



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
OFFICIAL SELECTION
2020

POLAND, SWEDEN 2020
A FILM BY MAGNUS VON HORN

SWEAT



SYNOPSIS

Sweat recounts three days in the life of fitness motivator Sylwia Zając, whose presence on social media has made her a celebrity. Although she has hundreds of thousands of followers, is surrounded by loyal employees and admired by acquaintances, she is looking for true intimacy.



LONG SYNOPSIS

Sweat is about three days in the life of Sylwia Zając, a 30 year old fitness motivator living in Warsaw who has gained celebrity status due to her avid use of social media. She is self-made and hard working, on one hand keeping her own body in the best possible shape as well as inspiring thousands of others to do the same. When an Instagram post where she confesses to feeling lonely goes viral, a stalker appears outside her apartment. Sylwia tries to ignore the stalker and stick to her busy schedule but when his attempts to contact her become more and more vulgar she finds it difficult to remain positive and smiling. At her mother's birthday party she tries too hard to get attention and admiration from her family and ends up breaking down in tears. When the stalker returns to her street at night she gets a friend to beat him up. But his bloody and deformed face fills Sylwia with fear, never did she imagine that she could inspire such evil. She takes the stalker to the hospital in an attempt to make things right. The next morning she has a live performance on Breakfast Television. To the last moment she doesn't know what to expect from herself after the rough night. When the talk-show hosts start asking questions about her viral instagram post, Sylwia opens up and speaks from the heart. For a moment she knows exactly who she is and what's important in life.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Emotional exhibitionists fascinate me, probably because I am on the opposite side of that spectrum; I keep my emotions on the inside and rarely share them because I fear being judged. So when I meet people who effortlessly and without shame express themselves I feel envy. On social media I am a passive observer. I observe those who are active, who expose themselves and their feelings. How much is truth? I fantasise about their real lives. What are they like when their cell phone is sleeping? Is there a difference? I started following a fitness motivator and influencer. The amount of photos and videos she posted each day amazed me. Everything from driving home from work, talking about a headache, emotional problems, what to eat for dinner, taking photos of her body, opening gift bags and letting the camera together with all her followers discover what's inside. She has 600000 followers on Instagram, has been on the cover of bodybuilding magazines and has released a couple of work-out DVDs. Posting and sharing her private life is her job. She is self employed and her product is her body. But who is she the moment before she starts recording herself? Is there a big difference between her on-line and off-line persona? She can post 20 videos in a row of her dog playing with a rubber toy while she comments in the background, sometimes using a funny voice to represent her dog's thoughts. She sends all of these videos to her many thousands of followers. Is she bored?



Lonely? And then all of a sudden, she doesn't post anything for a day. What happened? I wanted to make a film about her. I actually wrote her a mail to see if I could meet her as part of research for the film but she never replied. It's probably for the better. I started following many others, similar fitness celebrities. Sometimes they met each other. A bodybuilder was recording himself while eating with a group of friends, all of them in the fitness business. In the background I could see Sylwia sitting alone at the end of the table. She was just waiting for her food, not speaking to anyone, not holding her phone. When the bodybuilder turned the camera and made everyone at the table wave, Sylwia suddenly smiled, straightened her back and threw a kiss to the camera.

For me it is about finding enough inspiration to want to write about someone. In the case of my previous film, *The Here After*, it was a court case about a teenager who had killed his girlfriend. It gave me a unique insight into a boy's life. That made me want to write about him. In this case, social media has given me that opening. I want to take a closer look and use my own imagination to fill in the gaps. Sylwia is an extremely contemporary character. She is a pragmatic business woman as well as an inspiration to people who want a healthy lifestyle. She is an ambassador for feeling comfortable in your body and being proud of who you are. Accept yourself, she says,

but what happens when she has problems accepting herself? When her stalker, Rysiek, enters her life she starts doubting herself, because, in many ways, he's similar to her.

Rysiek was inspired by Bjork's stalker, Ricardo Lopez, who recorded himself over many hours as he contemplated his own life and how he planned to kill Bjork. Watching Lopez's recordings had a similar effect on me as when I watched some really emotional posts made by social media celebrities. They both have an emotional openness that makes them attractive and intriguing. I want to explore their similarities and why these "freaks" sometimes make me jealous. I envy the emotional openness, the exhibitionism they completely embrace, but at the same time I fear them. Scared because I feel connected to them on a human level. Sylwia needs to accept that she is partly just like Rysiek – a masturbator sharing his most intimate and pathetic feelings. Rysiek is not ashamed. And at the end of the film Sylwia is also no longer ashamed. Only by being ok with herself can she be happy with who she is. And that's when she also gives the best love to her followers.

Sweat has a rhythm and perspective that stays very true to Sylwia's character. The story is subjectively told and connected to her emotional flow. The story needed to be told in a way that is fitting to her character, as well as to the very realistic style of the film. Sweat is three days in Sylwia's life. Just three days where she experiences an



internal shift and becomes more connected to who she really is. It's a subtle story and therefore embraces the banalities of everyday life. Long scenes and passages where meaning is not directly communicated but rather comes from a gradual collection of experiences. We have the luxury to join Sylwia for a little while, but her life has been going on long before we see her and will go on long after we leave her. Eventually all the scenes and meetings Sylwia goes through end up asking us the same questions. How should we share, how should we connect? And it's a question directly connected to how Rysiek makes her feel when he enters her life.

Visually I saw the story being told with a camera that is intimate and mobile. A camera that is almost like a dog in relation to Sylwia. A faithful and loving dog that is sometimes allowed to come close and jump up in her knee for a cuddle, and sometimes dismissed to a corner of the room where it sits patiently and waits. If Sylwia is excited her emotions spread to the camera, just like a dog gets excited when it's around excited people. The camera follows Sylwia's mood. It loves her and respects her. It won't abandon her, but Sylwia has the power to abandon the camera. She can shut us out. And she can let us in.

I want the end of the story to be a kind of success for Sylwia. Of course there is a bitterness to it but it's none the less a success. I wanted to reach a point where Sylwia meets herself, where she



sees who she is and accepts it. Maybe she will be lonely, maybe she will be a peculiar person but at least she knows who she is. She accepts that the closest relationship she has in her life is with her followers. She cherishes that and decides to make the most of it. Maybe the audience even feels a grain of shame having judged her. The problem is maybe not as much in Sylwia as it is in the eye of the observer. Are we able to look at Sylwia with love, like she looks at us with love?

Magnus von Horn



**INTERVIEW WITH
MAGNUS VON HORN**

In *Sweat* you deal with the subject of a social media influencer. How did you navigate the specific visual contradictions by treating the subject through an auteur film?

The contradiction is what interested me. To put social media on a stage where it isn't usually found. After all it is just a facade that takes a moment or two to overcome and after that it is just about people. I really like when I find a part of myself where I didn't expect it. Eventually we are all the same. The contradiction is the beginning, at the end the contradiction doesn't matter anymore because we have overcome it. At least that's how I wish for *Sweat* to work. To find the fitness motivator in yourself.





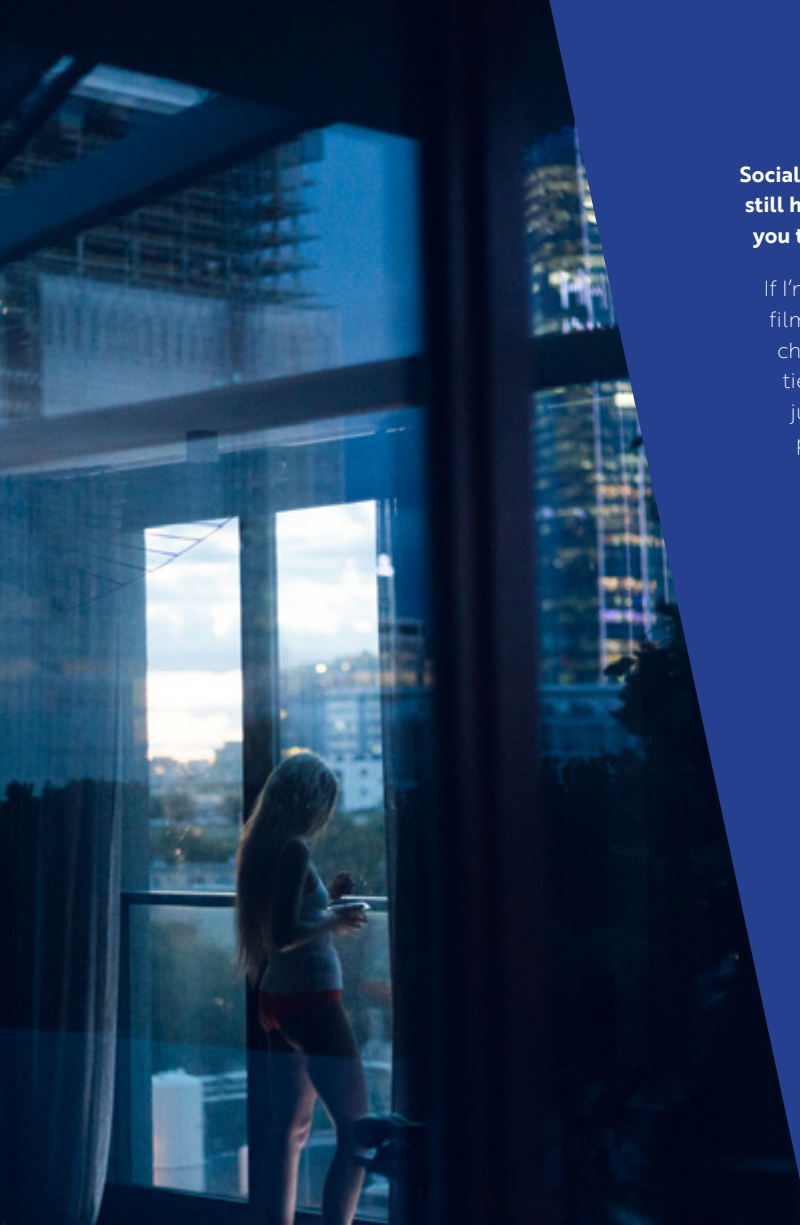
What drew you to Sylwia's story in the first place? How did you develop the film, from script to the shoot?

It all started with snapchat when that was still the main platform. I couldn't stop watching fitness motivators and the way they made their lives into reality shows. I felt like I got to know them on some level because they shared so much of their everyday life. 20 videos of a dog playing with a rubber toy and then an emotional speech about love problems. That's why I watched them. It was provocative, I both hated and loved them. I called them narcissists but then I started thinking about how unable I am to make posts like they do because I fear being judged. I wondered who is really more narcissistic, me or them? It made me want to start writing.

In the beginning I had many sensational plot driven stories surrounding Sylwia; murder and mayhem. It was a lot of fun developing a kind of genre mix of drama and thriller but the more Sylwia developed as a character the more I got interested in problems that were really important for her. What does a viral video gone bad mean? What does a mother's birthday mean in-between the gym and celebrity parties? My moral side kept telling me that I needed to make a clear statement about social media but as Sylwia got stronger I also stopped feeling the need to make a statement. It was difficult to finance the film because of that, many people were lacking a clear stance. Is it a film

that criticises social media or not? I never wanted a clear stance. I wanted three days of Sylwia's life. Not three days that ended the world or gave birth to it. Just three days that gives her perspective on what's important in her life and what isn't. A moment of clarity which will probably disappear in a couple of days, later she'll find it again. I often feel life works like that.

When rehearsing and filming it was important for us to get rid of wishful thinking and only deal with what we have in front of us. Get rid of the big ideas and only work with the drama that really existed in the scenes. This became a key to how we worked with actors and the camera. It sounds obvious but it is challenging (and liberating) to just accept what is in the scene and not try to force meanings into it. I often found out that scenes I thought would be dramatic were not and the other way around. This doesn't mean they failed, it just means they become interesting in other ways and the challenge was to accept it and go with the flow. The last scene of the film was shot on the last day of shooting. To that day I didn't know for sure what Sylwia was going to say in the morning show sofa. But because of the year and a half Magda Kolesnik spent preparing Sylwia I felt quite sure that she would know what to say. And she did. And I also think what she says applies both to Sylwia and Magda and me.



Social media influencers are in some ways an easy target. But you still have a lot of generosity towards the character of Sylwia. Can you tell us a little about the process of writing the character?

If I'm going to spend such a long time developing and eventually filming Sylwia I need to like her. I love the process of developing characters because it's an organic process that takes time and patience. It's a really nice job. Sylwia is my projection. I am Sylwia. But just like that Sylwia is everyone else as well. Actors and actresses put themselves in the lives of others and make them available, I like to do the same but through writing. I like to explore what connects me to people I at first don't want to be connected to. There is a lot of hate surrounding influencers. The anonymity of the internet is perfect for that kind of expression. I feel the hate is part of the influencer, it's a shadow, it's dark energy generated. In a way the influencer and the hater are one. A bit like Sylwia and her stalker.

Was it easy to cast an actress who could perform the very specific, and very physical requirements of the role?

No, it wasn't. But Magdalena Kolesnik was actually the first actress we invited for casting. She was great, and then we kept casting for months without finding anyone better. Magda didn't even have instagram at the time, she spent a year in the gym and a lot of time on social media to get into character. She is a great actress because she treats Sylwia like she treats herself. When I get lost on set I know I can always rely on back-up from Magda. She knows what Sylwia would do.



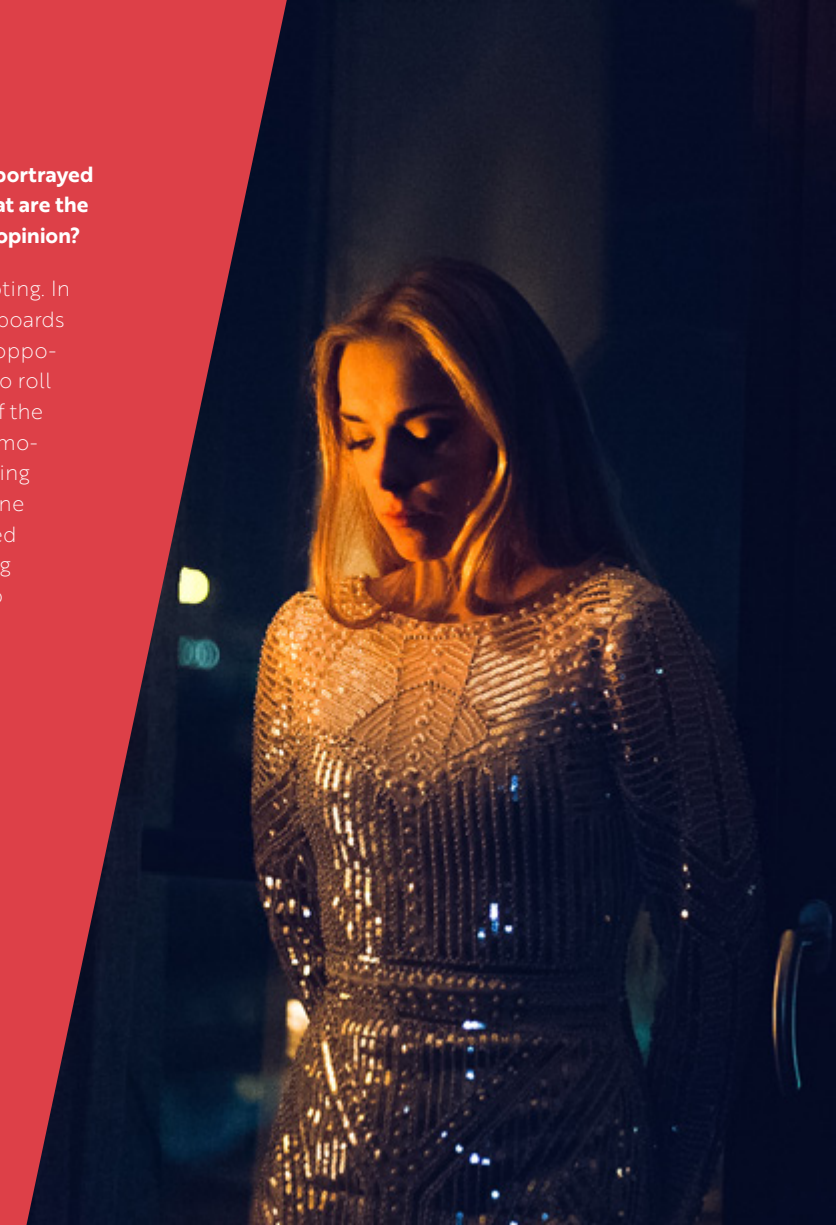


The world of fitness influencers is an area that is rarely portrayed in cinema. How was it for you to dive into this world? What are the benchmark films that could have influenced *Sweat* in your opinion?

My main objective was to be free and mobile during shooting. In my previous films I have always worked with very strict storyboards and carefully planned staging. In *Sweat* I wanted to do the opposite, we didn't have a storyboard and we wanted to be able to roll with the punches, enjoy surprises and quick changes. Some of the takes we did were over 30 minutes long (we had to change memory card during the take). I really enjoyed that. It was very liberating to not think about editing and coverage. Most scenes were done in one shot, in editing we would cut out whatever was not needed and then dive back into the shot when we felt it was interesting again. So the benchmark films I watched were not connected to fitness but rather to this aesthetics; eg. films from Dogma 95.

Michal Dymek (DoP) has such great intuition for handheld camera and it is a pleasure to let him roam around the actors for 20+ minutes. It is a pleasure watching the actors act for such long moments. When it works I am already watching the film on the monitor on set, it's extremely rewarding.

But mostly I was inspired by social media posts from the real world.



Do you feel that you, as a Swedish born but Polish trained director, have a specific position in European cinema? Do you relate to Polish, Scandinavian, European or World cinema in any specific way?

I really don't know. I am sure my life in Poland has deeply shaped who I am today and what I do. I guess that can be the same for anyone changing country and culture. I don't think I really feel part of Polish cinema or Scandinavian cinema or European cinema or World cinema, I don't really know what those names mean and I'm not so interested in finding out. I do feel part of the people I work with; my producer, Mariusz Włodarski, my script sparring partner, Andrzej Mellin, the Polish Film School in Lodz. We share an interest in the same kind of stories. I do feel part of character driven cinema. What I like the most is to develop characters and work with actors.



CAST & CREW



**MAGDALENA
KOLEŚNIK**

A graduate of the National Academy of Theatre Arts in Krakow, Koleśnik debuted in Warsaw's Ateneum Theatre in *The Force of Habit* (dir. M. Miklasz). Her role in *The Suicide* (dir. J. Trela), where she played Maria Lukianovna, was awarded at the 32nd Drama Schools' Festival in Łódź, while her performance in *The Dybbuk* (dir. M. Kleczewska) earned her the Andrzej Nardelli Award for the best acting debut awarded by the Theatre Critics' Section of the Polish Performing Artists Union (ZASP). She has also played in several films, notably Robert Gliński's *Stones for the Rampart*, Jan Komasa's *Warsaw 44* and Daria Woszek's *Marygoround*. In theatre, she has worked with such directors as Krystian Lupa, Maja Kleczewska, Grzegorz Jarzyna, Krzysztof Garbaczewski. She joined the Zygmunt Hübner Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw in 2015. Magda's role in *Sweat*, where she plays Sylwia Zając, is her first leading role in a feature film.



**JULIAN
ŚWIEŻEWSKI**

Julian Świeżewski has been acting at the Zygmunt Hübner Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw since 2016. He played the leading role in Maciej Sobieszczarski's loud film *The Reconciliation*, as well as supporting roles in Wojtek Smarzowski's *Volhynia*, Olga Chajdas' *Nina* and 1983 the first Polish series produced by Netflix. He also stars in Bodo Kox's upcoming series *Men and Gods*. He was awarded at the 15th Contemporary Drama Festival in Zabrze for the leading role in *Good Night Cowboy* with the WARsawa Theatre. He also won the Grand Prix at the 32nd Drama Schools' Festival for his outstanding stage persona in the diploma play *Ecce Homo!!!* and his role in the play *Sketches from Dostoevsky*. In 2018, he was nominated for the prestigious Zbigniew Cybulski award.



**ALEKSANDRA
KONIECZNA**

For many years she appeared on the stage of theaters, cooperating with the best artists in Europe such as Grzegorz Jarzyna, Kristin Lupa or René Pollesch. She directed performances in multiple places, among others – the National Theater in Warsaw and Kochanowski in Opole. She has appeared in many movies, tv series and theaters. Aleksandra acted as Zofia Beksińska in the *The Last Family* by Jan P. Matuszyński and Iga Cembrzyńska in Janusz Kondratiuk's *A Cat and a Dog*. For each of these roles she was awarded at the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia and Polish Film Awards. She was awarded Polish Film Award The Eagle for Best Actress in 2020 for her part in *Corpus Christi* by Jan Komasa.



**ZBIGNIEW
ZAMACHOWSKI**

A truly versatile artist, Zamachowski is an acclaimed film and theatre actor as well as a singer-songwriter. He graduated from the National Film School in Lodz in 1985. He has worked with many Warsaw theatres, including the National Theatre, which he joined in 1997. He has played in dozens of films; his best-known performances include a co-starring role in *Part 10* of Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Decalogue* series, as well as the leading role in *Three Colors: White*, as well as roles in Robert Gliński's *Hi Tereska*, Andrzej Jakimowski's *Squint Your Eyes*, Jerzy Hoffman's historical epic *With Fire and Sword*, as well as Andrzej Wajda's biopic *Walesa: Man of Hope*.



**MAGNUS
VON HORN**
/ Director

Magnus von Horn was born in 1983 in Sweden, Gothenburg. He is living and working in Poland. He graduated from the Polish National Film School in Łódź in 2013, where he now teaches directing. Magnus made a successful entrance with his short films: *Echo* (2010) premiered at Sundance FF and *Without Snow* (2011) premiered at Locarno FF. His debut feature *The Here After* was premiered at the Directors' Fortnight 2015 – Cannes FF and won two Swedish Guldbagge Awards for Best Film & Best Director and traveled along the festivals such as Toronto, Karlovy Vary, San Sebastian and was sold to more than 10 territories. With *Sweat*, his second feature length fiction he took part in Torino Film Lab.



**MICHAŁ
DYMEK**
/ DOP

Michał Dymek was born and raised in Warsaw, Poland. He obtained his Masters in Cinematography from the Polish National Film School in Lodz. Michał has shot several feature films including *Dolce Fine Giornata* (dir. Jacek Borcuch) which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival 2019. Michał has also shot several award-winning short films, including *The Best Fireworks Ever* (dir. Aleksandra Terpińska) which won The Canal Plus and the Audience Award at the Semaine de la Critique at the Cannes Festival 2017. He is a frequent collaborator with the recognised polish artist Agnieszka Polska and he shot her feature debut *Hurray, we are still alive!* and her recent video art *Demon's Brain* which was exhibited at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin. Michał also works as a Light Designer and Video Artist in Theatre. Most recently Michał shot Magnus von Horn's feature *Sweat*. Michał is a member of the Polish Society of Cinematographers.



**AGNIESZKA
GLIŃSKA**
/ Editor

Film editor Agnieszka Glińska is a graduate of Film Studies at Lodz University and Film Editing at the National Film School in Lodz. A member of the Polish Association of Editors, the Polish Film Academy and the European Film Academy. At the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia in 2015, she was awarded for her editing of Magnus Von Horn's *The Here After* and Jerzy Skolimowski's *11 Minutes*, for which she also received the Eagle Polish Film Award. In 2014, she won the President of the Polish Filmmakers Association award for editing Adam Palenta's *House on its Head*. Glińska was nominated for the Eagle award for Best Editing twice – in 2015, for Michał Ołtowski's *Waterline* and in 2017, for Anna Zamecka's *Communion*. The films she has edited have won awards at many prestigious festivals both in Poland and abroad. Three of them – Jacek Borcuch's *All that I Love*, Skolimowski's *11 Minutes* and Zeresenay Berhane Mehari's *Difret* – were Oscar candidates, while Anna Zamecka's *Communion* made the shortlist.



**MARIUSZ
WŁODARSKI**
/ Producer

Mariusz Włodarski, holds a degree in International Relations and completed his education at the National Film School in Lodz, Poland. He learned his craft working on international co-productions for Opus Film. In 2010 he founded Lava Films, where he produced *The Here After* by longtime collaborator Magnus von Horn, which was presented at Cannes as part of the Directors' Fortnight. At the time, Mariusz was representing Poland as a Producer on the Move. His credits include credits such as *The Harvesters*, premiered in Cannes Un Certain Regard 2018, *The Taste of Pho* premiered in San Sebastian 2019, *Apples* by Christos Nikou and Cannes selected *Sweat*. He is currently working on *Wonder Xenia* by Małgorzata Szumowska and *Wolf* by Nathalie Biancheri. Mariusz is a member of EAVE, the European Film Academy and ACE Producers Network. He teaches at The Polish National Film School in Łódź and regularly trains at the gym ;)

FESTIVALS

Cannes 2020 Official Selection

FILM INFORMATION

Original Title: Sweat

English Title: Sweat

Genre: Drama

Country: Poland, Sweden

Language: Polish

Year: 2020

Duration: 105 min.

Picture: Color

Aspect Ratio: 2.35 : 1

Sound: 5.1

Available Format: DCP

CAST

Magdalena Koleśnik

Julian Świeżewski

Aleksandra Konieczna

Zbigniew Zamachowski

CREW

Director: Magnus von Horn

Screenplay: Magnus von Horn

Producer: Mariusz Włodarski

Cinematography: Michał Dymek

Editing: Agnieszka Glińska

Production Design: Jagna Dobesz

Sound Design: Michał Robaczewski

Production Company: Lava Films

Co-production

companies: Zentropa Sweden,
Film i Väst, CANAL +,
ECI Łódź – City of

Culture, Opus Film,
DI Factory

Co-financed by: Polish Film Institute,
Swedish Film
Institute, Media
Creative Europe

PRODUCER'S CONTACT

Lava Films

+48 782 668 551

lava@lavafilms.pl

www.lavafilms.pl

WORLD SALES

New Europe Film Sales

Puławska 152/5

02-670 Warsaw, Poland

www.neweuropefilmsales.com

FESTIVALS

Ewa Bojanowska

+48 609 804 296

Natalia Dąbrowska

+48 698 903 038

festivals@neweuropefilmsales.com

INTERNATIONAL SALES

Jan Naszewski

+48 600 173 205

jan@neweuropefilmsales.com

Katarzyna Siniarska

+48 698 900 936

kat@neweuropefilmsales.com

PRESS CONTACT

WOLF Consultants

Gordon Spragg, Laurin Dietrich,

Michael Arnon

+49 157 7474 9724

hello@wolf-con.com

www.wolf-con.com

