



DOI: 10.1515/RJES-2020-0013

**AT THE HEART OF “THE GALACTIC IMAGINARIUM” SFF FILM FESTIVAL,
2020, DUMBRĂVIȚA (CONFERENCE REVIEW)**

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In 2019, at the initiative of Darius Hupov, SciFi prose writer, Lead Editor of *The Galactic Imaginarium (Galaxia Imaginarului)* SFF Audio Magazine, editor of *Galaxy 42* Online SFF Magazine and *Planu'9* online pop culture SFF Magazine, the seeds of the first Science Fiction and Fantasy Film Festival in Romania were sown. The British actor Miltos Yerolemu was invited to attend as the Guest of Honour and the preparations were underway. The main challenge the organizing team faced at the end of 2019 was the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken worldwide to prevent the spread of the virus. With film submissions rolling and subtitling activities coordinated by Senior Lecturer Eliza Filimon in progress, the decision to turn “The Galactic Imaginarium” SFF Film Festival into an event with live, as well as online sessions was the best option. “TGIFF 2020” took place between September 23 and 27, as a unitary concept which included eight different programme sections, of which seven took place online, in view of providing an amazing experience to SFF fans everywhere.

In the preliminary selection stage, over 250 short films were evaluated by selected members of the organizing team and the best 44 were selected to compete in four categories: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Animation, and “Director of the Future”. One film in each category was rewarded with one of the TGIFF trophies and the audience were allowed to vote their favourite film in each category. The jury of TGIFF boasted professional members of the audio-visual industry in Romania: President of the Jury, Irina Margareta Nistor, creator and Ambassador of Cine-Festivals, producer of radio & TV Shows, film critic; Andrei Borosovici, director of the regional TVR studio in Timișoara; Lucian Ionică, author and documentary film producer; Marian Rădulescu, author and film critic; Adrian Chifu, screenwriter, film director, composer.

Volunteer students of different faculties of the University of West in Timișoara were involved actively in the organization and smooth running of the festival in safe drive-in and online modes. Four drive-in cinema screenings of 44 short films took place on the evenings of September 23, 24, 25 and 26 in the parking lot of the Multipurpose Hall of Dumbrăvița (Timiș County), each opened by informed comments on films, given by the President of the Jury Mrs. Irina Margareta Nistor.

On September 26 and 27, a variety of events took place in several virtual locations:

1. two conference areas (Zoom 1 and Zoom 2) where the films selected in the Official selection groups were presented, followed by Q&A sessions with members of the production teams, where participants engaged in live conversations about the film-making process;
2. the Discord server was the perfect spot to satisfy the socialization needs of the participants;
3. the Facebook page of the festival, supervised by the students of the West University of Timișoara, facilitated an ongoing Facebook Watch party;
4. a YouTube channel of the festival hosted videomaterials provided by participants in the programme;

5. the boardgamearena.com website organized sessions of online board games;
6. the twitch.tv channel of the festival held sessions of real-time video gaming.

Most of the “TGIF 2020” workshops on Zoom 1 and Zoom 2 conference rooms had an educational component, as participants were trained in making films with a smartphone or instructed on the steps needed in view of meeting their idols at film conventions. The following TGIF special guests moderated the sessions and shared their experience in organizing or attending similar SFF events worldwide: PhD Andrijana Rabrenović, who is one of the founders and organizers of Regional Festival of Fantasy Literature REFESTICON – the first and the only Fantasy Festival in Montenegro; MSc Dragić Rabrenović, who is a journalist and writer, one of founders and organizers of Regional Festival of Fantasy Literature REFESTICON; Jovan Ristic – a professional journalist, publicist, writer and translator, director and co-founder of the Serbian Fiction Film Festival (FSFF) – the first genre film festival in Serbia; Miroslav Lakobrija, who is a Makeup FX artist, Co-founder and director of Festival of Serbian Fantastic Film/Festival Srpskog Filma Fantastike, and founder of The Association “Young cuts”; Marcin “Alqua” Klak – Fan Special Guest, con-runner from Poland, who chairs the local SFF club in Kraków.

The highlights of the Zoom 2 thread were the “Water-dancing” workshop run by the Guest of Honour Miltos Yerolemou and the live session “Sword Choreography in Film and Theater”, which featured a duel between the British actor Miltos Yerolemou and Rareș Dumitrescu, Romanian, European and World fencing champion, moderated by Florin Kevorkian, Romanian film director, actor and university lecturer.

The Q&A session with Miltos Yerolemou, moderated by Mrs. Irina Margareta Nistor, was the key session on Zoom 1, allowing participants to learn about the British system of education in performance arts, the possibilities of pursuing a professional career in the UK or abroad, as well as details about the actor’s career, rooted in his first love, film. Prompted to refer to turning points in his life which have led him to an acting career, Miltos recalled his childhood afternoon routines of going to the cinema with his father and watching martial arts films. His favourite class at school was the theater class and he chose to do a degree in international theater at a Polytechnic University. The actor described the established system of British drama schools, which gives graduates an easier and safer career path, assisted by well-known agents. His studies have given him a wider and invaluable experience, yet a limited access to big roles in film. Miltos’s 10-year career as theatre performer of Shakespearean plays and choreographer, his passion and natural aptitude for physical performance earned him the role of sword choreographer Syrio Forel in *Game of Thrones*. According to the actor, the pressure of getting the choreography as close to perfection as possible was present from filming the very first scene in the series, with a three and a half minute onscreen scene taking three days to film. Looking back, Miltos considers that actors become more confident in their ability to internalise their parts if they are given the liberty to improvise. The character Syrio Forel in *Game of Thrones* had to stand out as “different”, “a foreigner”, in appearance as well as in speech. The accent Miltos put up was based on his father’s accent, stretched further to sound more Eastern. British actors, in the actor’s opinion, do not stand a chance in the American film industry unless they can do a variety of English accents. The final audition test he took before he got the part of Syrio Forel involved his playing the part many times with the same choreography but different accents, such as British, American, Italian, Spanish, Greek. He feels grateful to have worked with talented dialogue coaches, who are as popular nowadays and necessary as acting coaches. The example Miltos gave referred to a part he had to play in *The Crown* series, where he had to speak in modern Athenian Greek. Despite his knowledge of Greek, acquired from his parents, he had to learn how to pronounce certain words and phrases differently, because his pronunciation betrayed the rural dialect he had learned, a mixture of Turkish and Greek spoken in his parents’ village before he war. The dialect coach taught him

to avoid sounding like a Greek “an old man”. In the wake of his fame, when given the chance to lend his voice to the Golem character in *The Lord of the Rings* console videogame, the British actor confirmed how hard it is for voiceover actors to ‘become’ an animated character, recalling that he lost his voice after three days of recording all the sounds and words required. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0X2q7QjRO0&t=1590s>)

The TGIFF Award Gala was broadcast live from the TV Studio of the West University of Timișoara on September 27, moderated by Mrs. Irina Nistor and Senior Lecturer Sorin Ciutacu, who facilitated discussions with Guest of Honour Miltos Yerolemou and invited members of the production teams of selected films.

The winners of TGIFF 2020 edition, selected by the jury and the audience were:

- “Sci-Fi” category - **Help 3** (France, regizor Janek Tarkowski);
- “Fantasy” category - **The Bagpipe Maker’s Baby** (Great Britain, dir. Chris Hopkin);
- “Animation” category – **2 Aliens - Safe Space** (Germany, dir. Thomas Zeug);
- “Director of the Future” category – **Isaac’s Dream** (Great Britain, dir. Anna Ostrovskaia);
- Special Award, Mrs. Irina Margareta Nistor’s Choice – **The Girl** (Canada, dir. Keegan Connor Tracy);
- Audience’s Choice Award “Sci-Fi” category - **Help 3** (France, dir. Janek Tarkowski);
- Audience’s Choice Award “Fantasy” category – **Le Passage** (France, dir. Clément Labarre, Pierre Labarre);
- Audience’s Choice Award “Animation” category – **2 Aliens- Safe Space** (Germany, dir. Thomas Zeug);
- Audience’s Choice Award “Director of the Future” category – **Unauthorized** (Canada, dir. Kara Tsenov).

“TGIFF 2020” was an extraordinary achievement for guests, participants, SFF enthusiasts and the organizing team. The volunteer students of the West University of Timișoara who joined the organizing team of the SFF film festival benefitted from a wonderful experience and comprehensive training in coordinating virtual sessions on various platforms and using specialized software for audio-visual translation activities. The initial scope of promoting international visual storytelling and creating a solid foundation for yearly genre festivals was widened by embracing technology to overcome the impossible and make room for future science fiction and fantasy developments to land in Dumbrăvița, Timiș County, every year.

References

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0X2q7QjRO0&t=1590s> [2020, October 30]
<https://festival.galactic.one/> [2020, September 30]

Note on the author

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