



The
**GAM
BLER**

LOŠĖJAS

THE GAMBLER

Digital cinema, 109 min., fiction, 2013

Synopsis

Vincentas is the best employee at the emergency services station, whose passion is one – gambling in different games. Whenever he lands in some difficult situation, the medic is forced to grab onto something radical to return the money he is constantly losing. An idea strikes Vincentas to create an illegal game related to his profession. Initially the employees at emergency services are the only ones to be attracted to this macabre engagement. Soon enough, however, the idea kicks off and starts spreading like wildfire. The medic colleagues become betting agents, whereas Vincentas takes control of its bank. As financial matters keep on improving, a coworker Ieva starts objecting to the game. A passionate relationship has just unfolded between her and Vincentas. Soon enough he is going to face making a fateful choice – the game or love.

Director's statement

My generation grew up in the Soviet system, graduated from Soviet schools, and was immersed in double standard thinking. And then suddenly everything changed. Liberated from the communist state, we found ourselves in the capitalist world of unrestrained freedom. Imposed collective egalitarianism was replaced with market economy rules, in which you get as much as you manage to earn for yourself.

This is why I wanted to make a film about the moral dilemma that arises within the individual who was formed in the junction of different regimes. The main character of "The Gambler", Vincentas, is that new hybrid person. He belongs to the two conflicting systems.

His duality is best revealed in the critical situations which are experienced by the paramedic, who also happens to be an avid gambler. Balancing between death and life at work and trying to pay back his debts, he creates a game based on human life. Thus, the world-view of the post-Soviet conformist and the capitalist winner converge.

This is an explosive mix for any moral system.

Ignas Jonynas

Interview with Ignas Jonynas

The film "The Gambler" tells a story about a leading doctor who starts to gamble on the death of his patients. How did things become this way?

It is an old truth that play is fundamental to our nature and culture. During play the human being perceives himself, transmits knowledge, learns, and creates art. While playing he constitutes social dimension, symbolic systems, institutions. Kristupas Sabolius, a philosopher who worked together with me on this script, brought in ideas by Huizinga, Gadamer, and especially Roger Caillois, who claims that there are four types of play – Agon or competition, alea or chance (e.g., dice, roulette, etc.), mimicry or mimesis,ilinx or desire for dizziness (e.g., drugs).

Though there are many nuances, all of them share one thing in common – the game or play gives hope to transcend oneself, to escape from the current situation, to surpass human being. Man plays because he wants free himself from what is going on here and now, because he dreams and yearns for happiness or even divinity and eternity. And here, surprisingly, merge the rules, that are rational and thought-out with what is irrational and

impossible – dizziness, ecstasy, trance. While tightly regulated, game appeals to passion. In the deepest sense, it is associated with passion for life.

Casinos, lotteries, TV game shows, NBA, the football industry, and show business have learned to use this ambiguity, this combination of passion and reason, to make money. The game allows us to manipulate our vital forces, while constantly finding reasonable excuses. People have played and will continue to play, even if they are persistently shown the merciless statistics proving that it is almost impossible to win anything. Research shows that for the vast majority of lottery winners their lives end up in tragedy. Some are sent to prison, separated from their families or simply disappear without a trace.

In addition, in the current consumer society there is a certain model of happy life, which belongs to the winner. A successful businessman is the one who wins against the others, wins the race, and wins his millions. Look, even when we are buying lemonade, we are being offered to win - in the hope that something very important is hiding under the cap. So capitalism exploits the constant euphoria of victory by forcing us to gamble continuously.

Our film is trying to understand what happens when one such human-gambler is placed in a borderline situation, confronting life and death. With only a slight change of coordinates, passion for life turns into lust for death. Or is it the same? After all, Freud had something like this

in mind talking about Todestrieb. Besides, this person is a post-Soviet individual, which means he is cynical and desperate and does not believe in the major games of ideologies anymore. He is searching for his own game, because he does not want to conform to the absurdity of the games of those more powerful. This is the man that is steered by post-apocalyptic morale – for him the world has already collapsed, so all that remains is to play the game for the last time. Thus the banal phrase “Life is a game” becomes its own ironic paraphrase: “Death is also a game”.

This inevitably raises the question of morality. It looks like with your film you are trying to diagnose the crisis of morality.

Morality, ethics, conscience - these are the categories which, in the twenty-first century, are more and more difficult to perceive without ambiguity. Religious and political devaluation, TV influence, pursuit of well-being solely for oneself, and the universal search for entertainment are continuously erasing limits, violation of which earlier would have been treated as a “transgression”. We are forced to confront the cruel ethical paradox and this confrontation causes a lot of disappointment and aggression. This universal and global dilemma is revealed in Lithuania in a specific way. Historic distrust of ideologies, special hypocrisy formed in the Soviet system, makes us top-class anti-idealists.

There is a scene in our film where the main character receives an award as the best doctor. The reward is a mug with symbols of the Ministry of Health, and ten packs of an energy candy bar called Hematogen. How should he feel? As the protagonist of Kafka's "Der Process"? As someone who is involved in an absurd social game, where he is just a meaningless element? If he had at least some hope, maybe he would resolve to start a revolution. But he has already seen revolutions and knows that it is just another meaningless game parody. And namely this sense of the absurd is the start for macabre self-determination. If you all are already playing with me, I will also join the game. Only this time – till the end.

Is "The Gambler's" story real? Is it based on real events?

Almost. I have worked as an orderly at the psychiatric hospital on Vasaros street in Vilnius, and Kristupas has worked with disabled people in Italy. When writing the script we did extensive research. We met quite a lot of people and heard startling stories. And these experiences, as well as consultations with practising doctors, helped us to understand not only how the patient rescue system functions, but also how ambiguous the moral decisions are that people can make.

We discovered a lot of even more horrible stories. Some of them were widely publicized. Therefore, we are confident that such a game could easily happen. It might be going on at this moment.

However, this is not a film about the problems of the medical sector. Just the ambulance or hospital intensive care section are rich with human dramas and critical situations. "The Gambler" talks about us, people of today living in this era and in this society. It is inevitable that when you find yourself in an extreme situation, each of us would have to reconsider our value system. In a sense, everyone is Vincentas.

In the film, elements of thriller, crime film or tragicomedy can be detected, however, basis of storytelling is the traditional dramatic structure. How did you choose the genre?

While making the film, various versions of the script were repeatedly rewritten, various plot structures tested, and different genres tried. Some of the scenes were born in an attempt to experiment with the possible choices of the characters, not according to what would please the creators of the film or would cause "audience-catering" effect. We were just listening to the actual circumstances.

A thriller or crime film would require regular Manichaeism of the characters, in which it is clear what represents good and evil. Comedy or tragicomedy goes directly to social and anthropological criticism where

through parody it all gets inevitably exaggerated. Meanwhile, classic drama is the pure genre, perfect when you want to tell a coherent and intriguing story, limiting the "comments" of the screenwriters sitting backstage or aesthetic ornamentation.

You have worked in film-making, in theatre, and in advertising. The film is also a combination of various traditions of aesthetics and cinematography. What led you to such decision?

I wanted the film to be visually rich, but not removed from reality. In addition, it had to be intriguing by not only the story itself, but also by being sufficiently critical towards our social environment. In solving visual problems of similar "sharp documentaries", I drew experience from the classics of the twentieth century reportage photography – Weegee (Arthur Fellig) and Enrique Metinides. They both, like no one else, could see philosophical and aesthetic implications in dramatic street events. Through their mutilated physicality and somewhat creepy pictures, an undoubtedly multi-layered resonance of meanings permeates. In the film we wanted to achieve a similar effect - something that displayed documentary images as the "second bottom", or realism through which metaphors and symbols of human existence permeate. That's why the film was shot by the sea and in the port of Klaipeda. It's like a marginal situation between the water and the land, from which from the geographical reference point moves to the inner state of the characters. Speaking of personal

experiences that influenced the film's aesthetic decisions, I should mention several aspects. Working in advertising has taught me several important lessons: first of all, the ability to adapt a corresponding style to a particular story and not get into "empty rhetoric" with images, and secondly, to achieve maximum visual results with a modest budget. On the other hand, my theatre experience has allowed me not to fear the short filming time and limited amount of shifts, and to try to improvise bravely with actors on the filming site for maximum authenticity.

Ignas Jonynas

Born in 1971 in Lithuania, Ignas Jonynas has worked in theatre, film and advertising as a director, screenwriter, and actor. Graduated from A.Vienožinskis Art School, successfully obtained a bachelor's degree in TV Direction and a Master's degree in Theatre at the Lithuanian Academy of Music. He has worked as a construction worker, bartender, dock worker, medical orderly at a psychiatric hospital, and radio DJ. Ignas was involved with the music band Bango Collective. He has staged 10 theatre productions and directed one documentary and two short films. "The Gambler" is his debut feature film.

CAST

Vytautas Kaniušonis

VINCENTAS

Born in Murmansk, Russia, in 1963. In 1987 successfully completed the directing studies at the University of Klaipėda. In 1992 graduated from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (LMTA), where he studied acting. Shortly afterwards he left for Sweden, where established an enterprise and ran it for 10 years. During that time he had nothing to do with theatre. However, in 2004, he returned to Lithuania and completed master studies in directing under the academic guidance of Jonas Vaitkus. As a freelance actor, he worked in almost all of the Lithuanian theatres, and as a director, he worked on numerous plays at the "Menas" theatre. Since 2009 has been lecturing at the LMTA, where he teaches acting, and has been the artistic director of the "Menas" theatre in Panevėžys. "The Gambler" is his first leading role in cinema – up until now, he has played several small parts in both Lithuanian and foreign films.

CAST

Oona Mekas

IEVA

The daughter of filmmaker Jonas Mekas and photographer Hollis Melton, Oona began her love affair with cinema at a very early age. Some of her first memories are of dark theaters illuminated by the light of a projector, watching films by everyone from Stan Brakhage and Harry Smith to Buster Keaton and Sergio Leone. She started her film career in New York City, programming and co-founding a series called Fresh Film for Anthology Film Archives, a film theater and archive, where she serves on the board. These days, she calls Los Angeles home and continues her journey both in front and behind the camera as an actor, writer and director.

Kristupas Sabolius

scriptwriter

Kristupas Sabolius, born in 1979, is an active public intellectual, a writer and an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Vilnius University. He recently published "Furious Sleep" (2012), a book on imagination and phenomenology. Sabolius also wrote several theatre plays and a novel ("Bad Book", 2006). He has collaborated with contemporary artists, worked as a consultant for Oskaras Koršunovas theatre, and initiated several cultural projects ("One Minute Film Festival", "Haiku To Vilnius", "Freshmen Awards"). He also hosted a TV show on Lithuanian and European Theatre at Lithuanian National Broadcaster. His newest book on cinema and imagination is projected to be published in November 2013.

Janis Eglitis

director of photography

Janis Eglitis was born in 1968. He studied painting and acting, but ended up working in a documentary film studio as an assistant camera operator. Eglitis has been fortunate enough to have worked with the legendary filmmakers Juris Podnieks, Andris Seleckis and Davis Simanis. Later on, Eglitis worked as an assistant on fiction films, quickly moving on to doing the filming himself. He then attended the Latvian Academy of Culture and graduated with a degree in cinematography. Eglitis continues to do a lot of filming, working with leading advertising and music video directors in Latvia, Lithuania and Russia. He's filmed music videos for such high-profile groups as Mumi Troll, B2, Zemfira, Kasta and Brainstorm. Many of his films and commercials have received awards. Alexey Mizgerezv's (Russia) film "Convoy" participated in the Panorama program at the Berlin Film Festival, while Aik Karapetian's film "People Out There" was featured at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival.

CREW

Nerijus Narmontas

production designer

Born in 1980. Studied Information Society Studies at Vilnius University (2005-2006) and Arts / Set Design at Vilnius Fine Arts Academy (2000-2004).

Has been actively working on commercials and short films.

"The Gambler" is his first full length feature film.

CREW

The Bus

original music

The Bus is a Lithuanian music duo composed of Paulius Kilbauskas and Domas Strupinskas, both of whom have a history of producing successful projects. To name a few: Empti, Dublicate, MIR project, Bango Collective, No Dog Barking, Overtone, Dykumos, Snapsounds, etc. Currently this creative collaboration is involved in making movie & game soundtracks, but is always open to new artistic challenges. Their sound is recognizable by heavily distorted reverberant guitars, complex rhythms, deep warm analog synth lines and huge organic soundscapes.

More info: www.thebus.lt

CREW

Artūras Pugačiauskas

sound director / sound designer

Born in 1964. Sound director, sound designer, producer of audio recordings, as well as audio post-production of films.

Started his career in 1987, as a specialist of electronic music instruments and creator of synthesizer sounds.

Later, he worked with music recordings ranging from pop, rock, and jazz to classical symphony orchestras. His career in cinematic sound department started in TV films, later – cinematic featurettes. Artūras' works were highly acclaimed by film directors and producers, therefore he received many proposals for designing the sound of feature films.

For impeccable sound and sound design, he was nominated for several national "Silver Crane" awards, as well as the Latvian "Christopher" awards, and in 2005 he was awarded at the international Clermont-Ferrand short film festival (Prix de la Meilleure Creation Sonore). Additionally, he has been nominated for and awarded with several national "Bravo" music awards.

For filmography, see [imdb.com/Arturas Pugačiauskas](http://imdb.com/Arturas_Pugaciauskas)

Uljana Kim

producer

Born in 1969. Graduated from the Institute of Cinematography in Moscow (VGIK) in 1993 and is a film critic by education. She began her career in cinema as the executive producer of the documentary film "Pavasaris" (Spring) by Valdas Navasaitis, which won the best short film prize in the Cinema du Reel in 1997, Paris, and the main prize in the Oberhausen in 1998. Her first produced full-length feature film "Kiemas" (Courtyard) by the same director was presented in Cannes in 1999 (Quinzaine des realisateurs). The second feature film she produced - "Nuomos sutartis" (The Lease) by Kristijonas Vildžiūnas – was included in the Venice Official selection "Upstream" in 2002, and another feature film, which she produced, entitled „You am I" by the same director was presented in Cannes, the official selection "Un Certain Regard", in 2006.

She has been running "Studio Uljana Kim", which is a leading company in the production of full-length feature films in Lithuania.

Since 2004, she has been running the project "Lithuanian Film Promotion and information agency". www.lfc.lt

Roberts Vinovskis

co-producer

Roberts Vinovskis was born in 1975, in Riga. He studied applied design and painting, and then philosophy at the University of Latvia. From 1991 to 1994 he worked at Juris Podnieks' studio. Vinovskis founded "Locomotive Productions" in 1999 and continues to work there today. Vinovskis has made several documentary films, but in the last few years has actively worked as a producer for both fiction and documentary films that have been shown in numerous international festivals. The feature film "The Gambler" is his first co-production with Lithuania. Roberts is currently working on a Latvian – German co-production, in remembrance of the 100th anniversary since the start of WWI. Roberts is a member of both the Latvian Filmmakers Union and the Latvian Film Producers Association.

CREW

Director

IGNAS JONYNAS

Scriptwriters

KRISTUPAS SABOLIUS
IGNAS JONYNAS

Director of Photography

JANIS EGLITIS

Production Designer

NERIJUS NARMONTAS

Original Music by

THE BUS

Sound Director /

Sound Designer

ARTŪRAS PUGAČIAUSKAS

Sound Recordist

SAULIUS URBANAČIUS

Costume Designer

AUŠRA KLEIZAITĖ

Make-up Designer

EGLĖ MIKALAUŠKAITĖ

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Producer

ULJANA KIM

Co-Producer

ROBERTS VINOVSĶIS

Executive Producer

KRISTIJONAS PUIPA

Casting

DOVILĖ GASIŪNAITĖ

CAST

Vincentas

VYTAUTAS KANIUŠONIS

Ieva

OONA MEKAS

Dogdanas

ROMUALD LAVRYNOVIČ

Kaziukas

VALERIJUS JEVSEJEVAS

Poviliukas

LUKAS KERŠYS

Skirutis

JONAS VAITKUS

Antanas

ARTŪRAS ŠABLAUSKAS

Liubartas

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The Gambler

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A black and white close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her eyes, nose, and mouth. A small lizard is perched on her nose. The image has a grainy, high-contrast quality.

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