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LEMONADE

DIRECTED BY **IOANA URICARU**

PRESS BOOK



LEMONADE

A film by Ioana Uricaru

Romania, Canada, Germany, Sweden, 2018

88 min, colour, English, Romanian with English subtitles

Produced by Cristian Mungiu, Yanick Létourneau, Eike Goreczka,
Christoph Kukula, Sean Wheelan, Anthony Muir

TECHNICAL DATA

Original Title	LEMONADE
Genre	Drama
Countries of Production	Romania, Canada, Germany, Sweden
Year of Production	2018
Length	88 minutes
Shooting Format	2.8K Anamorphic
Screening Format	DCP 2K
Languages	English, Romanian
Subtitles	English
Technical Details	24 fps Sound 5.1. Aspect Ratio 1:2,39

CAST

Mara Mălina Manovici
Moji Steve Bacic
Daniel Dylan Scott Smith
Dragos Milan Hurduc
Aniko Ruxandra Maniu



CREW

Directed by	Ioana Uricaru
Written by	Ioana Uricaru, Tatiana Ionașcu
Director of Photography	Friede Clausz
Editor	Mircea Olteanu
Art Director	Sylvain Lemaitre
Sound Designer	Kai Tebbel
Sound Mixer	Olaf Mehl
Production Companies	Mobra Films, Peripheria, 42film, Filmgate Films, Film i Väst
Producers	Cristian Mungiu, Yanick Létourneau, Eike Goreczka, Christoph Kukula, Sean Wheelan, Anthony Muir
Line Producer	Tudor Reu
Associate Producer	Arne Kohlweyer
Financial Support from	Centrul National al Cinematografiei, Eurimages, Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung, Telefilm, Société de développement des industries culturelles – Québec, SODEC – Crédits d'impôts – Québec, CAVCO, Film i Väst, Creative Europe Programme – MEDIA of the European Union, Romanian Television

SYNOPSIS

While working in the US on a temporary visa as a caretaker, Mara, a 30 year-old single mother from Romania, marries Daniel, an American. After the arrival of her son Dragos, everything seems to have fallen perfectly into place. When the process of getting a green card veers unexpectedly off course, however, Mara is faced with abuses of power on every level and forced to answer a dark question about herself – how far would you go to get what you want?

The lead role, Mara, is played by Malina Manovici (Graduation) and this first feature by Ioana Uricaru is produced by Palme d'Or winner Cristian Mungiu.



STORYLINE

Mara, 30, goes through a medical examination by a US doctor and receives a few vaccine shots. She finally receives the medical certificate necessary for her immigration status adjustment, but also realizes they gave her an extra shot she didn't need. Her American husband, Daniel, 50, is waiting for her outside and gets upset upon hearing about the unnecessary shot – an infringement upon her rights.

A few days later, Mara and Daniel are interviewed separately by an immigration officer, Moji, who seems benevolent and even friendly. He asks questions about their marriage and we find out that Daniel, who works for a landscaping company, had a work accident and is still in need of medical care. This is how Mara met him: at the medical facility where she temporarily worked as a caretaker. They got married somewhat hastily, after only having known each other for a couple of months, hence the immigration authorities' request for this interview to make sure theirs is a bona fide marriage. Moji seems satisfied with her answers.

Mara's son, Dragos, 8, arrives from Romania, where he had been left in his grandmother's care while his mother was away in the US for the 6-month caretaker job. They are overjoyed by the reunion, but Mara has to break a lot of news to little Dragos: they won't be going back to Romania any time soon, Dragos will have to learn English so he can go to school in the US in the fall, and they will have to live together with Daniel – whom Mara, for now, describes as a “good friend”. At least Mara will be sharing the bedroom with Dragos, not with Daniel. Daniel is willing to accept this arrangement for now and tries to ingratiate himself to Dragos – maybe too much, as he's showing his vintage gun to the little boy.

Mara picks up her last paycheck from the medical facility and chats with Aniko, her friend from Romania. They came together through the same agency for the same type of temporary job in caretaking, but Aniko will soon have to go back to Romania unless she finds a solution to stay, legally or illegally. Mara tells her

about her plan to sell her only possession – a studio apartment back home – and use the money as down payment for a house in the US. If Daniel can take a mortgage with this help from her, they might be able to move out of the cramped and dingy one bedroom they now share.

While out grocery shopping with Dragos, Mara receives an unexpected phone call from Moji who summons her back to the immigration office – apparently there’s something wrong with her application. Pressed for time, and with Daniel unreachable as he’s in the middle of his physiotherapy session, Mara drops off Dragos with Aniko promising it won’t take more than half an hour.

She arrives late for the appointment with Moji and finds him already in his car, on his way out. As a favor, he proposes they speak in the car to save time, and she agrees to get in. He drives over to an abandoned area by a lake and starts questioning her thoroughly and

aggressively about her relationship with Daniel. He finally forces her to admit that she gave inexact information about the details of her intimate relationship with Daniel and accuses her of trying to gain unfair advantages through her marriage. It is clear that Moji can decide her fate by approving or denying her greencard application, and he directly asks for sexual favors in exchange for a favorable decision. He makes Mara give him a handjob for now, and summons her in three days’ time at a motel for a sexual encounter.

Shaken after her meeting with Moji, which took much longer than expected, Mara checks her messages and sees that Aniko had to go to work and decided to leave Dragos alone in a motel room, close to where she had picked him up. Mara hurries to the motel and finds the police waiting for her outside the room. They have been notified that a child has been left alone and accuse Mara of negligence. They threaten to call Child Protection Services and to take Dragos away from her. Mara finally convinces them to let her go with a warning

and with the obligation to take parenting courses and receive child welfare visits from a social worker.

While trying to decide if she's going to give in to Moji's request, Mara doesn't find the right moment and circumstances to tell Daniel everything that's happened to her. Daniel has arranged for a visit to a good charter school, which is also the location where he had his work accident, and the principal offers to grant Dragos a chance at an interview even if the selection for the fall classes has already closed.

A remorseful Aniko puts Mara in touch with a lawyer, who tells Mara that if they are to take on US immigration in court she needs to bring solid evidence of the sexual assault and gives her a recording device. The next day, Mara goes to meet Moji at the motel and tries to convince him to accept money instead of sexual "compensation". She gets undressed to gain his attention but refuses to sleep with him, which enrages Moji. He promises to deny her immigration application

and also to tell her husband that she gave in to Moji's blackmail.

That evening, Mara decides to tell Daniel the whole truth and he has a violent reaction, interpreting Mara's interaction with Moji as a betrayal and proof that she's not devoted to their marriage. He pushes her in anger, and Dragos jumps to her defense with the (unloaded) gun. Mara takes her child and seeks refuge at Aniko's place. It seems that all her plan and all her hopes of making a new life in America are now crushed: Moji is sure to deny her application, her husband is not going to stand up for her under these circumstances and since she didn't gather any evidence there's no prospect of getting justice in court. On top of this, the sale of her studio apartment in Romania has closed – for much less than she was hoping for – so going back looks like an increasingly worse option.

She still takes Dragos to the interview at school, and he is given a math test that he aces so brilliantly the

principal gushes over the prospect of having him in the class. Mara contemplates all that she and her child have to lose. She decides to go have forensic pictures taken of the bruises caused during the altercation with Daniel.

Mara returns the recording equipment to the lawyer and insists that they have to find a solution for her to stay in the US. He gives her discouraging news regarding her prospects, but Mara insists forcefully and tells him about the fight with Daniel. The lawyer suggests a rather far-fetched possibility – to start a domestic violence case against Daniel, which might bring Mara a witness status and therefore she could ask for a special type of visa. If they are successful in this request, this visa would give her and Dragos the possibility to stay in the US for another three years – and after that they will see. Mara and Dragos move into a small apartment that belongs to the lawyer – he will let them stay there in exchange for cleaning work from Mara. The future looks mostly insecure, but at least

she tried everything and there's a ray of hope – maybe that's what America is all about.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The idea has been sparked by a true story and grew into a screenplay based on my own experience of discovering the American way of life and the differences between the American and Romanian (or Eastern European) worldviews.

One of the themes is the conflict between the two cultures. The America portrayed in this film is not the one that immigrants dream of before leaving their native country. It's not a modern, technologically advanced world, full of possibilities, but rather a provincial one, inhabited by people who can be narrow-minded and prejudiced. The film wants to balance the representations of America and Romania, showing the contrast between them and the impossibility of deciding which one is "better". This feeling of being caught between two worlds, painfully familiar to any immigrant, is most clearly summarized in the question: is it worth it? I am not trying to answer this question through the film, but rather to point out that the beloved American motto "you can achieve anything you want"

comes with a fine print follow-up: "if you are ready to do whatever it takes".

The aesthetic key of LEMONADE is that of intense attention to detail, aiming for representing Mara's experience as realistically as possible. LEMONADE chooses to focus on everyday occurrences, complete with their natural lag times and the less dramatic moments. The ambiguity, the open ending, the rejection of the explanatory mode contribute to a shifting of the gravity center from the commonly used elements of drama to the authentic sensations that we can all identify with: the uncertainty, the shifting ground under our feet, the anxiety that affects us profoundly even when the stakes are small.

I see LEMONADE as a film that is uniquely positioned as a bridge between European auteur cinema and the more daring American independent films, and it does so through its subject matter, its production (which spans both Romania and the US) and its aesthetic stance. The sparseness of the story and the focus on



moments that might seem trivial and are usually left out in mainstream cinema have become a part of the Romanian cinema's "brand", but they also establish a connection to the work of American independent filmmakers like Kelly Reichardt (*Wendy and Lucy*) and Julia Loktev (*Day Night Day Night*). This connection will hopefully be highlighted by *LEMONADE*, a film that belongs both to the Romanian and the American cinemas, just as I consider myself as belonging to both cultures.

THE DIRECTOR: IOANA URICARU

Ioana Uricaru was born and raised in Romania, where she studied biology before turning to filmmaking and film studies. She holds an MFA in film and television production and a Ph.D. in critical studies, both from USC's School of Cinematic Arts. She is an Alumna of Berlinale Talents (2008 and Script Station 2009), the Cannes Cinefondation Residence Programme, the Sundance Labs and the Torino Film Lab. Recently Ioana Uricaru was granted a fellowship at the American Academy in Berlin.

FILMOGRAPHY (selection):

THE WITNESS (short, 2012). Recipient of Sloan Foundation Production Grant (writer/director)

STOPOVER (short, 2010) - Official Selection Sundance Film Festival 2011, Seattle International Film Festival 2011. Other international festivals: Cambridge, Transilvania, Morelia, London East End, Rehovot, Tacoma. Curated screenings at the Jacob Burns Film Center, Film Society of Lincoln Center

TALES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE – segment: **THE LEGEND OF THE PARTY ACTIVIST** (short, 2009) – Official Selection, Cannes 2009. Opening Gala: Transilvania Film Festival, La Rochelle Film Festival, Sarajevo Film Festival, Marseille Rencontres Films Femmes Mediteranee. International commercial distribution in over 30 countries. Released in the US by IFC Films (2011). Other international festivals: Toronto, London BFI, Pusan, Haugesund, Abu Dhabi, Rotterdam, Morelia.

NATIONAL TREASURE (documentary, Communication University of China, 2007, co-director Wang Ying)

THE SUN AND THE MOON (short, USC 2007) AFI Film Festival 2008, L'Alternativa Independent Film Festival Barcelona 2008, American Cinematheque Focus on Female Directors 2009, Creteil Festival des Films des Femmes 2009, Expression en corto Guanajuato 2010 (writer/director)



THE LEAD ACTRESS: MĂLINA MANOVICI

Mălina Manovici received her first major role in a feature film as Sandra in Cristian Mungiu's *GRADUATION*, which premiered in Competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016. She studied Dramatic Arts in Timișoara, Romania and in 2008 she started her collaboration with the National Theatre of Timișoara. In 2017, she got her first leading role in *LEMONADE*.

THE PRODUCER: CRISTIAN MUNGIU

Cristian Mungiu is a Romanian filmmaker born in Iași, Romania in 1968.

His debut film, *OCCIDENT/WEST*, premiered at Quinzaine des Réalisateurs in Cannes in 2002 and was an audience hit in Romania.

In 2007 his second feature, *4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS*, was awarded the Palme d'Or in Cannes. The film later received several awards as Best Film of the Year from various international associations of film critics. It also won the European Film Academy Awards for Best Film and Best Director.

He returned to Cannes in 2009 as a writer-producer-co-director with the collective episodic film *TALES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE* and as a writer-director in 2012 with *BEYOND THE HILLS* – double awarded for Best Screenplay and Best Actresses.

BACALAUREAT/GRADUATION was his fifth film presented in Cannes, awarded for Best Director in 2016.



STATEMENT OF THE PRODUCER CRISTIAN MUNGIU

In LEMONADE, a young mother has flown thousands of miles away from her oppressive past to seek freedom in the country where a rule was invented for everything you are free to do. Only that you'd better do it strictly the way it was established. I know Ioana Uricaru since 1994. We've been colleagues at the film school for four years. We spent hours and hours together watching films, speaking about films and helping each other for the student films we were shooting. After graduating the film school in 1998, we wrote together the screenplay for a feature. It was produced as a film with the title Outbond in 2011 and it premiered in Locarno.

LEMONADE has some of the ingredients I consider to be fundamental for a contemporary film designed to keep the spectators awake and interested: it is tense, clear, gripping, attaching and unpredictable – with this important blending between a personal story and a universal theme.

The development of the protagonist, her understanding of the world surrounding her and her evolution along

the story is a good blending between the American habit of writing characters with an arch development and the European impulse of respecting the integrity of each moment of the story with its realistic grip.

As for the protagonist, I believe she embodies the conflicting impulses of a mother wishing to do whatever it takes for her child and the pride of a woman understanding that between her image of the glorious west and the reality of the American society there are a few slight differences – as the world is populated by humans.

I am not sure the term 'producer' is the most appropriate for my implication in Ioana Uricaru's project. I am primarily a friend – helping out the making of a powerful film, bringing all my experience and skills but understanding to respect the freshness and freedom of creation of a talented director with a strong point of view and a firm vision about cinema.



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