

homo@lv



Documentary, HD, 16:9, colour, stereo, 70', 2010, Latvia

Directed by Kaspars Goba

A portrait of a post-Soviet country in Eastern Europe whose society is torn apart by the struggle to accept the Gay Pride Parade tradition. The unearthing of Pride in Riga from 2005 to 2010 shows the different perceptions of the concept of democracy in the 21st century.

Director Kaspars Goba

Screenplay Kaspars Goba

Cinematographers Kaspars Goba, Marģeris Eglītis, Inese Apse

Editors Gatis Belogrudovs, Visvaldis Zarakovskis

Sound Oskars Doma, Jānis Zāneris

Producer Ieva Ūbele

Production Company ELM MEDIA

SYNOPSIS

In the summer of 2005, two guys came up with the idea to organise an unprecedented event - a festive lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people's parade through the streets of Riga, the capital of Latvia. Following the example of similar LGBT parades in Western cities, they decided to call it 'Pride'. Little did they know that their good intent would spiral into a chain of inconceivable events lasting several years: the great emotion stirred up would dramatically divide Latvian society; the persons involved would be showered, in turn, with human excrement and holy water, families would be torn apart, jobs lost, and a pastor expelled from the church for free thinking. They could not have imagined that crowds of Western 'reinforcements' would flock to support both sides or that Jesus, the Devil, patriotism and human rights would all be used in the rhetoric surrounding the topic, and that the media would eagerly report it all. In the end, could it be that the victims of this hostility were all those involved, because for someone, somewhere it was beneficial to set us against one another?

Kaspars Goba worked on this film for five years. The extensive footage collected over the years enables the spectator to get an extraordinarily deep insight into the opinions and life stories of the individuals on both the Pride and NoPride fronts. The astonishing unearthing of Pride in Riga as shown in Kaspars Goba's work, from its inception in 2005 through to the announcement that Pride would not be held in Riga in 2010, enables the viewer to consider these events from a different perspective. One can contemplate the role politicians play in manipulating people's ideals, and also ask: what is the price of democracy in Latvia?

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In the summer of 2005, a little more than a year after Latvia had joined the EU, I received a call from a friend of mine, Lutheran minister Māris Sants, who had been ousted from the church for homosexuality a few years prior. He said that the first Pride Parade was scheduled to take place in Riga, and perhaps I would like to come. I thought to myself, Pride, this could be something significant. If nothing more, I could be the first to film it for history's sake. On the morning of July 23rd I picked up my camera and set out.

What I experienced in the Old Town that day rattled me like nothing had before - a small gathering of parade participants surrounded by a police brigade slowly made its way through a horribly menacing throng of protesters. If up to that point I thought I understood society, then after the Pride events I was wholly unconvinced. I hadn't expected that Pride would dredge up such deep emotion in the psyche of our society. That evening it became clear to me that I had to make a film.

After emotions had subsided and in following events in society in the subsequent years, I realized that the Pride organizers did not have a clear communications strategy - they succeeded in drawing attention to the issue, but lacked tactics in how to proceed, while the other side's discourse was dominated by emotional argument. People spoke on different levels without hearing or understanding each other. This allowed politicians to endlessly manipulate societal opinions through the media, using this topic to further their own goals. I, in turn, in observing all of this firsthand, was upset about the fact that Latvia, after such a bitter struggle for independence, was splintered over issues that didn't warrant feuding, in my opinion.

With my film I hoped to change the situation and offer the film as a forum for discussion. I sincerely hope I have achieved this.



No Man Is an Island

Normunds Naumanis, film critic, daily *Diena*

Berlinale has traditionally been able to take pride in the special attention focused on such an essential human rights aspect as the lives of “non-traditional” sexual orientation individuals and community, and the films that touch upon this seemingly marginal social theme.

In this regard, it's logical that the hour-long film *homo@lv* from the young Latvian documentary filmmaker Kaspars Goba would be screened at the Berlin film festival – a “hot theme” from a new EU member state will certainly guarantee interest. But not only. Goba's *homo@lv* is the first serious film from Latvia that fortunately combines in-depth, well-rounded investigative journalism with an exciting and dynamic film style, and as a result the film supersedes a “theme specific” framework to become a kind of collective portrait, though unpleasant and painful, of contemporary Latvian society. The film tells the story of the Pride and Anti-pride movements, well-known in Europe, as well as the unbelievable political soap-opera-worthy passions surrounding this small annual parade for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons and their supporters in Riga, the capital of the small Baltic nation of Latvia. The film's *story* unites episodes of broken fates due to sexuality, ruined careers, malicious speculations incited by political and religious organizations on the most intimate zone of this “human rights issue”, and finally, about the barrier of intolerance and hate that Latvian society will have to overcome if the population is to finally come to an elementary understanding of individual rights. This will not be an easy road for Latvia.

Will Berlinale, as the “Old-Europe” centre's arena of political-correctness, perceive the apprehension regarding the true state of human rights in Latvia contained in Goba's film as the exotic illness of a “new democracy” that needs to be quickly overcome as “we too have experienced it”? Does the director's fear for the “mental health” of society affect only one nation, Latvia (where, statistically speaking, the level of tolerance is favourable for gays and

lesbians – for example, 41% of Latvians aged 20 - 30 aren't against same-sex marriage. This is one of the highest results in Europe...)? Or, in reality, do people live by double moral standards? And is the gay community itself not divided by the same contradictions as the rest of society – the battle between various “sexual-minority” organizations for influence, power, and yes, also money? Kaspars Goba demonstrates all of this in his film without sentimentality and also without any sympathetically disingenuous motions towards the “threatened party” - the film clearly proves that society's democracy and tolerance ills cannot be remedied from “one side” only.

In Latvia though, there's been an odd “focus shift” of this, professionally-speaking, impeccable example of investigative journalism. Kaspars Goba's documentary *homo@lv* is mostly seen in one context – through the frightening, repeated, public scandal ridden mongering at Pride and Anti-pride events. The explanation for this attitude may be twofold.

Firstly, purely formally the film's ideological centre is Goba's wish to chronologically determine how the now infamous Pride parades began in Riga, Latvia. Through a jolly procession, homosexually-oriented persons and their supporters wanted to declare their disingenuously “hidden” though very real presence in Latvian society, in the most elementary of human rights and, no less importantly, in legal terms (to at least legitimize partnership and property rights to the level of Scandinavia or other civilized European nations).

In other words, it's as if the director, with the help of the film's imagery, was hoping to announce that to come “out of the closet” isn't a mortal sin. Yes, to come *out of the closet* – as gays and lesbians label the recognition of their orientation – is a goal, though it's no wonder, as the actual “threshold of tolerance” in Latvia is so low that in two decades only one well-known journalist has publicly announced his non-traditional sexual orientation. In a tragically-comic way this situation is a reminder that there is also only one publicly-known informer who has admitted to collaborating with the KGB...

The filmmakers, just as gay people themselves, understand that the publicly waved slogan “freedom for gays” will summon a natural storm of indignation from the part of society whose morals are intolerantly limited to: “let *them* do what they want at home, but stay off the streets with their gay propaganda”. Namely, with an aggressive denunciation from those Latvian leaders promoting the stereotype of “normal people”. The fear of this hate is paralysing. No one knows how to battle these prejudices – not the Latvian legislators, not the “normal people”. Although, as it was stated, the general opinion is that the level of tolerance in Latvia towards all types of “differences” is high (at least among those in the arts and other creative social activities), though as soon as there is talk of the human rights of homosexually-oriented persons, even those liberals who have had and have personal experience with “those people” are bewildered. Only one thing can be concluded from this, and Kaspars Goba nicely shows this in his film, that Latvian society is immensely, I might say even criminally, hypocritical. It's as if the members of the Parliament and other political and leadership figures weren't personally acquainted with a single gay or lesbian, though as soon as there is any mention of their rights (including also those of any socially repressed group, invalids or the mentally ill), then the majority of “famous people” in Latvia become blind, deaf and collectively amnesic.

It turns out though that the “shield of intolerance” has another side, and here it's surprising to note that with his film, Kaspars Goba has dug much deeper into the problems within “tolerant society”. The film shows that there is no single-mindedness in regards to the movement's goals among the Pride members themselves, and that several of those associated with Pride

activities on both fronts (from the tragically-comic marchers in their allotted protest territory, to the politicians and religious dissenters aggressively fighting against the “bum bangers”) are simply using the situation to benefit their personal careers. And even crazier – the fight for human rights, Pride and Anti-pride, is business!

From this standpoint Kaspars Goba’s film surpasses the narrow enclosure of a “propaganda film” sympathetic to gays & co., to become a rather unpleasant accusatory document on Latvian society’s generally existent belligerence, jealousy and intolerant ambitiousness. There is intolerance from human rights supporters as well – against those who “think differently”.

The film is about all of us, regardless of whom we spend our nights with, what we eat, drink, or which movies, music or books we use to polish our spirituality. It’s no wonder then, that so many are simply running away from Latvia – beckoned by the illusion of a peaceful life. Escaping to Europe, cherishing the illusion that at least fear won’t be the first thought before falling asleep. Escaping – if not physically, then at least emotionally.

What the film *homo@lv* (literally – *Latvian being* – therefore someone without any sense) lambastes in the end can be clearly defined in a few words – lack of trust. Latvia is governed by a deep crisis of humanity that neither the secular nor the spiritual leadership is “battling”. And specifically this insight into the emotional undercurrent of Kaspars Goba’s film is the most painful. I hope that the director’s worry will be felt by audiences elsewhere in Europe. Using the title of a popular German novel as a reminder, one can only hope that “no man is an island”.

KASPARS GOBA



Born in 1975, Cesis, Latvia.

Kaspars Goba is a documentary film director and professional photographer. His career in filmmaking began in 1996 and he has worked as a director, scriptwriter and cinematographer on more than 15 documentaries focusing on social and environmental issues.

HOMO@LV is his feature debut and the first documentary film from Latvia to be screened in the Panorama section of the Berlin International Film Festival.

His previous internationally acclaimed documentary *Seda. People of the Marsh (Russlands vergessene Kolonie)* (2004) was co-produced with filmtank hamburg GmbH for ARTE/NDR and received a prize at Latvian National Film Festival “Lielais Kristaps” for *Best Documentary of the Century*. In 2005 Kaspars established his own production company ELM MEDIA with the aim of drawing society’s attention to social and environmental issues through filmed documentaries and documentary photography projects.

Kaspars has a diverse educational background, which allows him to work on films covering topics from environmental protection to social problems. While working as a professional photographer and freelance journalist for the magazine *Rīgas Laiks* (Riga Time), he graduated from the University of Latvia as a biologist. Kaspars is currently studying for a Master’s degree in communications at the Riga Stradins University. He has taken courses in journalism, history and philosophy at the University of Latvia, Eastern European Jewish history at the Riga Branch

of the Open University of Israel and strategic management at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga. He has participated in international co-production courses ExOriente and ESoDoc 2006, and the Berlinale Talent Campus 2007, where he developed the script for his latest documentary HOMO@LV.

Kaspars also works in the field of documentary photography. During the last decade he has taken photos during journalistic trips to Iceland, northern Russia, Siberia, the Far East, Roma 'tabors' in Latvia and Lithuania, and Kurdish areas in Turkey. At the end of 2006 he published a photo album *Icelanders. Between Glaciers and Lava*, which received a prize from the Latvian Book Publishers' Association as *The Best Art Album of 2006*.

Along with his films, Kaspars often creates documentary photo series on the same topic, which have become objects of contemporary art. With his photo series on *Seda. People of the Marsh* and *HOMO@LV* made during the shooting of the films, he has taken part in contemporary art exhibitions in more than 20 countries.

Filmography

Documentaries: HOMO@LV 2010 / City of Sweets (Saldumu pilsēta) 2010 / Exploring Nature: Five Stories (Pieci stāsti par dabu) 2009 / Engure. Lake Given by the Sea (Engure. Jūras dāvātais ezers) 2005 / Seda. People of the Marsh (Seda. Purva ļaudis) 2004 / The Green City (Zaļā pilsēta) 2003

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MEDIA Plus

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Screening Dates at Berlinale

16.02.2011 17:00 CineStar 7 PREMIERE SCREENING
17.02.2011 22:30 CineStar 7