



SUNSET

(NAPSZÁLLTA)

A film by **László Nemes**

LAOKOON FILMGROUP in co-production with PLAYTIME
presents



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International Press

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SYNOPSIS

1913, Budapest, in the heart of Europe. The young Irisz Leiter arrives in the Hungarian capital with high hopes to work as a milliner at the legendary hat store that belonged to her late parents. She is nonetheless sent away by the new owner, Oszkár Brill.

While preparations are under way at the Leiter hat store, to host guests of uttermost importance, a man abruptly comes to Irisz, looking for a certain Kálmán Leiter.

Refusing to leave the city, the young woman follows Kálmán's tracks, her only link to a lost past. Her quest brings her through the dark streets of Budapest, where only the Leiter hat store shines, into the turmoil of a civilization on the eve of its downfall.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The monarchy of Austria-Hungary, in the very center of Europe, before the outbreak of World War I, is at the crossroads of all the accumulated European tensions, where coexist modernity and obsolescence on many levels. Politically, the old Franz Joseph, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, rules from Vienna, over vast territories, a dozen nations, many cultures and religions. All forms of vigorous political and ideological aspirations that have spread during the 19th century are present or rampant, sometimes mixed: socialism, anarchism, nationalism. Modern antisemitism reaches its maturity in Vienna. New scientific approaches blossom, the first forms of psychological studies and psychoanalysis thrive, whereas many pseudo-scientific and intellectual groups, cult-like movements, occult sects following illuminated leaders seem to crave for a special place in society, or on the edge of society. Thus, many fundamentally marginal, albeit enthusiastic movements co-exist in Austria-Hungary, where all art forms, including architecture, literature and motion pictures, flourish. The identity crisis resulting from the fragmentation of aspirations and the decay of the central royal order, coupled with a disenchantment of the world and a crisis of masculinity, give rise to a vibrating world that could lead to ecstatic prosperity or to downfall.

In a way, beyond the love for technology within society and its boundless optimism, there is a deep malaise – a floating sentiment that something ominous, possibly apocalyptic is about to happen. This is the age of an almost biblical expectation.

This society, whose codes and sophistication are embodied by the way people dress and behave - the hats they design and wear, preserves a facade of tranquility. But under the veneer of civilization, many forces cannot be controlled. They are about to take all the people, unsuspecting and believing in progress, into a quagmire and destruction of hitherto unseen, industrial proportions.







DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Irisz and Sunset

Even before starting my first feature *Son of Saul*, I had in my mind the idea of making a film about a woman, alone, lost in her world, a world she tries but ultimately fails to understand. Probably under the influence of a certain literary and cinematographic tradition of Central Europe, I've been drawn to a main character that is partly surrounded by mystery and whose actions the audience has to assess and re-assess continuously, even becoming at some point a figure of an unexpected dimension, like a strange Joan of Arc of Middle Europe.

Unlike *Son of Saul*, which had a meticulous documentary-style approach, *Sunset* resembles a tale, a mystery in itself where the viewer is invited on this journey to find, along with the main character, a possible way through this maze of facades and layers. From the outset, I imagined this movie as a way to plunge the viewer into a personal labyrinth, along Irisz's quest to find her brother and ultimately the meaning of the world she wants to discover. Behind every clue she seems to find, there exists contradictory information. Behind every layer, a new one is revealed and the main character herself might very well be unaware of the process taking place deep within her. Irisz is a character caught between light and darkness, beauty and menace, incapable of dealing with the grey zones. In this sense, *Sunset* is also a story of a girl, the blooming of a strange flower.

Sunset, from the outset, intended to follow from close range its main character, Irisz, allowing a highly intimate approach in an unusual period movie, trying to break with the predictable codes of postcard-perceptions of times past. Hopefully, the viewer is submerged into an unknown world, where people speak different languages – sound is a cornerstone of a strategy of immersion – forcing the viewer to give up some defenses. This seems necessary to me. To reach the viewer differently is my ultimate goal, after making the audience feel and think.



Sunset, our times and Europe

Sunset is a film about a civilization at its crossroads. In the heart of Europe, at the height of progress and technology, without being written in history, the personal story of a young woman becomes the reflection of a process that is in itself, the birth of the 20th century.

A century ago, from the height of its zenith, Europe committed suicide. This suicide remains a mystery until this very day. It is, as if a civilization, at its pinnacle, was already producing the poison that would bring it down. At the core of this movie lies this personal preoccupation.

Sunset is set before World War I in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a seemingly prosperous, multi-national state of a dozen languages and many peoples, with its blooming capitals Vienna and Budapest, the cultural center of the world. And yet, against this flowering backdrop is the reality of the hidden forces about to tear it apart.

As a child, I would listen to the stories of my grandmother who was born in 1914. Her life spanned the century, taken by the turmoil of the European continent, through all totalitarian regimes, genocides, failed revolutions and wars. She was, in a way, Europe herself.

My deep European roots have pushed me to wonder about the age we live in now and the ages of our forefathers, how thin the veneer of civilization can be, and what lies beyond. In our modern, post-nation state world, we seem to forget the deep dynamics of history, and in our boundless love for technology and science, we seem to forget how close to the brink of destruction they can bring us. I believe we live in a world that is not that far from the one before the Great War of 1914. A world utterly blind to the forces of destruction it feeds at its core. We are not far from the processes that took place in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. For us, history is now, and in Central Europe.



Subjectivity, civilization and cinema

As a filmmaker, I am drawn to discovering how the human soul (subjectivity), and the collective soul of civilization can meet. In imagining *Sunset*, I tried to find the junction between the story of an individual and the state of the world in which the heroine exists. Today's filmmaking practice is to orient viewers and reassure them continuously – but I've always wanted to find new ways to present audiences with a subjective experience of uncertainty and fragility, the underlying current of our very human condition. As in *Son of Saul*, I do not want to present the audience with a conventional period piece. I thought we could achieve more by giving a glimpse of a world up close and not try to fully uncover it. The imagination of the viewer would do the rest.

I find the standardization of current cinema and television suspicious and I remain resolved to find new ways of representing images and stories, not relying on already over-demonstrating and over-contextualizing methods. This means that one has to take risks.

I feel the experience audiences have while watching today's movies is increasingly unsatisfactory, reduced to an industrialized language for easier understanding, ignoring the viewer's journey. Movies, today, refuse to trust the audience. I directed *Sunset* in a manner that may seem strange to someone who fully embraces today's filmmaking practices. I wanted to reconnect the audience with the adventurous essence of motion pictures.

"Less is more" - our visual approach relied on an organic spatial strategy thanks to an ever-moving camera. As we dive into the world of a seemingly naive and innocent character, hopefully, we discover everything with her in an organic way. A volatile subjective flow of information turns the story of a young girl into a darker tale of decay.

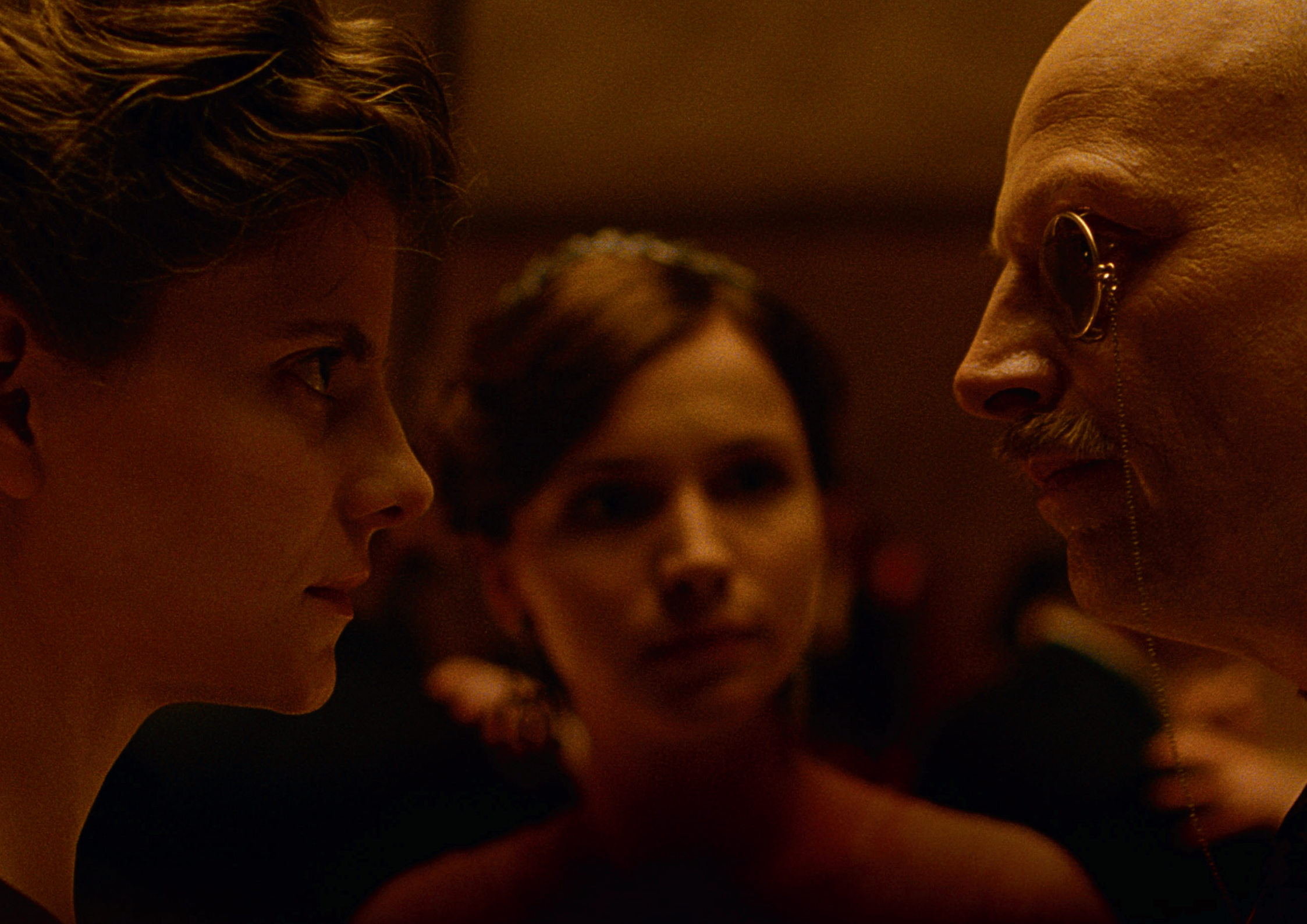
In a cinematic world relying less and less on real sets, and more and more on computers and visual effects, I wanted to take a stance that



cinema has everything to do with the magic of physics, optics and chemicals. It is a trick of perception, of light and darkness. We therefore relied on built sets in a real city – Budapest, the use of photochemically exposed and developed film and real effects on set. We used complicated, choreographed long scenes to bring *Sunset* into the physical world, one that the audience can believe in.

This film is my personal testimony to the love of cinema, almost a century after the hopefulness of *Sunrise* by Murnau – a movie to which we pay homage. I hope that *Sunset* carries in itself something of the interrogations embodied by Murnau's film.

It seems to me that we are again at the dawn of a new cinematic era, but one that is less passionate. We might be now, again, at crossroads, and the temptation could take us down a path on which the grammar of filmmaking is more unquestionable and rigid than ever, with an unconditional love for digital technologies and clear-cut dramaturgy, at the risk of losing the magic and the unrelenting inventiveness of cinema.





LÁSZLÓ NEMES

László Nemes was born in February 18, 1977 in Budapest, Hungary. After studying History, International Relations and Screenwriting in Paris, he worked as an assistant director in France and Hungary on short and feature films. He assisted Béla Tarr on *The Man From London*, and subsequently studied film directing at New York University. His shorts have been awarded thirty prizes in more than 100 international film festivals. His first feature, *Son of Saul*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2015, was awarded the Grand Prix, and later received both the Golden Globe and the Academy Award for Best foreign language film in 2016. *Sunset* is his second feature film.



FEATURE FILMS

2018 - *Sunset (Napszállta)* - writer, director
2015 - *Son of Saul (Saul fia)* - writer, director

SHORT FILMS

2010 - *The Gentleman Takes His Leave (Az úr elköszön)* - writer, director
2008 - *The Counterpart* - writer, director
2007 - *With a Little Patience (Türelem)* - writer, director

JULI JAKAB

Juli Jakab was born in 1988. Graduated in scriptwriting at the University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest (Hungary) in 2013. Started acting during her studies and has played in short and feature films ever since.

Selected Filmography

2018 - *Sunset (Napszállta)* by László Nemes

2015 - *Son of Saul (Saul fia)* by László Nemes

2014 - *For Some Inexplicable Reason (VAN valami furcsa és megmagyarázhatatlan)*
by Gábor Reisz

VLAD IVANOV

Before playing Oszkar Brill in *Sunset*, the Romanian Vlad Ivanov starred in Balint Kenyeres' Hungarian film *Hier*. In 2016, he featured in three films selected in Cannes: *Toni Erdmann* by Maren Ade, *Graduation (Bacalaureat)* by Cristi Mungiu and *Dogs (Câini)* by Bogdan Mirica. Winner of the LA Critics Award for his brilliant portrayal of abortionist Dr. Bebe in *4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days (4 luni, 3 saptamâni si 2 zile)*, Vlad Ivanov's versatility has established him as one of Europe's great character actors. As well as his film work, Vlad Ivanov is an accomplished stage actor and has received many domestic awards in Romania for his work in both stage and screen.

Selected Filmography

2018 - *Sunset (Napszállta)* by László Nemes

2017 - *One Step Behind the Seraphim (Un pas în urma serafimilor)* by Daniel Sandu

Romanian Gopo Award Winner – Best Actor

2016 - *Dogs (Câini)* by Bogdan Mirica

2018 Romanian Gopo Award Winner – Best Supporting Actor

Graduation (Bacalaureat) by Cristian Mungiu

Toni Erdmann by Maren Ade

True Crimes by Alexandros Avranas

2015 - *One Floor Below (Un etaj mai jos)* by Radu Muntean

2013 - *Child's Pose (Pozitia copilului)* by Călin Peter Netzer

2014 Romanian Gopo Award Winner - Best Supporting Actor

Snowpiercer by Bong Joon Ho

2010 - *Principles of Life (Principii de viata)* by Constantin Popescu

2009 - *Police, Adjective (Politist, adjective)* by Corneliu Porumboiu

2010 Romanian Gopo Award Winner – Best Supporting Actor

The Concert (Concertul) by Radu Mihaileanu

2007 - *4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days (4 luni, 3 saptamâni si 2 zile)* by Cristian Mungiu

2007 LAFCA Award Winner – Best Supporting Actor

2008 Romanian Gopo Award Winner – Best Supporting Actor





CAST

Juli Jakab	.....	Irisz Leiter
Vlad Ivanov	.....	Oszkár Brill
Evelin Dobos	.....	Zelma
Marcin Czarnik	.....	Sándor
Judit Bárdos	.....	Szeréna
Benjamin Dino	.....	Andor
Balázs Czukor	.....	Nulla
Christian Harting	.....	Otto von Koenig
Levente Molnár	.....	Gáspár
Julia Jakubowska	.....	Countess Rédey
Dorottya Moldován	.....	Lili
Sándor Zsótér	.....	Dr. Herz
Móni Balsai	.....	Mrs. Müller
Zsolt Nagy	.....	Szilágyi
Péter Fancsikai	.....	Róbert
Enrique Keil	.....	Man with monocle
Tom Pilath	.....	Prince
Susanne Wuest	.....	Princess

CREDITS

Director	László Nemes
Screenwriters	László Nemes Clara Royer Matthieu Taponier
Cinematographer	Mátyás Erdély
Set Designer	László Rajk
Film Editor	Matthieu Taponier
Sound	Tamás Zányi
Music	László Melis
Production	Laokoon Filmgroup
Co-Production	Playtime Production
Producers	Gábor Sipos, Gábor Rajna
Co-producers	François Yon, Nicolas Brigaud-Robert, Valéry Guibal
With the support of	Hungarian National Film Fund Hungarian Film Incentive Eurimages Aide aux Cinémas du Monde Centre National du Cinéma et de L'Image Animée Institut Français Indéfilms 6 TorinoFilmLab Creative Europe MEDIA
Nationality	Hungary, France
Year of production	2018
Length	142'
Hungarian Distributor	Mozinet
Italian Distributor	Movies Inspired
International Sales	Playtime

PLAYTIME