

OFFICIAL SELECTION  
**hotdocs**  
2023 OUTSPOKEN. OUTSTANDING.

# A HAPPY MAN

/ ŠŤASTNÝ ČLOVEK /

BY SOŇA G. LUTEROVÁ

**AZY** Production



**HBOMAX**

TENTO FILM FINANČNE PODPORIL  
**AVF** AUDIO  
VIZUÁLNY  
FOND

 AGORA  
DOCS IN PROGRESS

**F+** FEBIOFEST

dok.incubator







#### TAGLINE

Tell me how you feel.

#### LOGLINE

Marvin has to change.

A graphic designer by day and an erotica author by night, Marvin is starting his gender transition. Will his husband accept him?

#### GENRE

An intimate documentary profile.

#### TAGS

Family life, Human rights, LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA+, Society, Tolerance and Social Inclusion, Vulnerable populations.

#### WORLD PREMIERE

Hot Docs Festival, **April 27 – May 7, 2023**

This film was produced with the financial support of AVF



This film was produced with the support of the workshop

**dok.incubator**

## KEY CREW

Writer/Director [ **Soňa G. Lutherová** ]

Producers [ **Maroš Hečko, Peter Veverka** / Azyl Production ]

Co-Producers [ **Filip Čermák** / Company F ]

[ **Hanka Kastelicová, Tereza Keilová, Tereza Polachová** / HBO MAX ]

Director of Photography [ **Norbert Hudec** ]

Production Sound Mixer [ **Michal Stašák** ]

Editor [ **Peter Harum** ]

Music Composer [ **Matej Gyárfáš** ]

Dramaturgy [ **Maja Hriešik** ]

## TECHNICAL DATA

Format [ **4K, DCP / 1.85:1 / Color / 5.1** ]

Length [ **80 min 42sec** ]

Original language [ **Czech, Slovak, English, Swedish** ]

Locations [ **Sweden, Czech Republic** ]

## KEY ART/PHOTS:

[PHOTOS](#)

[TRAILER](#)

[SCREENER](#)

password: Hotdocs2023







A Happy Man presents an intimate story of a transgender man and his family, prompting viewers to contemplate universal existential bonds. The film explores the concept of a fulfilling existence.

It invites viewers to understand and empathize with the unique challenges individuals and families face navigating pivotal moments in their lives.

# SYNOPSIS

A creative writer and a psychiatrist move to Sweden from the Czech Republic to raise their young family, but adjusting to their new lives is made more complex as one begins the process of gender transition.

# THE STORY

Sometimes, life takes different turns than we expected and challenges us to reconsider what is “normal” and worthwhile.

A Happy man is a documentary about a family changing.

This story begins with Marvin - a parent, graphic designer, and amateur writer - recalling his recent past as a trans man. He was perceived as an average Czech middle class woman, living in Swedish Gothenburg, in a suburban house, with a Slovak husband and two children. Life should have been almost predictable. However, Marvin’s hobby of fiction writing led him to the field of erotic gay male romance, and offered him some clarity. At the same time, his personal quest began. To be true to himself, he felt the need to become himself, Marvin, a man.

*“The oppressive feeling of being in the wrong package is so intense and painful that I can’t stand it. I think I could survive it, but I would hate that kind of life. I would really hate it. I would survive for the kids if I had to. But I would hate it.” (Marvin)*

Marvin’s decision to transition might jeopardize his family as he knows it. His husband Ivan, who suddenly became part of a “rainbow family,” has been very understanding, but he must find his place in the chain of events: as the partner, father, and a cisgender heterosexual man, while keeping their family afloat.

*“I do not know what will happen. I do not have a plan. I just believe that if a situation starts to be a problem for us, we will be able to talk about it and somehow deal with it through a compromise.” (Ivan)*

And yet everything seems ordinary, even under these untraditional circumstances. While following the interactions between Marvin and Ivan, we are shedding light on the core of marriage and partnership in relation to sexuality and parenthood.

Marvin and Ivan have been living in Sweden for over ten years. Today, they believe Swedish society will be open to Marvin’s path, but gender transition is a lengthy and complicated legal and medical process. It might take several years, and he must prove to the authorities that his intentions are “serious enough”.

The struggles transgender people deal with in society shape the lives of the protagonists in A Happy Man. But the medical part of Marvin’s journey merely serves as background for the main storyline. Throughout his transition, Marvin reshapes his appearance, attitude, relationships and partnership. In this sense, everything around him, his world, is changing along with him, slowly but surely. Marvin’s husband Ivan is equally important as we observe his attitude and try to understand his position. In the end, it is a story of one particular family and a glimpse into their small world.



# THE STORYTELLING

The shifts in the family dynamics are delicate yet absolute. We follow Marvin and Ivan in everyday situations: the care for their children, their work life, free time, and socializing with friends, immersing the audience in their perspectives and feelings.

We collected the film footage over three years, from spring 2019 to spring 2022. The passing of time is also captured through selfie videos, which Marvin shot spontaneously on various occasions. They allowed him to share his perspective in his own way, when he felt the need to do so (for example, following his top surgery). We also incorporate personal photographs from the family archive.

To gain a deeper understanding of Marvin's perception, we include the excerpts from his books in the storytelling in the form of third person narrations. Sometimes they explain or add to what is hidden. On other occasions, they are funny commentaries or contradictions to what is captured by the camera. In the world of his imagination, Marvin can act freely and without any constraints. The audience can enter his thoughts and those mysterious areas of the brain that one can express only through art.

The key challenge was to combine these heterogeneous elements into a unified visual whole. The film's music was composed to add a specific dimension to the storytelling.





# OUR PROTAGONISTS

Marvin Horvat, the main protagonist, faces life's challenges and problems head-on. On the inside, he is often torn by fear and doubt; on the outside, he shows mostly defiance. Marvin is agile, always looking ahead. In addition caring for his two small children, he has a successful career as a graphic designer in Sweden.

Throughout the film, we follow Marvin as he takes his hobby of writing to the next level and establishes himself as a successful author. At first glance, his queer erotic romances are more lighthearted than serious and, at the same time, witty and thought-provoking.

In relation to his transition, Marvin's biggest fear is that it might negatively influence his children and marriage.

Marvin's husband, Ivan, is a psychiatrist and the head of the department in a hospital in Gothenburg. He supports Marvin throughout his search for himself. At the beginning of the film, Ivan does not know what to expect and wants to coolly take things in stride. As the story progresses, Ivan must face things head-on.

The couple's daughter and son have just started school and kindergarten, respectively. They have reacted to Marvin's change without

prejudice; from their perspective, nothing has changed much. The parent-child relationship is an essential element of the story, and much of the tension, dilemmas, and decisions evolve around them.

*"I have told her (daughter) that I was born a girl, but I feel like a boy in my head. And she told me: 'Oh, so dad has short hair, Kuba (young brother) has short hair, and you also have short hair. But I want my hair to be long!' Of course, you can grow your hair as you like." (Marvin)*

We feature the Horvats' children in the film, but to protect their privacy, we avoid showing their faces. The goal is for the audience to "feel" their presence (to hear their voices, to see their scattered toys) but only partly see them (hands, feet), from afar or out of focus. This approach is an intentional poetic feature of visual storytelling.

The family's situation is influenced by the reactions of their close relatives. Marvin's parents are living in the Czech Republic. In Central Europe, transgender people are still often perceived as oddities. Marvin's parents react accordingly, his father and stepmother with compassion and love, and his mother with fear and rejection.

*"That terrible moment when you realize that your parent does not have compassion for you because she mourns the fictive child she never had." (Marvin)*

According to his mother, Marvin has noticed his male essence "suspiciously" late in life as an adult with two small kids. She claims she is trying to protect him from himself: her "daughter" has, out of the blue, "turned into" someone else. Marvin's mother does not believe it's genuine. In contrast, Marvin's father and stepmother support him unconditionally. His father regrets he wasn't always there for Marvin after the divorce, and now wants to make up for it. Throughout the film, we follow the development of the parent-son relationship.

In the film, we also meet the Horvats' friends, neighbors, and colleagues, who are part of their social circle. They are a diversified group of Czech, Slovak, and Swedish origin.

Marvin's gender transition is a long adventure with an uncertain ending. One thing, however, is clear: many things will change, and the lives of Marvin and his family will never be the same.





# DIRECTOR'S APPROACH

As a filmmaker and a social and visual anthropologist, Soňa G. Lutherová has regularly focussed on the theme of changing identities in her projects.

Soňa met Marvin ten years ago, immediately after he moved to Sweden with Ivan. He came out to her as a transgender man in 2018 and she started to develop the project and to follow the Horvat family with the film crew at the beginning of 2019, when Marvin officially applied for a gender change. By then, he was somewhat anxious and overwhelmed by the situation, yet determined to face all the obstacles ahead.

In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, gender transition is rarely a topic for filmmakers. The media and the broad public see it as controversial, in a politically infused way.

Because of this, Soňa has decided to portray Marvin's "unordinary" life in an "ordinary" way. When we connect to people and their stories, we can empathize and look for parallels in our lives. The film portrays the events in-depth and sensitively. It uncovers things instead of portraying them in an ideological, judgmental, or even scandalous manner.



# CONCLUSION

A Happy Man is an intimate documentary story about a person who discovered his true “self” and must now risk what is most dear to him to live authentically. Should he risk everything in order to be happy? What about those who are close to him? How will their happiness be affected by Marvin’s actions?

A Happy Man is a unique story, and yet an ordinary one. We take the audience on a journey about existential aspects of human lives that concern all of us. What do we value in one another, and what is at the core of the relationships with our loved ones? What makes a good partnership and family?





# IMPACT GOALS

Our global society is saturated with information that isn't always truthful. Misconceptions and misinformation can be challenged by authentic and accurate documentaries, among other avenues. With A Happy Man, our aim is to tell an honest and grounded human story, transparent and without manipulation, a story that, at its core, offers a connection to all of us.

The film tells the story of a non-traditional family dealing with the specific problems connected to the gender transformation of one of the parents. Our main goal is to convey that no matter how unorthodox this situation seems to be at first glance, anyone can relate to these struggles and relationships.

Being human means finding oneself, deciding who you want to be and what you are willing to risk to be true to yourself. Through everyday situations and moments, along with the protagonists' perspectives and decisions, we pose existential questions: What is the basis of our relationships with our loved ones (partner, husband, children, parents)? What ties a family together? How do our choices and actions relate to who we truly are, and what we want to be? In our individual lives, each and every one of us makes these choices, whether they are radical and visible like Marvin's, or more banal and in line with social conventions and expectations. By following the story of Marvin and his family, the audience might reflect on their own lives and the responsibility each one of us has to both our loved ones and ourselves.

This is especially important today, when radical currents in society push us to constrict the way we look at family and suppress ways of living that do not comply with their worldview. Relationships between humans can take on various forms and encompass a wide range of experiences and emotions.

The mutual feeling of connectedness and empathy bonds people, regardless of their ideology or politics. And in this case, to see means to experience and ultimately relate to and understand each other.



**KEY  
CREATIVE  
TEAM**



# SOŇA G. LUTHEROVÁ

WRITER, DIRECTOR - SLOVAKIA

Filmography:

**ZATOPENE (FLOODED)**, SK doc (AH production, RTVS, SFI, 2016, 52 min) (2016)

Soňa is a documentary filmmaker, anthropologist, and writer. She has a PhD. in social anthropology and works as a visual anthropologist at the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. She has authored a number of academic papers, written a children's book and made her directorial debut with the mid-length doc FLOODED in 2017.

FLOODED is an anthropological documentary film about the fates of people connected to one house. The mansion in Parizovce was a family residence, home, property, center of a farmstead, and eventually a historical monument. Some

parts of the building have been preserved and have endured through centuries, others have been flooded by the waters of the Liptovska Mara waterworks. For the descendants of the Stein family, its last owners, the mansion is a memory of the lost past. For museum curators, it's a gem, a phoenix risen from the muddy waters, the pride of the Liptov region. The unusual story of the mansion from Parizovce and its last owners is also a reflection of the social changes in 20th century Slovakia.

[SCREENER](#)

password: parizovce





# MAROŠ HEČKO

PRODUCER - SLOVAKIA

Filmography:

**INVALID** (2023)

**THE WORD** (2022)

**AMNESTY** (2019)

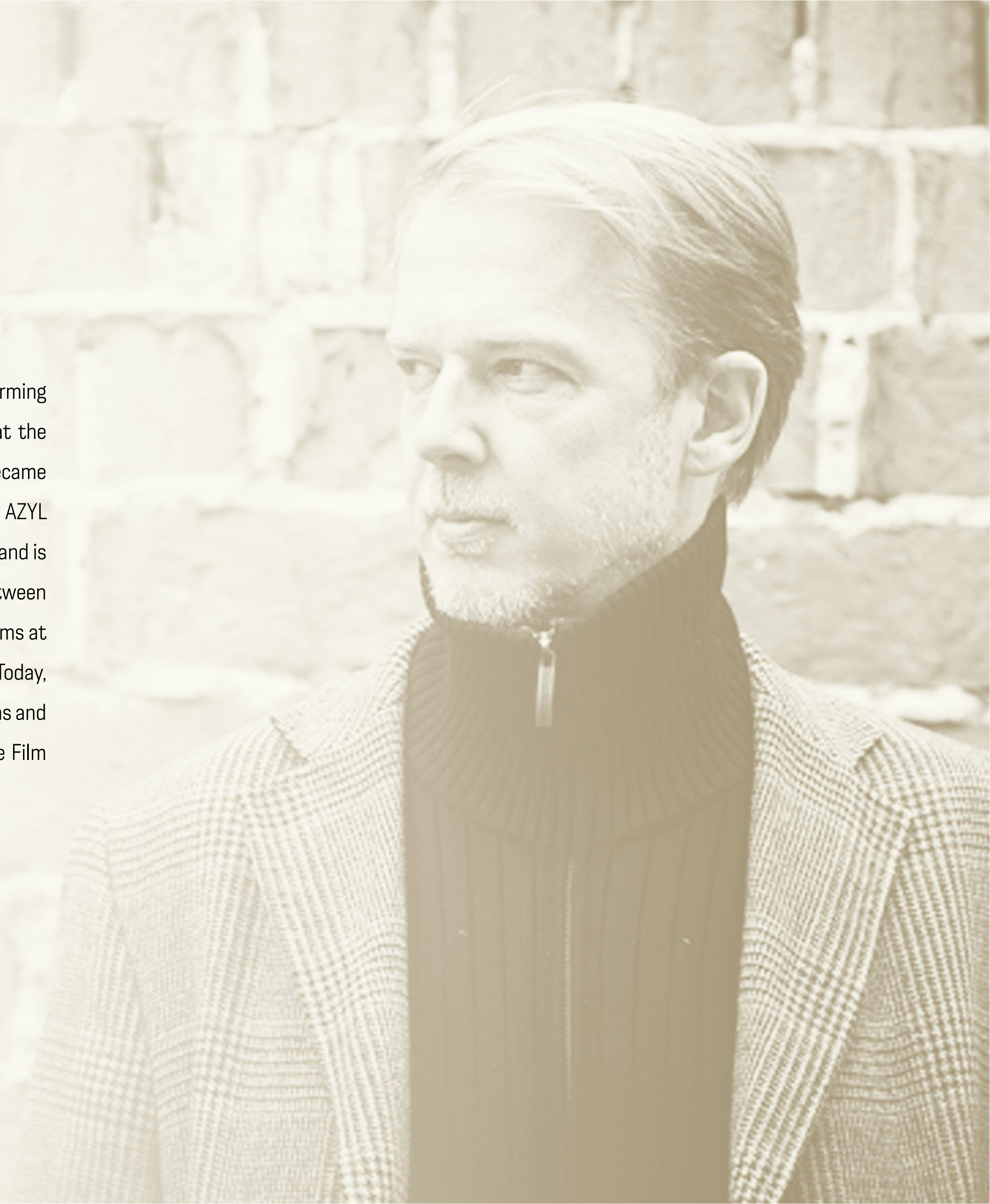
**DOGG** (2017)

**THE CANDIDATE** (2013),

**LET'S SHOOT THE SUNSET** (documentary) (2009)

**SMOG** (50 min) (2008)

Maroš Hečko graduated from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. After completing his Ph.D. studies at the Department of Screenwriting and Dramaturgy, he became fully engaged in film production. Maroš founded the AZYL minute film festival, which has been running for 12 years and is a member of the World Association of Minute Films. Between 2005 and 2012, he produced more than 1,000-minute films at workshops and competitions, which he also organized. Today, he is fully dedicated to writing and producing feature films and lectures on film analysis and creative production at the Film Academy in Banska Bystrica.





# PETER VEVERKA

PRODUCER - SLOVAKIA / US

Filmography:

**INVALID** (2023)

**THE WORD** (2022)

**ONE OF THESE DAYS** (2020)

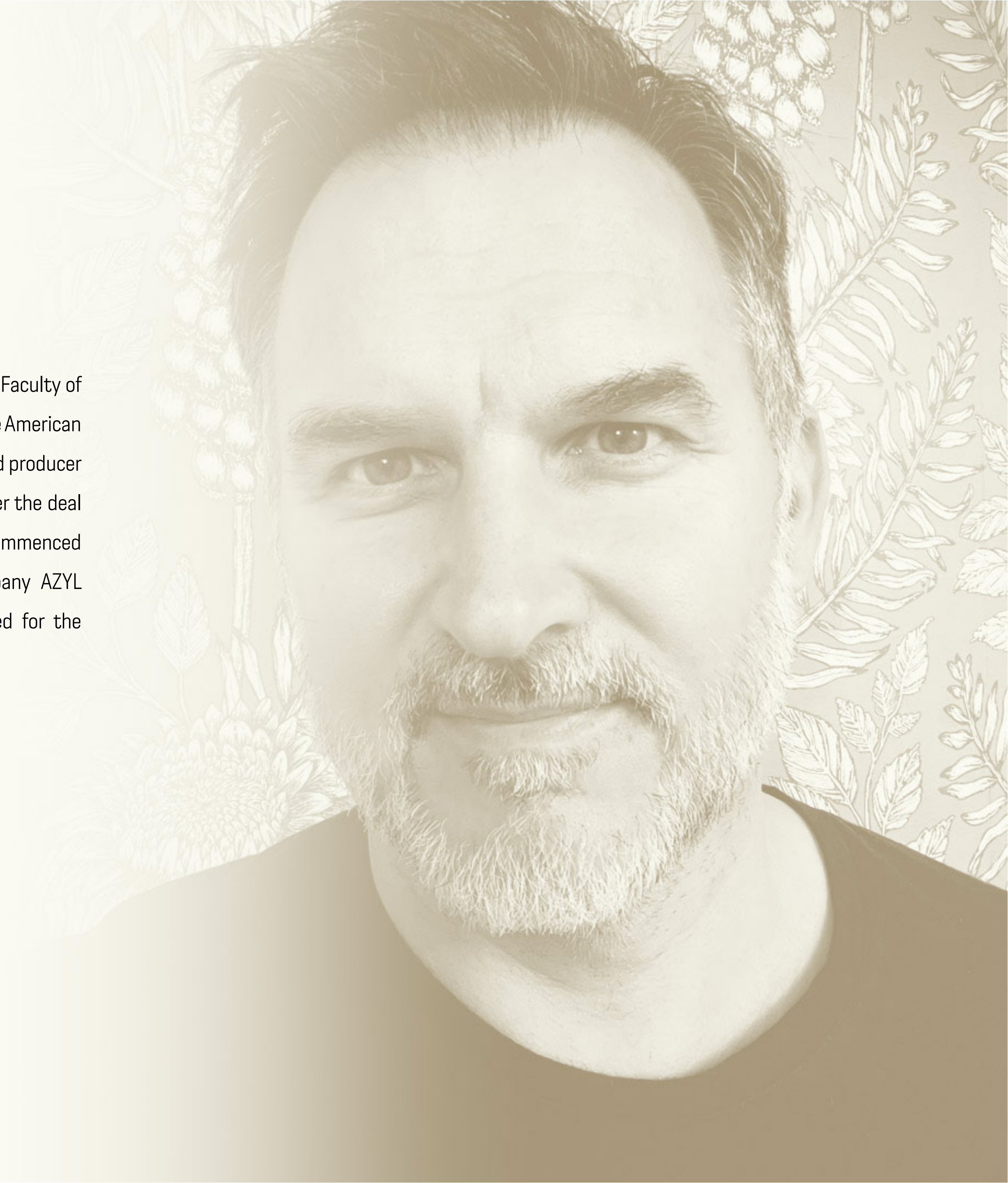
**AMNESTY** (2019)

**I.T.** (2016)

**IT: OKHWAN'S MISSION IMPOSSIBLE** (2016)

**A GOOD DAY TO DIE HARD** (2013)

Peter Veverka graduated from the Film and TV Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and the American Film Institute. He worked as a creative executive and producer for LA-based production company Point Road, under the deal with 20th Century Fox Studios. In 2018, Peter commenced a partnership with the Slovak production company AZYL working on developing European content intended for the global audience.





# FILIP ČERMÁK

CO-PRODUCER - CZECH REPUBLIC

Filmography:

**THE MAGIC QUILL** (2018)

**THE GREEDY TIFFANY** (2015)

**IVAN HARTL'S SNOW FIELD** (2012)

**GENERATION SINGLES** (2011)

**CZECH DREAM** (2004)

Filip Čermák has graduated from the Film and TV Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Since 2003, he has worked as a freelance film producer. He founded the production company named COMPANY F in 2011. He cooperated on tens of TV and film projects, but he most likes to remember these films: Český sen / The Czech Dream (2004), Grandhotel (2006), Chyťte doktora / Catch The Doc (2007), Generace Singles / Generation Singles (2011), Detektiv Down / Detective Downs (2013), Nenasytná Tiffany / The Greedy Tiffany (2015) and Jab Harry Met Sejal (2017).





# WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY

CO-PRODUCER

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