



## Romania Cristina Corciovescu

Statistically and quantitatively speaking, Romanian cinema has seen few significant changes in the last year. There are still only 10–12 domestic releases each year and about as many films again in various stages of production. Some of the completed films are so far unreleased, with producers waiting for the right moment to premiere them (i.e. a major festival competition). Only after that will they be screened for the Romanian public.

As in previous years, domestic audiences play hard to get when it comes to local films, as can be seen in the box-office statistics, which in 2008 only featured US releases in the top ten. Even the Romanian media pretty much ignores cinema (there hasn't been one single film magazine for ten years). Newspapers, magazines and television stations only ever talk about Romanian films in special circumstances and a film review can only be found in a few cultural publications, whose circulation is, at best, limited.

Looking forward, there may be a decline in the production of Romanian films. The global financial crisis has obviously played a part, but there have also been local problems. The National Centre for Cinematography recently suspended the annual project competitions (there were two each year, one in spring and the other in autumn). The reason given was to improve the competition regulations, a move prompted by younger filmmakers who were unhappy with its structure. On the other hand, there are more and more film festivals – over 15 – that, at least in theory, should draw people back into cinemas and, at the same time, revive their appetite for films with less commercial appeal than the Hollywood product that dominates the box office.

The achievements of the past few years, peaking in 2007 with Cristian Mungiu's 4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days winning the Palme d'Or, have set a high – if not completely unattainable – benchmark for young filmmakers to aspire to. But what course will the careers of the recent 'new wave' directors take? And what about the filmmakers following in their footsteps? And will there be a return to more genre-based films, albeit set in contemporary situations? The last year has hopefully brought forth some answers.



Corneliu Porumboiu's **Police, Adjective**

Without a doubt, the cinematic event of the year was the new film by Corneliu Porumboiu, **Police, Adjective** (Politist, adj.), which picked up the Un Certain Regard Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. Further proof, if any were needed, of the exceptional talent of this filmmaker, who pushes his minimalist aesthetic to the extreme, the film centres on the conflict between conscience and law, even though, from a traditional cinematic perspective, the film is almost devoid of conflict. A cop follows three students who smoke weed behind their college during breaks, but refuses to organise a sting operation that would end the case because

he fears that it would ruin their lives. Among the many highlights the film has to offer, its humour draws out the subtleties of language, while there are impressive performances by the leads, whose most insignificant looks and gestures are laden with meaning.



**The Legend of the Official Visit** from *Tales from the Golden Age*

Cristian Mungiu's return as writer, co-director and co-producer of **Tales from the Golden Age** (*Amintiri din epoca de aur*) was highly anticipated. Five directors are credited with working on the film, although it was decided not to identify which director was responsible for individual segments. Each story humorously recalls typical situations that took place in 1980s Romania: in *The Legend of the Official Visit*, there are fervent preparations in a village that the General Secretary of the Communist Party's car is going to pass through; in *The Legend of the Party Photographers*, there is tension in the office of a major newspaper, where pictures of the aforementioned General Secretary are



**The Legend of the Zealous Activist** from *Tales from the Golden Age*

to be artificially modified in order to make him look taller and more distinguished; both *The Tale of the Greedy Policeman* and *The Legend of the Chicken Driver* deal with the shortage of food (including ordinary items such as eggs or pork meat), which occasionally results in unfortunate consequences; in *The Legend of the Zealous Activist*, a young man goes to ridiculous lengths to bring old people into a school in order to help eradicate illiteracy; and in *The Legend of the Air Sellers*, an ingenious, though not quite legal, plan is hatched in order to generate money. For Mungiu, this return to short features was merely an interlude. For the other co-directors, the omnibus was another step forward (Hanno Hofer, Constantin Popescu) or the first step (Ioana Uricaru, Razvan Marculescu) towards a promising career.



Radu Jude's **The Happiest Girl in the World**

Radu Jude directed **The Happiest Girl in the World** (*Cea mai fericita fata din lume*), which received the CICAIE Award at Berlin and FIPRESCI prize at Sofia. It is the story of a provincial high-school student who wins a car that her parents want to sell in order to start a business. Jude builds his film out of an ordinary family dispute, interspersed with scenes of the girl talking to camera, during which she repeats the same line and employs the same gestures. Andrei Gruszniczki's **The Other Irene** (*Cealalta Irina*) was the FIPRESCI award winner at Pecs, while Bobby Paunescu directed **Francesca**. Both films were more conventional dramas: one of a man who cannot believe that his wife has lied and



Monica Barladeanu in Bobby Paunescu's *Francesca*

cheated on him, while the other features a woman who hopes that her migration to a new country might offer a new perspective on life.

Veteran filmmakers also returned to the screen. As well as Sergiu Nicolaescu's docu-drama, **Carol I**, there was Stere Gulea with **Weekend with My Mother** (Week-end cu mama), about a mother who finds her daughter after years of searching, only to lose her forever, and Mircea Daneliuc with



Adela Popescu in Stere Gulea's *Weekend with My Mother*

**Marilena**, the adaptation of a novel that deals with how one woman, played by Cecilia Bârbora, is perceived by three men. They do not see her for what she is. Instead, the film portrays her as some kind of victim because all the men see is an object to have sex with.

The last year also saw the involvement of HBO Romania in film production, which stimulated the documentary scene and supported films such as Tudor Giurgiu's **Weddings, Music and Videotapes** (Muzici, nunti si casete video), about the wedding planning industry, Alexandru Solomon's **Apocalypse on Wheels** (Apocalipsa dupa soferi), about traffic problems in Bucharest, and Claudiu Mitcu's **Australia**, about the Homeless World Cup.

### The year's best films

**Police, Adjective** (Corneliu Porumboiu)

**Tales from the Golden Age** (Cristian Mungiu, Ioana Uricaru, Hanno Hofer, Constantin Popescu, Razvan Marculescu)

**The Other Irene** (Andrei Gruszniczki)

**Francesca** (Bobby Paunescu)

**The Happiest Girl in the World** (Radu Jude)

### Directory

All Tel/Fax numbers begin (+4)

**Centrul National al Cinematografiei**, Str. Dem I Dobrescu nr. 4-6, sector 1, 010026, Bucuresti.  
Tel: 021 310 43 01. Fax: 021 310 43 00. www.cncinema.ro.

**Uniunea Cineastilor**, Str. Mendeleev nr. 28-30, sector 1, Bucuresti. Tel: 021 316 80 83. Fax: 021 311 12 46. www.ucin.ro.

**Arhiva Nationala de Filme**, Soseaua Sabarului nr. 20, com Jilava. Tel/Fax: 021 450 12 67. anf@xnet.ro.

---

**CRISTINA CORCIOVESCU** is a film critic and historian, and the author of several specialised dictionaries.

---