



## **MEDIA REPORT**

### **MAKING WAVES: NEW ROMANIAN CINEMA**

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# The New York Times

## Shake Up In Romania Changes a Film Festival in New York

### Festival Recast by Politics at Home



*Oana Radu, left, and Corina Suteu of the Romanian Film Initiative with Mihai Chirilov, the artistic director of Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema.*

By LARRY ROHTER  
Published: November 27, 2012

Ordinarily, a change of government in a Balkan capital would be little cause for concern at the Film Society of Lincoln Center. But when you sponsor a Romanian film festival, and your Romanian partner comes under attack by the new authorities in Bucharest, thus jeopardizing your joint undertaking, you may find yourself thrust into a political imbroglio.

The festival, Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema, will begin as scheduled on Thursday night at Lincoln Center, running through next Wednesday. But the film society has severed its connection to the Romanian Cultural Institute, the festival's original government-financed co-sponsor, in favor of collaboration with a new, private entity, called the Romanian Film Initiative, run by the former director of the institute's New York office.

In the last decade, the emergence of a Romanian new wave has been one of the most startling developments in world cinema, with one film after another winning prizes at Cannes and elsewhere. In New York a festival of Romanian movies was first held in 2006 in TriBeCa under the auspices of the cultural institute, and last year was invited to move to Lincoln Center.

But the arrival of a new administration in Bucharest “sent us back to square one,” said Corina Suteu, who resigned in September, along with her deputy, Oana Radu, as director of the New York office of the Romanian Cultural Institute. “The present authorities have gone back to a discourse on culture that is very archaic, and they do not consider new wave cinema as being ‘representative’ of Romania.”



At Lincoln Center, film programmers said there was no hesitation about continuing their partnership with Ms. Suteu and her associates and they opted not to explore the possibility of an officially sanctioned event.

“Under this leadership, the cultural institute did incredible things to make the new Romanian cinema visible in the United States, so there was never any question in our minds,” said Scott Foundas, associate program director at the film society. “Our feeling always was that we think very highly of these people as curators, have very similar taste in cinema and are very pleased to have them as part of the extended Lincoln Center family.”

The government of Prime Minister Victor Ponta, which came to power this spring, is a seemingly unlikely coalition between former Communists and a conservative party. In June it issued an emergency ordinance modifying the 2003 statute setting up the Romanian Cultural Institute, which had previously reported directly to President Traian Basescu, Mr. Ponta’s political rival.

“It’s an Ionesco-like government,” said Mihai Chirilov, the artistic director of the film festival, referring to the Romanian playwright who is considered a father of the theater of the absurd. “It’s a very unexpected combination that shows their only aim is power.”

As a presence on the New York cultural scene since shortly after the fall of Communism in 1989, the Romanian Cultural Institute has not limited itself to promoting its national cinema. The institute has also helped bring Romanian writers to the annual PEN World Voices literary festival, supported visual artists in their efforts to get their work shown locally, and collaborated on shows featuring Romanian music, both classical composers like the pianist Dinu Lipatti and pop groups like Timpuri Noi.

In place of that longstanding emphasis on making Romanian culture better known in the West, under the new emergency ordinance the institute's primary task is "to uphold the identity" of Romanians living abroad. The previous, outward-looking policy was condemned in the ordinance as "highly negative" because it "impairs on a permanent basis the feeling of belonging to the Romanian nation in the case of those temporarily living in other countries."

The Romanian director Andrei Ujica has made several critically praised films, including "Videogram of a Revolution" and "The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceausescu," shown at the New York festival in 2010, that examine the relationship between political power and media manipulation. In a telephone interview from Berlin, where he teaches cinema, he described the new government policy as an "abusive change" and "anticultural."

"It's a kind of attempt at a small cultural revolution, in a Maoist meaning, but in a new form, coupled with the new tabloid culture that has become so strong in East European countries," he said. "That is a new and dangerous mixture, with a very rigid nationalist focus."

On the Web site of Mr. Ponta, the government has denied any intention to seize control of the cultural apparatus or limit freedom of expression. "The decisions that have been adopted are meant only to build a more comprehensive democratic framework for the Romanian Cultural Institute's functioning and to redress the problems pertaining to its spending of public money," an official statement said.

With government financing ruled out, Ms. Suteu and her associates did what everyone does these days: they began a Kickstarter campaign that raised \$22,000 from some 300 people. In other gestures of support, leading Romanian artists, writers and film figures, both in the diaspora and back home, signed protest petitions and also contributed money, and the Trust for Mutual Understanding, which promotes cultural and other exchanges between the United States and the former Soviet bloc, supplied a \$50,000 grant.

The festival opens on Thursday with "Of Snails and Men," an absurdist comedy by Tudor Giurgiu, and will conclude with Cristian Mungiu's religious drama "Beyond the Hills," which won two awards at the Cannes film festival this spring.

In between, the bill includes several works by promising new directors and a retrospective of the films of Alexandru Tatos, who died in 1990 and is considered a major influence on the new wave.

Unusually, the program also includes two panel discussions, titled “Creative Freedom Through Cinema: Romania and Hungary,” that will be linked with screenings on Saturday and Sunday. Hungary, Romania’s neighbor, is included in the discussion because the nationalist government there has been criticized as curbing freedom of expression.

“Corina and Oana have been very quick on their feet to make this happen, which I’m not sure everyone could do,” Mr. Foundas said. “It was a very bold move on their part, and without skipping a beat, they have created an entity to protect the independence of this festival and to continue going forward in the way we want to see.”

# The New York Times



## Guiding Stars Who Had Never Acted on Film Before

By LARRY ROTHER  
December 5, 2012



The Romanian director Cristian Mungiu has never won an Academy Award, but he is nonetheless part of Oscar history. In 2008, his “4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days,” a drama about an illegal abortion that had won top honors at the Cannes Film Festival the previous spring, was considered a shoo-in for an Oscar nomination, but ended up being snubbed by Academy voters. That led to a change in the rules, taking some of the power to choose nominees away from voters and conferring it on a special committee

Now Mr. Mungiu, 44, is back and competing with a new film, “Beyond the Hills,” that has again scored big at Cannes, with awards for screenplay and the performances of its two lead actresses. Set in an Orthodox monastery, it examines the friendship of two women who grew up together in an orphanage but have taken strikingly different paths as adults. One has become a nun, finding inner peace, while the other has migrated to Germany and is so deeply troubled that when she returns to visit her friend she ends up being subjected to an exorcism. (It’s based very loosely on a 2005 case in which a Romanian novice died in an exorcism.)

“Beyond the Hills” was shown at the New York Film Festival this fall, when Mr. Mungiu was in town and sat down for an interview, and it will close the festival Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema at Lincoln Center on Wednesday. Here are edited excerpts from that October conversation:

**Q.** The real-life incident on which your film is based has been amply written about in the press and in two books by Tatiana Niculescu Bran. What compelled you to go back to this episode?

**A.** I knew about this story for a very long period, because this was in the press a lot, and I was preserving all the clips and I read the books. Eventually I googled to see what the reaction of people was seven years later, only to discover that people were still so concerned and preoccupied and polarized by this that, apart from the books, I couldn’t find any balanced position about what happened.

For me it was very important to see all the things this story can reveal. And this is why I decided to make a film out of it. Actually, the great difference between the books and what I did is the relationship between the girls, which never existed in reality, but which gave me a reason for everything that happened.

**Q.** For those two vital roles, you chose performers who had never acted in a film before, and they ended up sharing the best actress award at Cannes. How did you achieve that?

**A.** Well, this is the crucial decision you need to make on a film like this: who are you going to work with? We had the kind of liberty we’ve never had before to just experiment with them, in the rehearsals and at the shooting. We rehearsed a lot during casting, read a lot, and I acted a lot for them, so I am giving them directly the tone of voice, the energy, the rhythm, the body language that I want. Guidance, but not with words. I’m not telling them what to do, I show them how to do.

But it’s fair to say that by the end, I had adapted as much to them as they adapted to me. We did what was there in the script, but each time it wasn’t possible to get the dialogue exactly right, I was adapting what I wanted to do and editing the scene to what they could do. Because you can’t push onto the actors something that does not belong to them.

**Q.** For many foreigners, their main image of Romania, to the extent they have one at all, is of a strange and superstitious place, with Transylvania and vampires and all of that. Are you worried that “Beyond the Hills” could reinforce those stereotypes?

**A.** I hope the film will not be seen and interpreted like this. I think this is a local story speaking about things that are very general. What people are asked to do in the name of love for God, for example, this is the same in a lot of different religions. It’s the same mechanism, the way it works. Sin and the way evil works into the world, the way violence evolves into people.



One of the things that really interested me to investigate was how does violence find a place in this community? They are very mild people who start by sitting at the same table with this girl, and somehow a few days later they feel they are not fighting her, but demons inside her, and are entitled to make decisions about her life. How does this happen, practically? Where is this moment? I don't think this belongs to a society that is underdeveloped, I think this can be understood to speak about things in a more general way.

**Q.** Having seen three of your films, I have a sense that certain themes fascinate you, such as women in a situation of duress. Is that fair to say?

**A.** Yes, but in "Tales From the Golden Age," there were also episodes that involved men in difficult situations. So it's not exclusive. Actually, I am much more interested in the situation than the character. I don't start from characters. I need a situation that is very complex and layered and gives me the possibility to speak about a lot of things at the same time. I can't handle very simple things. I always need to have first of all a strong conflict between some people, and a world behind. At first this was the world of the end of Communism, and now it's this religious world.

**Q.** I also want to ask you about the Oscars. You know, don't you, that you're already famous in Oscar history?

**A.** (Laughs) Yes, in a very strange sense. But I don't think it's fair to expect too much from the Oscars for the kind of films I do. I hope that people will watch the film and have the patience to understand that there is a kind of cinema that is different but that is also cinema, and there's nothing wrong with that.

**Q.** Are you talking about the general audience or the Academy voters?

**A.** I'm talking about the Oscar committee and also the Oscar voters. What's important in cinema is to have options and allow spectators to say, "Let's see, I'm going to see this kind," to have this liberty, to be able to choose. But you can't have a film which is going to be appreciated the same everywhere — in Cannes, at the Oscars, in Romania. You just do the kind of cinema you are interested in, and then the film will have its fate, in different contexts with different people.

**Q.** Does winning prizes mean anything to you? Because your films have done very well at Cannes.

**A.** This has a very precise meaning. It helps the film to be seen, that is the benefit of awards. And the Romanian new wave, this exists just because of Cannes, honestly. We wouldn't represent anything, even in Romania for our spectators, unless there was this kind of appreciation.

Actually, in Romania people haven't seen my films a lot. But they appreciate the fact that I'm appreciated. This is it. I'm carrying the banner, like a football team and Nadia Comaneci, stuff like that.



# The New York Times

## Movie Listings for Nov. 30-Dec. 6

Published: November 29, 2012

**Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema** (Friday through Wednesday) The Film Society of Lincoln Center offers its seventh annual survey of films from Romania. The lineup includes recent work, like Tudor Giurgiu's comedy "Of Snails and Men" (Friday at 3:30 p.m.) and, as the series' closing night on Wednesday at 7 p.m., Cristian Mungiu's "Beyond the Hills," with the film's two stars, Cristina Flutur and Cosmina Stratan, in attendance. There's also a three-film survey of the influential Ceausescu-era filmmaker Alexandru Tatos, including his reputed masterpiece "Sequences" (Saturday at 6 p.m.) and a 40th anniversary screening of the folkloric "Stone Wedding" (Tuesday at 8:45 p.m.), a two-part film directed by Mircea Veroiu and Dan Pita. Walter Reade Theater, Lincoln Center, 165 West 65th Street, (212) 875-5601, [filmlinc.org](http://filmlinc.org); \$13. (Kehr)

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## Carrying the Torch for Romanian Cinema

### When Politicians Desist, Cinema Curators Go Rogue

By: Bruce Bennett  
November 28, 2012



Having endured Nazi occupation, Allied bombing and Communist dictatorships, violent revolutions and post-Soviet liberation, it's little wonder that Romania has produced some of the world's bleakest cinema. Recent milestones like Cristi Puiu's lacerating "The Death of Mr. Lazarescu" and Cristian Mungiu's "4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days" have unapologetically depicted life in realistically downbeat dramatic hues, winning over festival juries and audiences along the way.

In fact, Romania cinema has gradually become a central component of international film culture. This year, Mr. Mungiu's "Beyond the Hills" earned screenwriting and acting recognition from the Cannes Film Festival jury, and it's an early favorite for the foreign-film Academy Award.

"When a country is emerging from some period of great political or social tumult, there's often a sudden explosion of new voices in the arts," said Scott Foundas, the associate program director at the Film Society of Lincoln Center.

On Thursday, FSLC will open *Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema*, the annual weeklong survey that has helped define and establish the southeastern European country as a stronghold of socially incisive, independently minded personal cinema. And true to form, this year's survey has itself emerged from tumult.



The series's programmers, Mihai Chirilov and Corina Suteu, who were forced to mount the festival independently.

Until 2012, the festival's existence was due almost entirely to the efforts of the Romanian Cultural Institute—a state-sponsored cultural exchange agency with branches in 18 international cities—and its local director, Corina Suteu, and deputy director, Oana Radu. "The Romanian Cultural Institute has been the single most important agent for bringing attention to these films internationally," Mr. Foundas said. "In terms of traveling with these films and filmmakers, it has done an enormous amount of work."

But this summer, the new coalition government of Prime Minister Victor Ponta sought to redirect the RCI's nonpolitical promotional efforts down more partisan avenues. A June "emergency decree" halted the institute's focus on international appreciation and exchange. Support for independent work that was seen by some as offering an unflattering national image was withdrawn in favor of what Mr. Foundas described as work "promoting traditional folkloric culture to the Romanian diaspora and not to a broader international audience."

The prime minister's decree also made the Romanian institute and its activities accountable to the country's increasingly divisive senate in the midst of an election year, rather than to the country's president. "The mandate of the institute changed," said Ms. Suteu, who, along with Ms. Radu, resigned from her post as director of the institute's New York bureau in September. "A president has the obligation of neutrality. By moving it to the senate, you politicize it."

Said Mr. Mungiu, the nation's most decorated contemporary filmmaker, "This decision was not taken following any kind of analysis regarding the activity and results of the institute. It was taken out of the blue and it was followed by an abrupt cut of funding, even for projects in development."

One line item that vanished overnight was the institute's considerable financial obligation to the Making Waves festival. "They cut all the funds for the autumn," Ms. Suteu said.

Representatives for the Romanian Cultural Institute in Bucharest could not be reached for comment.

While some, including the Museum of Modern Art and Film Forum, lodged protests, Ms. Suteu went back to work. "I believed that someone has to do something positive in this kind of disastrous situation," she said. "So I started to fund-raise for the festival."

In partnership with Ms. Radu and Mihai Chirilov, a critic, film programmer and the longtime artistic director of the annual Romanian film survey, Ms. Suteu established the Romanian Film Initiative. The organization is designed to retain what she described as "the playful, experimental spirit" of the festival, outside of the politics and purse strings of her own country.

The RFI swiftly courted individual financial support and grants from the Trust for Mutual Understanding and others. Visual artist Adrian Ghenie contributed a canvas to the RFI's war chest in advance of his anticipated Pace Gallery show in the spring. A crowd-sourcing campaign netted \$22,341. "They really were able to put this together quite quickly and miraculously, when you consider that it all happened less than six months before the scheduled start of the festival," Mr. Foundas said.

The resulting, fully funded edition of Making Waves comprises 17 new fiction and nonfiction films, shorts, and a three-film revival of director Alexandru Tatos's seminal work, along with panel discussions and a high concentration of filmmaker attendance. The diversity of expression on hand resists critical and political naysayers who have dismissed Romanian film as minimalist, miserablist kitchen-sink cinema.

"I think someone in Variety said it was 'bathroom sink drama'," Mr. Chirilov deadpanned. "Whenever you have a trend, you always have people that will attack it."

Both he and Mr. Foundas pointed to the festival's opening-night film, "Of Snails and Men," a bittersweet comedy that set domestic box-office records at home in September, as an example of, in Mr. Foundas's words, "the breadth of what's getting made over there."

As to the future of the fledgling Romanian Film Initiative, Ms. Suteu said that whatever comes next will be handled in a spirit of freedom and conviction that isn't always readily available in public service. "When you are no longer a government official," she said, "you are not obliged to make compromises."

## **Celebrating the Romanian New Wave at Lincoln Center**

By Michael Nordine  
Wednesday, Nov 28 2012

What's now referred to as the Romanian New Wave announced itself loudest with Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, which in 2007 won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. The laurel wasn't exactly unprecedented—at least one Romanian film had received a major award at the festival each of the two years prior—but it nevertheless felt definitive. Deeply rooted in the nearly quarter-century (1965 to 1989) reign of Nicolae Ceausescu as its authoritarian dictator and characterized by minimalist staging and deadpan black humor, the central European nation's recent contributions to the world of film have been good or great with almost alarming frequency. "Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema," the Film Society of Lincoln Center's annual series co-sponsored by the Romanian Film Initiative, begins this Thursday with Tudor Giurgiu's *Of Snails and Men* and runs for exactly a week. In addition to a dozen or so other recent works, it also features a shorts program and a retrospective devoted to Alexandru Tatos.

Giurgiu's film is a good deal less somber than most Romanian exports to make it stateside. But its comic tone shouldn't be mistaken for a lack of seriousness: Set against the backdrop of Michael Jackson's first and only visit to Romania in the early 1990s, it concerns a group of factory workers at a shuttered car plant who scheme to take over the factory by donating sperm en masse. Entwined in its comic narrative is a genuinely felt sense of loss and fear; Giurgiu does take the dark humor so often embedded into his countrymen's films and, as Corneliu Porumboiu did with 2007's *12:08 East of Bucharest*, quietly moves it to the fore.

Radu Gabrea's *Three Days till Christmas* acts as a sort of companion piece to last year's stunning *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceausescu*. Gabrea presents an at times farcical take on the dead-and-deposed dictator that highlights the man's absurdity via a re-enactment of his last days interspersed with archival footage and talking-head interviews. It offers few rewards to anyone who has seen Ujica's film, but works well enough as a genre mash-up holding all parties responsible.

The biggest draw is still likely to be Mungiu's *Beyond the Hills*, which tells of a young nun and her wayward, overly dependent friend and closes the series next Wednesday night. (It isn't the only monastic offering on display; Anca Hirte's *Teodora Sinner*, a decidedly more modest and lo-fi take on the lives of nuns, screens Sunday and Wednesday.) Mungiu, whose follow-up this is to *4 Months*, is, along with Cristi Puiu, one of the Romanian New Wave's primary

standard-bearers; his latest won two more awards—for its screenplay and two lead actresses—at Cannes just this May. Long, deliberately paced, and set on a remote monastery, it's something like the archetypal Romanian film: so quietly tense on so many levels that its seemingly placid surface seems poised to shatter at a moment's notice. Waiting for that to happen (or not happen) proves far more exhilarating than exhausting.



## Romanian Cinema – Making Waves, Witches and Wild Animation

By: David D'Arcy  
December 3, 2012

New Romanian Cinema – Lincoln Center

*Making Waves*: New Romanian Cinema, the selection of Romanian movies now at Lincoln Center, is clear evidence that the source of so much vitality in film is still very much alive. The series, however, is an autonomous production, presented by Romanians who are not affiliated with the right-leaning communist/conservative government now ruling in Bucharest. All the more reason for your support.



*Making Waves* closes this week with *Beyond the Hills*, the latest by Christian Mungiu of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. It opens commercially in the spring. See it now if you can. It is a story of cults and group tyranny.

Voichita, a young well-meaning woman in a religious community, ruled by an imperious orthodox priest known as Daddy, brings a friend, Alina, with whom she grew up in an orphanage. We can only imagine how wonderful an experience her youth was. Alina (Cristina Flutur), who has been living abroad and, worse, seems to be in love with the young Voichita (Cosmina Stratan), has the stoniest of dispositions. When Alina has a violent seizure, she's put in a hospital, then is returned to the nunnery, where she is suspected of all sorts of sins. Alina's response is to be more devout than her fellow sisters – another sign interpreted by the panicking women as a sin. As resentment simmers, superstition takes over. Exorcism seems the only answer. Papa, the presiding priest, rules with an impunity that the former communist leaders might have envied. Mungiu's measured deliberate unfolding of the tale of a witch among us under gray skies

and in a stark chilly monastery that creaks with every suspected step of the devil, reminds us of the persistence of old ways. As Papa instructs the faithful close to him on the strategies of the devil, we see that ignorance tends to find ways to fill gaps in knowledge. Look for echoes of Joan of Arc and Hawthorne and the dark fatalism of Mungiu's *4 Months*.



Just as dark is *Crulic: The Path to Beyond*, a wildly inventive animated drama by Anca Damian that tells its version of one of the oldest stories in film, the saga of a wrongly accused and arrested man. This man eventually dies of a hunger strike in a Polish jail. The protagonist here is one Claudio Crulic, a Romanian of 33 who becomes a suspect when a local judge gets his wallet stolen in Krakow. Even though Crulic can prove that he was not in Poland at the time of the theft, local authorities won't listen, Nor will Romanian diplomats in Poland to whom he writes. This ominously titled account of resistance unto death – based on a true story and animated with hand drawings and photo-collage – has a dead-pan first-person voice-over that will have you laughing between gasps. Kafka was Czech, but Ionesco, the master of the absurd was Romanian. So was Saul Steinberg, a great teller of improbable tales. Perhaps Damian and Steinberg were drinking some of the same water that led to Damian's cartoons that range from a jailhouse scrawl to dreamy metaphysical wide-screen vistas. Make sure that you stay through the end credits to hear the protestations from officials who condoned Crulic's imprisonment and now insist that they did nothing wrong. The film was not originally intended to play theatrically in Romania, but attracted crowds, much to the chagrin of officials.

*Crulic* has a unique feel in its own twist on an animated journey through a familiar tale of injustice, but visitors to Film Forum will be struck by its affinities with *Consuming Spirits*, Chris Sullivan's hand-drawn Faulknerian epic of death and retribution (and all sorts of other misdeeds) in western Pennsylvania. Sullivan spent 15 years on his remarkable film – a lot longer than Crulic spent in jail. I hope *Consuming Spirits* gets an eventual release in Bucharest.



If you were wondering if there is such a thing as a happy ending in a Romanian film, sample *Of Snails and Men* by Tudor Giurgiu, a richly realistic farce about a factory that becomes a pawn in a crooked maneuver by greedy French businessmen and a corrupt plant manager. The gambit is that Romanians will harvest and gather snails for the French market. And why not? The horses that the French eat tend to come from Hungary, and the frogs on French menus are usually imported from Bangladesh. The carpetbaggers being French, they are also after the local women. Who said that Romanians were immune to stereotypes? Of course, the gambit goes wrong, and the corrupt boss who dreams of lining his pockets is exposed. But one man's failure is another man's teaching moment, as Barack Obama might say, and families with stars in their eyes stumble into the revelation that there's no place like home. Now that's funny, and we can all dream. The comedy's cast of well-known Romanian talent gives you a sense of how the country laughs at itself.

## Commentary: Romanian Cinema Is In Grave Danger -- And Here's Why You Should Care

By Oana Sanziana Marian  
November 28, 2012



The title of the Palme d'Or-winning 2007 Romanian film "4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days," from director Cristian Mungiu, refers to the length of a terminated pregnancy. But in recent months it has taken on the significance of a countdown.

Romanian films such as "The Death of Mr. Lazarescu" (Cristi Puiu, 2005), "Police, Adjective" (Corneliu Porumboiu, 2009) and, of course, "that abortion movie" represent some of the most vibrant and engaging international filmmaking in recent years — garnering ten major awards at Cannes, Berlin and other festivals and spawning a movement referred to as the Romanian New Wave. But now, on the eve of Film Society at Lincoln Center's "Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema" series, which starts Thursday, Nov. 29, that fresh flow is threatened by sudden changes in the Romanian government's policies. This is

disastrous for the filmmakers, first of all, but also for American cinephiles, who are in danger of much-diminished access to future Romanian films.

Consider Mungiu's most recent work, "Beyond the Hills," which will have its much-anticipated U.S. release in February. Since its premiere at Cannes, where it won awards for best screenplay and best actress (shared between the leads Cosmina Stratan and Cristina Flutur), and recent screenings at the New York Film Festival and AFI Fest, the buzz around the film has been growing. As Romania's official entry for the best foreign-language film Oscar this year, "Hills" is likely to find a wider audience. But pretty soon, absent that designation, films such as Mungiu's could fall off the radar completely.

In June, Prime Minister Victor Ponta passed an undemocratic "emergency ordinance," without a parliamentary vote, that restructured the Romanian Cultural Institute. This action was largely seen as the Prime Minister's move to replace all personnel appointed by his political enemy, President Traian Basescu, whom he also tried (and failed) to have impeached later in the summer, via another unconstitutional measure.

Mungiu and countless other artists, Romanian and otherwise, argue that the way in which the current Romanian government under Ponta has severely undermined the country's fragile cultural infrastructure is a real blow to Romania's image abroad. In one fell swoop, the Prime Minister's move has dismantled years' worth of steadily built relationships between the Romanian Cultural Institute, Romanian artists and other countries' institutions, threatening Romania's integrity as a civil society. Though the RCI takeover is just one of many alarming "emergency" measures, it is the one that most directly affects the future of Romanian films.

The question at the center of Romania's currently imploding politics is, in fact, the same question that exists at the heart of "Beyond the Hills": Who is responsible for this mess?

An interesting dynamic about the Romanian New Wave is that not everyone "back home" is happy about its popularity in the West. Some people claim that these films distort and tarnish Romania's image abroad with "shameful" representations of malignant hospitals, corrupt state officials, young women who have abortions and taciturn loners who buy shotguns and shoot them for seemingly no apparent reason. This disconnect rests in these viewers' inability to see art as art (not specifically a Romanian problem), which is then stoked by the zeal with which these films have been consumed in the West — the West, still, is not to be trusted, partly by conditioning and partly because, well, maybe the West is not to be trusted.

For example, there's the efficient commodification of "Romania's most popular export" into a movement with a catchy name. The directors themselves reject the imposed homogenization and implicit expiration date that comes with the term "Romanian New Wave Cinema." That said, if "Beyond the Hills" gets an Oscar



nomination, even if it doesn't win, its visibility might create new opportunities for investors to back future Romanian films. But if so, it will also add to the above list of "shameful" representations the callous doctors, the queer, mentally ill (or possibly Devil-possessed) orphan and the botched Christian Orthodox exorcism of Mungiu's film. Most damning of all for its detractors, "Beyond the Hills," adapted from a novel by the writer-journalist Tatiana Niculescu Bran, is based on real events that took place in northeastern Romania just seven years ago.

The protagonists of "Beyond the Hills," Alina and Voichita, grew up together in an orphanage in the poorest region of Romania. Separated when they "matured" out of the home at age 18, Alina sought work in Germany. Voichita found a home and relative solace in a local monastery, and the film begins with Alina's arrival there to collect her friend, who is not prepared to rekindle the relationship with the same level of intimacy that Alina expects. Or, for that matter, to leave the monastery and work on a cruise ship, as the two had planned.

The film implies but never insists on the homosexual nature of their previous relationship; one understands that what is unrequited here is simply human affection. In any event, this rejection, framed by the religious mores that Voichita has passively adopted, incrementally unhinges Alina's grip on reality, and she has what is effectively a psychotic break.

There are lots of "shameful" elements in "Beyond the Hills": sexuality itself; masturbation ("self-abuse," the mention of which triggers physical violence in Alina); the autism of Alina's brother (Romania doesn't officially recognize autism after the age of 18); paranoid schizophrenia (never discussed as a disease, but implied by the specific medications the doctor prescribes to Alina); and the challenge to the presumed benevolence and authority of the Orthodox church, to which more than 86% of the Romanian population claims to belong actively. The young women are, incidentally, in their early 20's, which means they also represent the many abandoned and neglected children that made headlines in the early 90's — this, too, has been considered a moment of "shame" for Romania, as if the country were an untrained, and thereby innocent, puppy, whose nose the world was forcing into a stain on the carpet. So to a certain segment of the Romanian populace, the restraining of the former RCI and the films it supported might seem justifiable

"The RCI never gave money to produce films; it just allocated state funds for promotion," Mungiu said in a recent interview. "But what people back home don't understand is that it takes such a long time to convince people that you're a good partner, to build trust, and that all of that can vanish in one second if you're not serious."

For example, the New York office of the RCI spent the last seven years building a network with other institutions to facilitate the promotion of Romanian artists and their work. In keeping up with the growing reputation of Romanian cinema, many of these efforts were made in support of films and filmmakers, including an

allocation of \$60,000 a year for the last three years for programming in New York, including visits by the filmmakers.

“But because of the political hatred that dominates Romanian society today, these things [trust, networks, relationships] didn’t matter for a second,” Mungiu has said.

As a direct result of the new policies in Romania, 2012 funding for RCI ceased in July of this year, endangering existent programming worldwide such as the Romanian Film Festival in New York, which is partnering for the first time this year with Lincoln Center. “Making Waves,” as the seventh edition of the festival is called, will in fact take place, closing with “Beyond the Hills.” However, the Lincoln Center’s partner is no longer the state-run RCINY. It’s now called the Romanian Film Initiative, and it was started by the former heads of the RCINY office, Corina Suteu and Oana Radu. To replace the funding recalled by the Romanian government, Suteu and Radu were forced to launch a Kickstarter campaign that successfully brought in more than \$22,000 from 263 donors.

While the old RCI seemed committed to bridging the gap between Romanian artists and their potential audiences, its new mission is to promote state-sponsored Romanian cultural products abroad (or what some might label “propaganda”). For an idea of what this might mean, consider the difference between the films of Neil Jordan and the mass-consumption-ready thrills of “Riverdance.”

In pointing to the discomfort and difficulty of watching the Romanian New Wave films, critics are not wrong, *per se*. The prevailing aesthetic of “Beyond the Hills,” like Mungiu’s previous film “432,” is life, starkly lit and captured by a lens that aims to withhold judgment, blame or any hint of gratuitous softness or relief, while also pinning the viewer to her seat with an accumulating tension so that she can’t look away. It’s hard to defend against accusations that the film sometimes nudges realism over the ledge of “unflinching” to something just short of sadistic, even as it waves the anti-sensationalist flag.

The new Romanian films *are* difficult to watch. As were the great films of the “Old Wave,” from directors such as Lucian Pintilie and Mircea Danieluc. So perhaps it’s understandable that many older Romanians, who’ve lived most of their lives under Communism, and who now face an austere and frightening retirement, might respond to the reallocation of state funding with a gesture that is as much Romanian as the thumb-to-forefingers is Italian: a simultaneous shrug and scowl of swift, bitter dismissal. “We’ve lived through miserable times,” they could be saying. “Why pay for more of the same?”

Meanwhile, many of the younger generation, brought up in a dilapidated educational system only to come of age in the midst of recession, unemployment and a devastating national drain of intelligence, talent and manpower (the theme of Mungiu’s first film, “The West”), find these films too bleak, too long, too silent — in other words, not entertaining enough. (It is maybe worth noting that when Vittorio De Sica’s “Bicycle Thieves” came out in 1948, the poor, beleaguered



Italians it represented hated the film and asked for their money back, while the rest of the world immediately recognized it as a masterpiece.)

Romanian filmmakers aren't concerned with simple entertainment, nor should they be in a culture so long deprived of real freedom. We need their "24 lies per second in the service of truth," as another "difficult" director, Michael Haneke, has said. Stripping artists of the infrastructure that supports them is a form of suppression, as damaging as dictating what kind of work they are allowed to make. And the loss of a functional cultural infrastructure for Romanian filmmakers is a loss for the people who will have a harder time getting access to their work. Cinema, the most collaborative, cumbersome and costly of the creative arts, is particularly vulnerable.

The hope is that the last few years of strong Romanian films have bolstered both the filmmakers and their audience enough to overcome Romania's truly shameful politics and to keep this creative valve open. Visibility is a filmmaker's practical currency, ensuring opportunities and funding for future films. But it isn't only that. Visibility, literally, is what makes the film a reality. In effect, a film that nobody sees doesn't exist.



## Of Snails and Men

### Despre oameni si melci (Romania)

By RONNIE SCHEIB  
December 4, 2012

**Loosely based on an actual 2002 event that transpired in Romania, Tudor Giurgiu's engaging film "Of Snails and Men" shifts the action back to 1992, when the country was still naively unsure of what would follow the fall of communism. Threatened with the closure of their small-town factory, workers decide to sell their sperm at \$50 a pop so they can buy the plant and keep their jobs. Resembling "The Full Monty" but more downbeat, too lite for the arthouse yet too melancholy for escapist uplift, tasty "Snails" may prove to be as challenged a traveler as its titular gastropod.**

The fat, corrupt manager (Dorel Visan) of the local car factory secretly strikes a deal to transfer ownership to a French businessman (Jean-Francois Stevenin) who will close the plant and sell the stock and fixtures. (Apparently, in the turmoil that followed the overthrow of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, many state factories were bought by Westerners for peanuts, and the deconstructed parts made fortunes for their new owners.) The manager lies to his employees, claiming the French will repurpose the factory as a snail-packing plant and hire back part of the workforce, thus hoping to create competition between workers for these nonexistent jobs.

When union organizer Gica (the excellent Andi Vasluianu) sees an ad offering money for sperm, it seems like the only answer to economic catastrophe. But things aren't that easy. After years of putting up with Gica's philandering, his wife (Andreea Bibiri) threatens to leave if he pursues his seminal entrepreneurship. And Romanian workers, who held an at least nominally exalted position in the communist hierarchy, possess little value in the capitalist marketplace, their seed judged inferior to that of strapping, blond, educated Danes.

While collective destiny propels the film's throughline, its dynamic energy comes from the interlocking stories. Gica's lunchtime rooftop trysts with the manager's curvaceous secretary, Manuela (Monica Barladeanu, in a deftly nuanced sexpot role), are merely food for a genuine friendship. Given that her loyalties are divided among her boss; her co-workers; her sometime-b.f. Gica; and the new love of her life, Olivier, the son and reluctant helpmate of the Frenchman buying the factory (Jean-Francois Stevenin's real-life son Robinson fills the role), Manuela must deftly navigate perilous ethical shoals.

Helmer Giurgiu easily balances individual and collective action, his visual style facilitating his characters' often comic juggling of private and social responsibilities.

## Of Snails and Men (Despre oameni si melci): Film Review

10:11 AM PST 11/29/2012 by Neil Young



### **The Bottom Line**

Intermittently droll comedy set in 1992 Romania looks unlikely to repeat its domestic success further afield.

**Andi Vasluianu, Monica Bîrlădeanu and Jean-François Stévenin star in a Romanian-French comedy from director Tudor Giurgiu.**

An old-fashioned culture-clash workplace comedy about sperm-donation, Romanian/French co-production *Of Snails and Men (Despre oameni si melci)* yields a reasonable haul of laughs but overall proves more flaccid than penetrating. Emulating director **Tudor Giurgiu's** previous outing *Love Sick* (2006), the picture clicked at Romanian box-offices following its Sept. 14 launch and the presence of father-and-son performers **Jean-François** and **Robinson Stévenin** in prominent supporting roles will boost prospects in French cinemas early next year. But while Gallic multiplex audiences may possibly respond to this daft take on post-Ceausescu workplace politics, elsewhere its best prospects lie as a small-screen attraction.

Having U.S.-premiered at Chicago's film festival in October, it was selected as the opener for the annual focus on Romanian cinema at New York's Lincoln Center (Nov. 29 and 30). A mostly larkish take on essentially downbeat issues, it does at least provide lively evidence that there's more to Romania than the often dour examples of the much-ballyhooed New Wave which peaked with **Cristian**

**Mungiu's** 2007 Cannes winner *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. Festivals seeking undemanding crowdpleasers may want to give it a look.

Mungiu's Palme laureate held the Romanian record for the biggest home-grown opening weekend admission numbers for half a decade until *Of Snails and Men* arrived, although **Iura Luncașu's** *Sweet Little Lies* eclipsed the latter's figure only a month later. Both films star local pin-up **Andi Vasluianu**, an appealingly rough-edged presence here as happy-go-lucky union-organizer Gica, who makes an eye-opening first appearance locked in an amorous *al fresco* clinch with stunning co-worker Manuela (**Monica Bîrlădeanu**). The pair have adjointed to the rooftop of the provincial auto-factory where they both work to indulge in a little lunchtime hanky-panky, evidently par for the course for the not-so-happily-married "family man" Gica.

As secretary to the firm's bumptious boss Vladimir (**Dorel Vișan**), Manuela discovers that the company is in such serious financial trouble -- it's 1992, and Romania's economy is on the skids -- that the only hope is an alliance with a French firm who want to switch the factory's emphasis from making cars to canning snails. The workers, many of whom face being laid off, aren't happy about the bosses' idea of progress, and the resourcefully virile Gica comes up with an unlikely solution involving a Bucharest sperm-bank which may be willing to pay handsomely for donations.

This bizarre development is the main motor of newcomer **Ionuț Teianu's** screenplay, and though many aspects of both its concept and execution strain credulity (and then some), it is loosely based on actual events, albeit ones which occurred in 2002 rather than a decade earlier. Setting events in 1992 does allow Giurgiu and Teianu to bookend the picture with footage of **Michael Jackson's** sole, brief visit to Romania, a welcome touch of madcap oddity in what's otherwise a by-the-numbers variant on what are by now very well-thumbed pages from the *Full Monty* playbook.

Some mildly amusing points are made about Romania's awkward "democratic transition process," though this blandly-shot, unimaginatively-scored affair manages only a so-so attempt to evoke period detail: **Gabriel Achim** made much more of the country's recent but bygone past with last year's similarly factory-set but audaciously original black comedy *Adalbert's Dream*.

"The snail itself doesn't have much flavor," as someone remarks here, and Giurgiu's film likewise is always more passably pleasant than particularly vivid or distinctive. The promising *escargot* angle is generally overlooked in favor of the broader sperm-bank shenanigans, and while the cast do their best with the material -- veteran Vișan steals most of his scenes as the conniving Vladimir - there's the general sense of a screenplay which can't quite find a way to juggle its various strands, themes and tones. It doesn't help that proceedings dribble away into an underwhelming climax, so that what began with a bang goes out with only a dry chuckle.

## Snails to open NYC's Romanian cinema season

28 November, 2012 | By Screen staff

**Tudor Giurgiu's comedy *Of Snails And Men* will open the season in New York, which will also feature *Beyond the Hills***

The seventh annual delve into Romanian cinema at New York's Lincoln Center has reinforced the international impact of Romanian cinema with audiences, with the season featuring recent productions as well as a three-film retrospective of cult filmmaker Alexandru Tatos and an anniversary screening of the Mircea Veroiu and Dan Pita's 1972 classic *Stone Wedding*.

Co-presented by the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the Romanian Film Initiative in collaboration with the Transylvania International Film Festival and the Romanian Film Center, the selection of films – including features, documentaries and short films – will be highlighted by Cristian Mungiu's new film *Beyond The Hills* (the official Romanian submission to the Oscars) as well as opening with Tudor Giurgiu's comedy *Of Snails And Men*, which had opened this year's Transylvania Film Festival.

Other films to be screened during the season (which runs Nov 29 to Dec 5) include Adrian Sitaru's *Best Intentions*; Radu Gabrea's *Three Days Till Christmas*; Anca Damian's animated documentary *Crulic: The Path To Beyond*, and Silvu Purcarete's *Somewhere In Palilula*.

The opening night screening of *Of Snails And Men* will be attended by director Tudor Giurgiu along with lead actors Monica Bîrlădeanu and Andi Vasluianu.



## **A festival of Romanian film wrestles with political instability back home, and emerges anew**

By: Anna Codrea-Radu  
November 28, 2012

**When *Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema* opens this Thursday at Lincoln Center, its organizers will be peering over the balustrade, more anxious than ever before to see a full house.**

It wasn't certain that this year's festival, now in its seventh incarnation, was going to run at all. Its former sole funding and organizational body—the Romanian Cultural Institute of New York—cut its funding months before the festival was scheduled to take place. The RCINY's former director, Corina Suteu, her deputy Oana Radu, and their long-time colleague Mihai Chirilov, are now independently running the festival. In collaboration with the Film Society of Lincoln Center, they're pulling together a showcase of the latest films from what's become a cinematic powerhouse.

"The best news we had in months was that the festival was going to take place," Radu said in the foyer of the Walter Reade Theater when we spoke recently.

She and Suteu had just clocked their last day at the RCINY the previous day. The women resigned after six years because they didn't agree with the decisions being made by the central RCI in Bucharest about the future of the New York outpost of the institute.

"I took the decision to resign along with Oana," Suteu said. "We had a discussion and decided to try and pursue what we believed in. We followed our values and took a huge risk rather than staying to try and save our jobs."

Back in Romania, the political situation is at the boiling point. A tussle between the country's president, Traian Băsescu, and prime minister Victor Ponta, came to involve the central RCI in Bucharest: it was restructured, its funding was slashed, and its president resigned.

"It's a wreck, the whole institute is a wreck," one source working at the RCI in Bucharest, who asked not to be named, told Capital. He described the new



president of the RCI in Bucharest, Andrei Marga, as "the butt of all jokes in intellectual circles."

For the New York RCI outpost, the effect of the shakeup was a huge policy shift. The RCINY's mission, which used to be to promote Romanian culture to American audiences, was redefined as seeking to serve the Romanian diaspora stateside.

"The discourse about the institute is like what I heard when I was in school," Suteu said, referring to her upbringing in Romania under communism

The underlining theme of this year's festival is reality.

"People will be shocked when they see the disclaimer on so many of the films that they're based on real stories," Mihai Chirilov, the festival's artistic director, said.

Over the past decade, Romanian directors have focused much of their work on raw, dark tragicomedies packed in a gritty, unpolished aesthetic; in film circles, a Romanian New Wave cinema has been declared.

Of these, the two most well known directors in the west are Christi Puiu and Cristain Mungiu.

Puiu's 2005 masterpiece *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* received worldwide critical acclaim, and marked the beginning of the Wave. Mungiu's Palme d'Or winner *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* came along in 2007, solidifying the movement's public profile.

This year's festival opens with *Of Snails and Men* (pictured below left), a ludicrous story about a group of workers who try to save their factory from financial ruin; director Giurgiu and actors Monica Birladeanu and Andi Vasuianu will be leading a Q&A after the screening. On Friday, producer Ada Solomon will be in attendance for the U.S. debut of director Adrian Sitaru's film *Best Intentions* (pictured at right). Reminiscent of *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* in its theme, the story follows a young man navigating the Romanian hospital system following his mother's stroke. Also on Friday, Giurgiu's *Another Christmas* will be screened along with a host of other shorts, an expanding subgenre of Romanian cinema.

The standout piece of this year's bill is another film by Mungiu, *Beyond the Hills* (pictured above left), which will close the festival on Wednesday Dec. 5. Winner of best screenplay and best actress at this year's Cannes Film Festival, the disturbing tale about two women in a secluded monastery (based on a real case of exorcism) explores religious hypocrisy, human fallibility, and morality. When the festival first began in 2006, Mungiu was barely known, even within Romania; this year *Beyond the Hills* is Romania's entry for the Oscars.

Romanian cinema, however, wasn't born with the release of *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*. In his programming, Chirilov wants to include classic Romanian films as well. This year, three films by the late Alexandru Tatos will be shown. Chirilov said that Tatos isn't a particularly well-known director in the states apart from a single title released here in the '80s, *Sequences* (pictured below right), later acquired by MoMA for its film archive; the film will be screened at the festival.

One high-profile and long-serving fan of Romanian cinema is Richard Peña, the program director of Film Society of Lincoln Center. Peña discovered Romanian cinema in the 1980s when he was still working at the Chicago Institute.

"There's something very vital about Romanian cinema," Peña said, during an interview in his office at Lincoln Center. "I still think about *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* every day."

When the RCINY cut much of the funding for this year's festival, Suteu quickly sought alternate means of supporting it.

"We asked the Film Society of Lincoln Center, 'Do you want to work with us if we raise the money?' They took the risk with us, which was proof of what we've achieved and also of their own vision."

The Film Society had already worked closely with Suteu last year when, after five years of being hosted at Tribeca Cinemas, Lincoln Center hosted the festival for the first time. For Peña, the partnership was natural.

"Our job is to help write film history," he said, "This is what we're supposed to do."

The festival is being funded by a small group of supporters. Among them is the Trust for Mutual Understanding, a nonprofit that gives grants to cultural exchange projects between the United States and eastern Europe, as well as the Blue Heron Foundation, a charity for orphaned Romanian children.

Further funding came from Romanian artists. Adrian Ghenie, the visual artist, sold one of his artworks to support the festival.

"There was an amazing reaction on the part of the artistic and cultural community," Suteu said. "It showed that they care and they think that what's happening in Romania isn't OK."

Radu, Suteu, and Chirilov together also launched a Kickstarter campaign, asking for \$20,000, a target they exceeded. The campaign not only bolstered the financial viability of the festival, it showed the organizers the extent of their audiences' support for the festival.

"It gave the audience a sense of ownership," Radu said.

Elena Saftoiu, a Romanian who's lived in America since 1992, went to last year's festival and saw *Medal of Honor*.

"I was very impressed," she said. "Romanian films are special. They're on the same level as the independent films I see here."

For Saftoiu, the festival is important not only because of the quality of the films, but because of the image it creates of Romania in America.

"Most of the news here is about the unusual, but not the representative," she said. "It's always about the orphanages and HIV. This changes the opinion of Romania held abroad."

Whether this week is a success will determine the fate of future festivals. But Suteu and Radu have more than just that reason to hope the festival continues.

"You can't politically dismiss the arts," Suteu said.

## DAILY | “Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema”

By: David Hudson

“Celebrating the Romanian New Wave at Lincoln Center” is the title of Michael Nordine’s overview of the week-long series opening today in New York, and cinephiles everywhere will want to do just that: celebrate it. At the same time, we need to sound the alarm. First things first, though, beginning with *BOMB Magazine*’s preview of its forthcoming Winter Issue, a video conversation between Liza Béar and Cristian Mungiu, whose *Beyond the Hills*, Romania’s official entry into the Foreign Language Oscar race (more), will be a highlight of the series:

Next, Michael Nordine: “What’s now referred to as the Romanian New Wave announced itself loudest with Cristian Mungiu’s *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, which in 2007 won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival. The laurel wasn’t exactly unprecedented—at least one Romanian film had received a major award at the festival each of the two years prior—but it nevertheless felt definitive. Deeply rooted in the nearly quarter-century (1965 to 1989) reign of Nicolae Ceausescu as its authoritarian dictator and characterized by minimalist staging and deadpan black humor, the central European nation’s recent contributions to the world of film have been good or great with almost alarming frequency. *Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema*, the Film Society of Lincoln Center’s annual series co-sponsored by the Romanian Film Initiative, begins [today] with Tudor Giurgiu’s *Of Snails and Men* and runs for exactly a week. In addition to a dozen or so other recent works, it also features a shorts program and a retrospective devoted to Alexandru Tatos.”

Now then. As Larry Rohter reports in the *New York Times*, the FSLC “has severed its connection to the Romanian Cultural Institute, the festival’s original government-financed co-sponsor, in favor of collaboration with a new, private entity, called the Romanian Film Initiative, run by the former director of the institute’s New York office.”

At *Indiewire*, Oana Sanziana Marian explains why: “In June, Prime Minister Victor Ponta passed an undemocratic ‘emergency ordinance,’ without a parliamentary vote, that restructured the Romanian Cultural Institute. This action was largely seen as the Prime Minister’s move to replace all personnel appointed by his political enemy, President Traian Basescu, whom he also tried (and failed) to have impeached later in the summer, via another unconstitutional measure. Mungiu and countless other artists, Romanian and otherwise, argue that the way in which the current Romanian government under Ponta has

severely undermined the country's fragile cultural infrastructure is a real blow to Romania's image abroad. In one fell swoop, the Prime Minister's move has dismantled years' worth of steadily built relationships between the Romanian Cultural Institute, Romanian artists and other countries' institutions, threatening Romania's integrity as a civil society. Though the RCI takeover is just one of many alarming 'emergency' measures, it is the one that most directly affects the future of Romanian films."

Rohter reports that Corina Suteu "resigned in September, along with her deputy, Oana Radu, as director of the New York office of the Romanian Cultural Institute." Suteu: "The present authorities have gone back to a discourse on culture that is very archaic, and they do not consider new wave cinema as being 'representative' of Romania." Andrei Ujica (*The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceausescu*): "It's a kind of attempt at a small cultural revolution, in a Maoist meaning, but in a new form, coupled with the new tabloid culture that has become so strong in East European countries. That is a new and dangerous mixture, with a very rigid nationalist focus."

Rohter: "Unusually, the program also includes two panel discussions, titled 'Creative Freedom Through Cinema: Romania and Hungary,' that will be linked with screenings on Saturday and Sunday. Hungary, Romania's neighbor, is included in the discussion because the nationalist government there has been criticized as curbing freedom of expression."

**Updates, 12/2:** "Expertly acted without any overscaled moments puncturing the literally pent-up tension, [Radu Jude's] *Everybody in Our Family* queasily treads the border of being unrewardingly unpleasant," writes Vadim Rizov at *GreenCine Daily*. "Radu Gabrea's *Three Days Till Christmas* reconsiders the 1989 last days of Romania's longtime leader Nicolae Ceausescu (Constantin Cojocaru) and inseparable wife Elena (Victoria Cocias). Ceausescu's long dictatorship—beginning with idealistic, anti-totalitarian rhetoric, ending in massive national impoverishment, infant malnutrition and the secret police excesses of the Securitate—was terminated in the three days leading up to Christmas 1989.... Composed solely of muddy, often informationally unclear TV footage from the period, it's must-see viewing for those interested in the period."

Adrian Sitaru's *Best Intentions* "may be modestly small-scale, but is quite a fascinating character study," writes Christopher Bourne at *Twitch*. Also, *Of Snails and Men* has "crowd-pleasing ambitions, offering gentle humor and colorful characters. Unfortunately, the political and social commentary lacks bite due to its general blandness and tendency to traffic in broadly stereotypical characters."

And for the FSLC, Anna Husted interviews Tudor Giurgiu, while Eugene Hernandez talks with Corina Șuteu, Oana Radu and fellow programmer Mihai Chirilov.



## "Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema" Brings Some of the Best of Contemporary and Classic Romanian Films to NYC

By: Christopher Bourne



"Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema," screening from November 29 through December 5, continues the Film Society of Lincoln Center's annual survey of contemporary Romanian cinema. Films from this country have retained interest among followers of world cinema since the 1990's Romanian New Wave, which introduced audiences to such directors as Cristi Puiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, and Cristian Mungiu, whose latest film **Beyond the Hills** (pictured above) closes the festival.

As usual, the festival features not only new and recent films, but also retrospectives: this year, the films of influential 70s and 80s filmmaker Alexandru Tatos will be featured with a mini-retro of three of his films: **Red Apples** (1976), **Anastasia Gently Passes** (1979), and **Sequences** (1982). This year, the Film Society has admirably made this series more accessible to the general public by offering free screenings and panel discussions. Below are reviews of four recent films screening in the series.

**OF SNAILS AND MEN** (Tudor Giurgiu)

Giurgiu's second feature takes place in early 90's Romania, during the rapid privatization and Westernization that took place in the immediate post-Communist period following the fall of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. Reportedly based on a true story, the film centers on an auto factory that's going out of business and whose owner plans to sell the factory to a French company who will convert it to an escargot canning plant. The factory's union leader (Andi Vasluianu) comes up with a wild plan to raise money for the workers to buy the factory and save their jobs: having himself and all his fellow workers travel to Bucharest to sell their sperm.

Not for nothing has this film been frequently compared to **The Full Monty**; **Of Snails and Men** has equal crowd-pleasing ambitions, offering gentle humor and colorful characters. Unfortunately, the political and social commentary lacks bite due to its general blandness and tendency to traffic in broadly stereotypical characters: the venal factory boss, the working class hero, the whorish secretary with a heart of gold. The story is set against the backdrop of Michael Jackson's 1992 visit to Romania for a concert, but there's little attempt to connect that to what happens here. **Of Snails and Men** is a competently made film that goes down easy, but has little lasting resonance.

(Nov. 29, 7pm; Nov. 30, 3:30pm)

#### **BEST INTENTIONS** (Adrian Sitaru)

Sitaru's second feature, with its glimpse into Romania's health care system, immediately brings to mind a classic of the Romanian New Wave: Cristi Puiu's 2005 film **The Death of Mr. Lazarescu**. While not as accomplished or revelatory as that earlier film, **Best Intentions** has some interesting formal tricks up its sleeve that it uses to add some fascinating dimensions to its story and characters. In its beautifully choreographed long-take opening sequence, we are introduced to the main character Alex (Bogdan Dumitrache) arguing on the phone with a work colleague, arguing in person with his girlfriend Delia (Aline Grigore) because she has thrown away an old beloved piece of his underwear, and most pertinently for the plot, gets some very bad news by telephone. The bad news is that Alex's mother (Natasha Raab) has suffered a stroke and is in the hospital. Alex makes the long trip from Bucharest to his hometown to be by her bedside. Along the way, he gets lots of advice from both family members and strangers about how his mother can get the best care.

Alex emerges as a man who has never quite grown up, and is ill-equipped to deal with the possibility of the death of a parent. He deals with this by becoming an extreme control freak, suspicious of everyone around him, and alienating all who try to help him. Sitaru frames much of the film from the POV of many different characters, frequently having them deliver their lines directly to the camera. Interestingly, the only major character's whose perspective we are not privy to is Alex; we are made to be observers of his behavior. **Best Intentions** may be modestly small-scale, but is quite a fascinating character study.

(Nov. 30, 6:15pm)



### **THREE DAYS TILL CHRISTMAS** (Radu Gabrea)

Gabrea's hybrid documentary/fiction film explores the final days in the lives of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu (December 22-25, 1989), as they attempted to flee the revolution that deposed them and was the occasion for their execution on Christmas Day. Gabrea mixes archival footage (street demonstrations, TV broadcasts), reenactments, and interviews with people involved, to viscerally convey the violent chaos of the time. Gabrea eschews footage of the real Ceausescus in favor of employing actors (Constantin Cojocaru and Victoria Cocias) to portray the couple, giving us a speculative view from their perspective, as they receive violent comeuppance for the crimes they have committed against their people. While Gabrea never quite convinces us that this mash-up approach illuminates the story any more than a traditional documentary or dramatic method would, this is still a worthwhile experiment.

(Dec. 2, 7pm; Dec. 3, 4pm)

### **EVERYBODY IN OUR FAMILY** (Radu Jude)

Jude's third feature brilliantly expands on the promise of his remarkable 2009 film **The Happiest Girl in the World**, with this disturbingly dark comedy. (His previous short feature, 2010's **A Film For Friends**, screens at this year's festival on Dec. 1, 9pm.) Marius (Serban Pavlu), a divorced dentist, wants to use his restricted child-visitation time to take his daughter Sofia (Sofia Nicolaescu, in a wonderfully adorable performance) to the seaside during his vacations. He encounters numerous obstacles along the way, getting into a vicious argument with his father while trying to borrow a car for the trip, and finally coming up against the resistance of his ex-wife Otilia (Mihaela Sirbu) and her new husband Aurel (Spahiu), who claim Sofia is too sick to take out. Marius, while being far from a conventional hero, initially has our sympathy for his plight. But this becomes much more complicated as the frustrated Marius gives in to his rage at the situation and, while spewing viciously profane invective at his perceived enemies, goes to extreme ends to try to get what he wants.

Radu Jude nicely conveys the increasingly violent claustrophobia of his scenario by structuring the film in a way that approximates real time and enveloping us in the extreme kitchen-sink emotion on display. Jude proves himself to be a talent worthy of mention alongside the other celebrated stalwarts of the Romanian New Wave.

(Nov. 30, 8:30pm; Dec. 5, 2pm)

For more information on these and other films in the series, and to purchase tickets, visit the Film Society of Lincoln Center's website.

# BOMBLOG

## Winter Issue Preview: Cristian Mungiu

By Liza Béar  
November 28, 2012

**Watch a video conversation between filmmaker Cristian Mungiu and Liza Béar, an excerpt of the interview from BOMB's forthcoming Winter Issue. Mungiu's *Beyond the Hills* screens this week at Lincoln Center as part of the Romanian Film Festival.**

Cristian Mungiu's latest film *Beyond the Hills* screened at the 50th New York Film Festival following its premiere this year at Cannes, where it won Best Screenplay and the Best Actress award shared by its two leads. The story is based on a tragic incident that occurred at a monastery in Tanacu, Romania, in 2005, and explores the relationship between two young women who had grown up together but whose lives took different paths. Mungiu's previous film, the riveting and unsettling *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, won the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

The full interview will be published in BOMB's Winter 2012 issue, on newsstands December 15.

*Beyond the Hills* will screen at the Walter Reade Theater as part of Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema, an annual series organized by the Romanian Film Initiative, running from November 29 to December 5. The series schedule and lineup can be found at the Film Society of Lincoln Center's website.

**Interview:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Olyyxu7Kuzg>

## To Romania With Love

By Vadim Rizov



The major titles of the recent "Romanian New Cinema"—*The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, *Police, Adjective*, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, the brief exchanges in the largely dialogue-less three hours of *Aurora*—have accustomed viewers to conversational interactions frequently taking the sudden form of often un-incited rudeness. The opening of Radu Jude's *Everybody in Our Family* seemingly represents similar terrain: sprawled in a half-unmade bed, a man stifles his alarm. Finally sitting up and checking his phone, he mutters "Fuck you" to a voice mail. The question of who the "fucking cunt" being cursed is, at this stage, less notable than the man's hostility, already at full strength moments after waking.



Because something like a whole reel is devoted to largely cute father-daughter interactions, the film's midway reversal gets alarmed attention very quickly. Seemingly reasonable Marius is revealed as far from an audience identification point. His violent behavior in the claustrophobic apartment results in an admittedly tense second half, placing a child in continuous jeopardy without using the threat as a cheap tool for emotional investment.

Greater detail is undesirable, since *Family* doesn't have American distribution yet. Expertly acted without any overscaled moments puncturing the literally pent-up tension, *Everybody in Our Family* queasily treads the border of being unrewardingly unpleasant. The scenario pushes Marius steadily towards total lunacy, producing a vein of extremely dark humor veering towards live-action cartoon. Compelling though it is, a larger purpose besides moment-to-moment palpitation-inducement is notably missing.



Radu Gabrea's *Three Days Till Christmas* reconsiders the 1989 last days of Romania's longtime leader Nicolae Ceausescu (Constantin Cojocaru) and inseparable wife Elena (Victoria Cocias). Ceausescu's long dictatorship—beginning with idealistic, anti-totalitarian rhetoric, ending in massive national impoverishment, infant malnutrition and the secret police excesses of the Securitate—was terminated in the three days leading up to Christmas 1989. *Christmas'* main strand follows Nicolae and Elena as they attempt to flee the country, then hole up with military protectors. As people rage outside and alleged "terrorists" fire on protesters, history's inevitability makes no impression on Nicolae, who bristles over being betrayed by traitors and foreigners.

Footage from state TV—communications from hastily assembled protester factions and their pre-broadcast squabbling about who speaks first—overlaps heavily with Andrei Ujica and Harun Farocki's 1992 compilation documentary *Videograms of the Revolution*. Composed solely of muddy, often informationally unclear TV footage from the period, it's must-see viewing for those interested in the period. *Christmas'* use of the same shots—while no less interesting a second time around—points to the fact that this particular sociopolitical moment has been extensively explored. These clips function as scene-setters for a film largely

split between last-days reenactment and talking heads interviews with the real participants. Conceptually rich, the film unfortunately offers no tension between the recreations and the interview "truths"; the former flatly illuminate the latter.



The *Variety* review reports Romanian viewers were peeved by climactic scenes of the terrified Ceausescus holding each other in bed, an eminently understandable response of distastes. The goal is the perpetually surprising news that historical monsters are people too, a point in no way germane to understanding Nicolae and Elena's traumatic hold on the Romanian political psyche. (The death count from their overthrow alone has been estimated between 1,104 and 1,247, the vast majority of them civilians.) Viewers who only learn about them here might conclude Nicolae and Elena—ranting in harsh, impeccably recreated fits—were shot to get them to just *shut up*.

## Making Waves: New Romanian Cinema



The Film Society of Lincoln Center and the Romanian Film Initiative are pleased to announce the continuation and reinvention of the yearly festival dedicated to Romanian cinema in New York City. *MAKING WAVES: New Romanian Cinema continues the celebrated Romanian film series in New York and will take place at the Film Society of Lincoln Center from November 29 to December 5, 2012. The festival will offer a panorama of the best in Romania's newest contemporary filmmaking, including features, documentaries and shorts, along with retrospectives of Romanian filmmakers, special programs, panels, and a series of conversations on the political and policy shifts currently affecting arts and culture in Central and Eastern Europe.*

This year, despite the festival's growing success and recognition, its very survival has been jeopardized by the recent political changes in Romania, which have impacted the primary mission, status and budget of the Romanian Cultural Institute. In response to this unexpected adversity, the team that founded the festival seven years ago under the auspices of the Romanian Cultural Institute, Corina Suteu and Oana Radu, have resigned their posts as Director and Deputy Director, respectively, of the Institute, to establish the Romanian Film Initiative (RFI) together with Mihai Chirilov, the long-time artistic director of the festival. The RFI, in cooperation with the Film Society of Lincoln Center, strives to keep the playful, experimental spirit of the yearly event alive, and to continue to help Romanian films make waves in New York City and beyond. The RFI currently enjoys the support of leading Romanian artists, including film directors Cristian Mungiu, Radu Muntean, Lucian Pintilie, Corneliu Porumboiu, Cristi Puiu, Andrei Ujica and visual artist Dan Perjovschi, and the continued partnership of Transilvania International Film Festival.

"The Film Society of Lincoln Center is proud to continue its support of the exciting new generation of films and filmmakers from Romania by supporting the



MAKING WAVES festival, especially in light of the recent governmental changes in Romania that have greatly endangered the future of state support for art and culture,” says Scott Foundas, Associate Program Director for the Film Society of Lincoln Center.

MAKING WAVES offers an overview of the best new Romanian filmmaking each year and introduces American audiences to landmark films rarely seen in the U.S. The festival has run in New York since 2006 when it was launched by the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York, in collaboration with other partners. Notably, in 2011, the festival moved to the Film Society of Lincoln Center.

“Romanian Cinema deserves to be exposed on a sustainable basis to American audiences and in the most professional way possible. It is with great passion and commitment that the Romanian Film Initiative strives to reach beyond a crisis situation by creating a new platform and allowing the immensely gifted film community in Romania to remain in the world spotlight,” says Corina Șuteu, initiator and president of the festival and co-founder of the Romanian Film Initiative.

MAKING WAVES will present a week-long overview of the best and most recent films from Romania’s contemporary cinema, including the Opening Night selection *OF SNAILS AND MEN* by Tudor Giurgiu and Cristian Mungiu’s Cannes-awarded *BEYOND THE HILLS* as the Closing Night film. The lineup also includes the New York Premieres of Radu Jude’s *EVERYBODY IN OUR FAMILY*, Adrian Sitaru’s *BEST INTENTIONS*, and the North American Premiere of Radu Gabrea’s *THREE DAYS TILL CHRISTMAS (LAST DAYS OF THE LIFE OF ELENA AND NICOLAE CEAUSESCU)*.

The festival will also host a long-due U.S. presentation of director Alexandru Tatos, one of the leading Romanian filmmakers of the 70’s and ’80s, whose film *SEQUENCES* gathered a small but dedicated following due to the film’s inclusion in the MoMA collection. New York audiences will have a chance to see three of his best films: *RED APPLES* (1976), *ANASTASIA GENTLY PASSES* (1979) and *SEQUENCES* (1982), on new prints produced with the support of the Romanian National Film Center. The star of *ANASTASIA GENTLY PASSES*, Anda Onesa, and Director of Photography, Florin Mihăilescu, long collaborator of Alexandru Tatos, will attend to introduce select screenings and to participate in post-screening Q&As.

MAKING WAVES: New Romanian Cinema is supported by the Trust for Mutual Understanding, as well as the Blue Heron Foundation and other generous donors and sponsors, including visual artist Adrian Ghenie, and producer-director Bobby Paunescu. To complement funding for the festival, the Romanian Film Initiative has also launched a Kickstarter campaign to garner the grass roots support directly from the festival’s dedicated audience, and the many fans of Romanian cinema world wide.

<http://www.romania-insider.com/romanian-film-fest-in-new-york-goes-ahead-tonight-without-the-cultural-institute/70359/>