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Unpredictability is a very good trait

IDENTITY: A kaleidoscopic portrait of a strange and divided nation behind the scenes



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The Diviners

Director(s) **Roman Bordun**

Producer(s) **Roman Bordun**

Country: **Ukraine**

Odessa is a famous city – an obvious statement about one that has certainly made its mark on

history. When these words come from a young girl living in Odessa of today, however, the city's claim to fame seems less obvious. She does not elaborate but adds that she has the intention to become famous – her plan is to study at one of the best universities in **Russia**. «I'm drunk!» she continues, which might put things a bit in a different perspective.

This is taken from a late-night street scene in the Ukrainian port city by the Black Sea. It is part of a new documentary by **Roman Bordun**, who works as a design engineer for building and architectural structures in Lviv. He is also a photographer and painter, he films a video diary, and now he decided to portrait his home country by filming people and scenes in three cities – Odessa, Lviv, and, of course, the capital, Kiev.



Country and pride

The film has been described as a kaleidoscopic portrait of contemporary **Ukraine**, one that is very much to the point. It consists of a seemingly unconnected series of takes from different parts of the cities. It leaves you a bit puzzled in the beginning but, all of a sudden, it makes sense.

It is a clever portrait of a people and nation that, in itself, seems unconnected to reality and, at the same time, deeply divided. Like the intoxicated young woman in Odessa, most people express love and admiration for their country, and still they feel the old bonds to the Russians – whom they dislike, even hate. Others feel like true Europeans but also a need to conceal their poverty and obvious inadequacies within the European context. Bordun seeks out the essence of all this. He walks the streets with open eyes and an open mind, and his absence of judgment is

one of the many strong sides of this documentary. With gentle care, he depicts his own people without telling us what is right or wrong, good or evil. Many instances are both.

The disharmony is ever-present.

He travels the country by rail. It is a proud institution with all the frills of yesteryear and, at the same time, outdated and rundown. One passenger on an intercity train expresses his admiration for Japanese railways. The Japanese superhumans, as he puts it. Their electric trains run at 1,200 kmph he claims over and over. But still, he prefers his homey carriages that are always running late, because this is his country and pride.

Unpredictability

Ukraine seems to be permanently wet and damp, and one is never really at ease – at least not in the Western sense of the word. People go swimming amongst dead leaves in the brownish water of a lake, and Bordun takes us to a naturist beach on a riverside. You see church towers on the opposite bank, while people make themselves at ease on the utterly charmless beach. «The atmosphere is more sincere in a way,» says one of the beachgoers with a broad smile. It is not quite clear what he is hinting at, but that doesn't matter – not everything needs a deeper explanation, and Bordun is blessed with a deep feeling for this. Being content is a goal in itself – like the Kiev family enjoying themselves at a full-fledged picnic in drizzling rain.

The disharmony is ever-present. Two people sitting on a bench outside an apartment block. One – an elderly woman – is ethnic Russian, while the other – a heavysset man with a beer belly – is a proud Ukrainian. They discuss who is to blame for all the misfortunes of the country and, without going into the question of **Crimea** and direct enmity, tempers flare. But still, there is a neighbourly undertone of mutual understanding, which seems to be a way to get by in spite of all the disagreements. There is a reason why Bordun describes his nation as diviners.

Being content is a goal in itself

At times this borders the grotesque. The girl with lofty plans for fame at a Russian university takes part in a street party where everybody is drinking, some heavily, and still the atmosphere stays calm. People sit in small groups talking and having a good time. But a couple of guys start fighting. Or rather, one guy decides to beat up another who is defenseless in his drunken stupor. Even this seems to take place in a good spirit, and nobody takes notice. They let it happen, the way you let things happen in Ukraine.



The Diviners, a film by Roman Bordun

Then, a soothing winter sets in. When the snow covers the Ukrainian cities they change their ways. Bordun revisits the now snow-clad place of the wild street parties and the desolate nudist beach. The spots seem different and tranquil, otherworldly in a strange way – as if the white blanket gives the Ukrainian people a break to get ready to face each other and their common society again once spring arrives.

After watching this kaleidoscopic tale for a bit less than an hour, you sit back with a wish to go there and experience the strange and fascinating world of Roman Bordun. «Unpredictability is a very good trait,» says one girl in one of the Ukrainian cities, and she seems to be so right!



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