designer	Sylvía Dögg Halldórsdóttir, Maria Kero
Make-up artists	Dominique Rabout
Editor	Davíð Aleksander Corno
Sound	François De Morant, Raphaël Sohier
	Vincent Cosson, Aymerick Devoldère
Original Music	Davíð Þór Jónsson
Production	Slot Machine & Gulldregurinn
Co-production	Solar Media Entertainment, Köggull Filmworks, Vintage Picture

With the support of THE ICELANDIC FILM CENTRE, EURIMAGES, AIDE AUX CINÉMAS DU MONDE, CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE, INSTITUT FRANÇAIS, CNC NOUVELLES TECHNOLOGIES EN PRODUCTION, UKRAINIAN STATE FILM AGENCY, MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF UKRAINE, NORDISK FILM & TV FOND, FONDATION GAN POUR LE CINÉMA, CREATIVE EUROPE PROGRAMME MEDIA OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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