



CRYSTAL SWAN

ХРУСТАЛЬ  A FILM BY DARYA ZHUK

Thursday, June 25, 2020 / 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM Postscreening discussion via Zoom with director Darya Zhuk

Set in the immediate aftermath of Belarus's independence, *Crystal Swan* (2018) follows the path of Evelina, a young woman who dreams of moving to Chicago and pursuing her passion for music. Obtaining a US visa proves a difficult endeavor, however. Determined to leave the country, Evelina debates buying a letter of employment from the black market. Depicting a nation anticipating a brighter future and a heroine insistent on making her own destiny, *Crystal Swan* explores vital questions of self and belonging.

Director Darya Zhuk will join moderator Hannah Garibaldi (Film and Media Studies, UCSB) for a virtual discussion of her debut feature film. Two days before the event, registered attendees will receive a link enabling them to screen the film in advance.

CWC Global

Media are global by nature; they express culture just as much as they transcend borders. The CWC Global series is dedicated to showcasing media from around the world. This series features screenings and events that place UCSB in conversation with international media makers and global contexts across our deeply connected world.



UC SANTA BARBARA



Director Darya Zhuk

Belarus-born director Darya Zhuk discovered filmmaking while studying Economics at Harvard. After working as a business analyst at HBO, she earned her MFA degree with honors from Columbia University with a concentration in Directing. Her debut feature film *Crystal Swan* was the nation of Belarus's first entry to the Oscars for Best Foreign Language Film in 22 years. *Crystal Swan* opened the prestigious Karlovy Vary "East of the West" competition and won many prizes including Grand Prix at Odessa Film Festival, Grand Prix at Tbilisi International Film Festival, FIPRESCI at Bratislava IFF, and Youth Jury Award at Cork Film Festival. It had its North American Premiere at Slamdance in 2019.



Moderator Hannah Garibaldi

Hannah Garibaldi is a PhD student in the Film and Media Studies Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She received her Master's degree in Film Studies from Chapman University with her thesis, "Chromatically Subverting the Production Code: Hollywood's Colorful Weapon in the 1940s." Her research interests include the intersection of Hollywood censorship with color filmmaking in the 1930s-1950s, the establishment of accessibility standards in current cinematic exhibition, and the influence of physical illness, injury, and disability upon historical Hollywood film productions.



Production notes

The film is a production of Demarsh-Film (Belarus) in association with Fusion Features (US), Unfound Content (US), Vice Films (US), Inspiration Films (Russia), and Crystal Goose (US). The film was made in association with BelarusFilm (Belarus), Nashe Kino (Belarus). The film has been supported by grants from New York State Council for the Arts (US), Hessen Film Fund (Germany), Tribeca Film Institute (USA).

Actor Alina Nasibullina, who plays Velya in the film, previously appeared in “How Victor the Garlic took Alexei the Stud to the Nursing Home,” which won the East of West Competition at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2017.

The film was lensed by award-winning director of photography Carolina Costa (*They, Flower, The Chosen Ones*). The script was written by poet, filmmaker, and screenwriter Helga Landauer (*Olshvang*); Darya Zhuk co-wrote the script.

Crystal Swan premiered at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival where it opened the “East of the West” competition in July 2018. The film won the Grand Prix at Odessa International Film Festival. At Vyborg Window to Europe in Russia, the film won the Best Coproduction Award and the Russian Critics Award. Most recently, the film won the Audience Award at Pacific Meridian Film Festival in Vladivostok, Russia. In its home country of Belarus, the film beat the box office numbers of such audience favorites as *Whiplash* (dir. Damien Chazelle) and *Youth* (dir. Paolo Sorrentino).



Production Team

director	Darya Zhuk
screenplay by	Helga Landauer
co-written by	Darya Zhuk
producers	Birgit Goernbock, Olga Goister, Debbie Vandermeulen, Valery Dmitrotchenko
executive producers	Danny Gabai, Will McCance, Eddy Moretti, Dmitriy Osmerkin, Chris Schumann, Shane Smith, Bernie Stern
director of photography	Carolina Costa
editors	Sergey Dmitrenko, Michal Leszczykowski
sound design	Oliver Achatz
production designer	Andrey Tolstik

Key Talent

Alina Nassibulina	Velya
Ivan Mulin	Stepan
Yury Borisov	Alik
Svetlana Anikey	Velya's mother
Ilya Kapanets	Kostya
Ludmila Razumova	Alya, Stepan's mother
Natalya Onishenko	Angela, Vika's mother
Vyacheslav Shakalido	Mikhalych, Stepan's father
Anastasiya Gavrya	Vika, bride

Director's statement

I'm a Belarus-born film director living in New York. I spent most of my young adult life straddling two worlds: the world of my freshly independent home-country, which was just starting to define its identity after the split from the Soviet Union, and my new home in America, where I stayed after finishing an undergraduate degree at Harvard. I spent most of this period standing in long queues to the US Embassy in Minsk. I visited my parents frequently, and as Belarus was openly critical of US international policy, the visa requirements were quite brutal.

It was in this long line at the embassy where I first thought of *Crystal Swan*. People waiting for permission to go to America were like prisoners waiting for a verdict; they were so stressed that they often shared their whole life stories with strangers next to them. The humiliation people had to experience to apply for a visa wasn't something that my American friends knew much about. I wanted to explore what this process is like.

The story of *Crystal Swan* is set in mid '90s since this is a time I know well from my personal experience. My protagonist Velya is a DJ dreaming of going to Chicago to visit the birthplace of house music. We meet her in one of these cues to the embassy. She is young and full of illusions; she still feels like she is the center of her world. She is an archetypal American character placed in the post-Soviet mess. The freedom she seeks is not available, and in the reality in which she lives, individualism doesn't always win. Her beliefs and approach to life are constantly challenged with every step of her journey.

Can she be a free agent in an unfree world? The lack of freedom of people around her is what stops my main character from reaching her goal. The trauma of previous history catches up with her through the abusive actions of the people who surround her.

Velya's dream is as fragile as the crystal swan she is given as a present at the end of the film. Or does the swan represent her new friend Stepan who betrays her? Stepan is like Zeus, who turned into a swan to pursue his sexual satisfaction. Visually, I was interested in a world that recently experienced a geopolitical disaster, where high culture is mixed with low culture in the most unexpected places. Everything is upside down. Clothes are sold together with pianos. Crystal chandeliers sparkle by the highway. A rave party is jumping among the huge sculptures of Lenin and Marx. I tried to add surreal notes to underline general absurdity to a world firmly placed in the real.

I collaborated with my DP Carolina Costa (*They, Flower, The Chosen Ones*) to create a specific visual language for this very particular moment in history. We used 4:3 framing with lots of overhead space to show overbearing prison-like sense of Velya's reality, but added primary colors to keep her hope alive.

