

KINO LORBER



OLGA

A FILM BY ELIE GRAPPE

OFFICIAL SELECTIONS

Winner: SACD Prize, International Critics' Week Cannes • COLCOA French Film Festival •
Palm Spring Intl. Film Festival • Karlovy Vary Intl. Film Festival

Switzerland, Ukraine, France | 2021 | 87 min | Color
In French, Ukrainian and Russian with English subtitles

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

2013. A 15-year-old gymnast from Ukraine is torn between Switzerland – where she is training for the European Championship in preparation for the Olympics – and Kiev, where her mother works as a journalist reporting on the Euromaidan protests.

SYNOPSIS

Olga (Anastasia Budyashkina) is a talented teenage Ukrainian gymnast exiled in Switzerland, dreaming of Olympic gold and trying to fit in with her new team in her new home. As she prepares for the European Championships, the Ukrainian people back home in Kyiv rise up in what has become known as the Maidan Revolution, suddenly involving everyone she cares about. Olga is left a powerless, distant bystander as her mother, an investigative journalist, faces danger as she challenges the brutal Yanukovich regime. Incorporating documentary footage from the 2013 uprising, *Olga* is a tense, sensitively handled tale of exile reflecting the clash between the personal and the political in a young woman's search for identity.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 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 had come to Switzerland just before the Euromaidan, and was deeply moved by how upset she was when she told me about the revolution, and the way the images had affected her.

In listening to her story 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. 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, and become aware of the risks that they take. 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. How can one teenage girl reconcile her personal desires with the course of History?

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 neutrality and a distance that Olga will never have. From that distance, Olga is haunted by the images of her city, which she no longer recognizes. A high-performance athlete, she finds herself completely at 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. For me the Euromaidan revolution is particularly fascinating to observe – the demonstrators came from all political sides and social classes, an amazing surge of solidarity within such a dislocated society. 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.

Anastasia Budyashkina plays Olga. She is the key to the emotion of the film. For her role and the roles of the other gymnasts, I did not want to work with professional actors; I had to try and capture the truth in the actresses. This 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 Ukraine's national reserve team. The trainers and some of the athletes –including Steffi and Zoe – 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 shooting 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 colors 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.

This film started in 2016 when writing began, and after beginning production in 2020, shooting was suspended due to the coronavirus crisis and was finally completed nine months later. Today, at last, I am delighted to introduce you to OLGA.

Elie Grappe

CAST AND CREW BIOGRAPHIES

ABOUT ELIE GRAPPE - Director, Co-Writer

Elie Grappe was born in Lyon in 1994. He studied classical music for 10 years at the Lyon National Conservatoire before joining the Film Division of the ECAL (Lausanne School of Higher Education in Art and Design) in 2011, from where he graduated in 2015.

As part of his training, he directed the *Répétition* (“Rehearsal”) in 2014, a short documentary selected for the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival, and the Krakow Film Festival. His graduation short film *Suspendu* (“Suspended”) from 2015 was co-produced with Point Prod audiovisual production company and Swiss public broadcasting organization Radio Télévision Suisse (RTS) and distributed by Salaud Morisset film production and distribution company in around 60 international festivals. He then directed the casting and coached the actors of Blaise Harrison’s film *Particles*, screened at Cannes Directors’ Fortnight in 2018.

After completing his studies, Elie Grappe settled in Switzerland and started writing *OLGA*, his first fiction feature film. Shot in Kyiv, Swiss Olympic, and Paris, the film was co-written with Raphaëlle Desplechin, produced by Point Prod and Cinema Defacto, in co-production with RTS and Canal+. The project was part of Emergence and Grand Nord workshops and Locarno Filmmakers Academy. The screenplay was read in Angers Film Festival and won the Visio Foundation prize. The project was part of the Films After Tomorrow program at Locarno Festival 2020, a section devoted to films brought to a standstill due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The shooting was completed in the autumn of 2020. In 2021, *OLGA* got selected for the 60th edition of the Semaine de la Critique, Cannes parallel selection.

ABOUT ANASTASIA BUDYASHKINA - “Olga”

Anastasia Budyashkina was born in 2001 in the city of Lugansk, Ukraine. In 2014, amidst the war in Lugansk, she moved to study in Kiev. Anastasia began training in artistic gymnastics at age four and later competed professionally as part of the Ukrainian National Team. In 2020, she made her feature film debut in the lead role of the film *Olga*, directed by Elie Grappe. In 2022, she trained at the university to become a sports coach and was hired by a circus company as an aerial gymnast. Following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia, Anastasia has taken refuge in Switzerland, where she is currently continuing her university studies in sports coaching as well as her circus training.

CAST

Anastasia Budiashkina..... Olga
Sabrina Rubtsova..... Sasha
Caterina Barloggio..... Steffi
Thea Brogli..... Zoe
Tanya Mikhina..... Ilona
Jérôme Martin..... Adrien
Alicia Onomor..... Juliette
Lou Steffen..... Andrea
Alexandr Mavrits..... Vassily

CREW

Director

Elie Grappe

Production

Tom Dercourt & Jean Marc Fröhle

Screenplay

Elie Grappe & Raphaëlle Desplechin

Director of Photography

Lucie Baudinaud

Editing

Suzana Pedro

Sound

Jürg Lempen François Musy Simon Apostolou

Production Design

Ivan Niclass & Pascal Baillods

Original Music

Pierre Desprats