

WAKE ME

A FILM BY MARKO ŠANTIĆ



WORDS FROM THE CURATOR

A brilliant contemporary drama set in urban Slovenia, with an amazing fresh cast of European Shooting Stars.

In this intelligent mix of Sofia Coppola's "Lost in Translation" and Christopher Nolan's "Memento", the protagonist Rok loses his memory and is seemingly turning into a better man. Or will his ultra-radical past take over his personality again?

An amazing cinematic experience which proves the power of images.

— Nikolaj Nikitin, curator of Critics pick at Tallinn Black Nights film festival



Original title: ZBUDI ME
DCP 2K Scope, colour, 1:1.85
Duration: 85 min 33 sec
Language: SLOVENIAN, BOSNIAN
SLOVENIA/CROATIA/SERBIA

Directed by MARKO ŠANTIĆ
Written by MARKO ŠANTIĆ, GORAN VOJNOVIĆ and SARA HRIBAR
Director of photography IVAN ZADRO
Editor VLADIMIR GOJUN
Composer JAN VYSOCKY
Production designer MARCO JURATOVEC
Costume designer TINA BONČA
Makeup artist LIJA IVANČIĆ
Sound designers OGNJEN POPIĆ, ZORAN MAKSIMOVIĆ, JULIJ ZORNIK
Sound recordist GREGA ŠVABIĆ
Line producer LUKA RUS

Starring JURE HENIGMAN, TIMON ŠTURBEJ, NATAŠA BARBARA GRAČNER,
ŽIVA SELAN, JURIJ DREVENŠEK, BENJAMIN KRNETIĆ, TAMARA AVGUŠTIN,
BLAŽ SETNIKAR AND OTHERS.

Producers DANIJEL HOČEVAR and ZALA OPARA
Co-producers JURE BUŠIĆ, DIMČE STOJANOVSKI and STEFAN ORLANDIĆ

A VERTIGO LJUBLJANA production
In co-production with JAKA PRODUKCIJA and LIVING PICTURES
In collaboration with HIPPOCAMPE PRODUCTIONS, FS VIBA FILM and 001

Supported by SLOVENIAN FILM CENTRE, EURIMAGES,
CROATIAN AUDIOVISUAL CENTRE, FILM CENTER SERBIA,
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Developed with the co-financing of CREATIVE EUROPE MEDIA
The project was developed on SOURCES 2 and Nipkow programme V.
Presented on ReAct Workshop
Participated on the international market for film music composition, created by the
festival international du film music and cinema Marseille with the support of Sacem



LOGLINE

Rok is suffering from memory loss, which erased recollection of his recent life. Seeking familiarity, he returns to his hometown, where he learns that his brother is following the same wrong path as him.

SYNOPSIS

Rok awakes in the hospital where he ended up unconscious due to an unfortunate incident. He has no memory of his girlfriend, his job, nor the apartment he lives in. All he remembers is his hometown and the home he shared with his mother and younger brother.

Shortly after returning to his neighbourhood Rok notices that he's no longer welcome. His family and acquaintances behave differently toward him. Slowly, he manages to piece together a mosaic of memories, realizing how problematic his past was. His younger brother is following the same path. For the first time in his life, Rok accepts responsibility; he wants to put an end to the bad family history and prevent it from repeating itself.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In recent years, the world has witnessed historical revisionism – the reinterpretation of history. Younger generations are spending much more time on the Internet, where they acquire incorrect historical facts. It seems that, influenced by this, the image of history that they're creating is completely different from what it once used to be.

Due to memory loss, the film's main character, Rok, doesn't remember his problematic past – and, upon returning to his hometown, he begins uncovering his old "demons". His amnesia caused by a head injury represents today's contemporary individuals who generally know nothing about sharing a common past and who are more easily pushed into hostility towards other cultures and fellow citizens.

This general ignorance of history is something that's affecting us all, and it's exactly what my fourth film is about.

– Marko Šantić



AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

In January 2021, the midst of relatively strict Covid measures, you started filming the film Wake me. In a nutshell, what is it about?

The main character wakes up in a hospital with memory loss and does not remember the past few years of his life. He returns back to his hometown where he slowly gets to know its environment- his old life, his old friends, and the reasons why he left. It is a story of a general amnesia of society, which does not remember its past. Our main characters story personifies a time in which we no longer remember our own history and everything is relativized or revised. The younger generations do not know what was going on in the past, as the Internet has become the only source of information in the digital world that surrounds them.

This is your fourth feature film: how did the idea for the script come about? Three of you are signed under it: were Goran Vojnović and Sara Hribar involved in the development of the script from the beginning, or did they join in later? Was this your first collaboration? What was your writing dynamic like?

Goran joined from the very beginning, while Sara joined about halfway. I started writing this script in 2014, Goran joined in 2015. The process of writing was very long. I have worked with both Goran and Sara before. Goran was the screenwriter of my first short feature film Good luck Nedim, which I worked on in the third year of film academy. He was also the one who helped to guide me further in my interest in film. We worked together on another short film, where I was an assistant. With Sara we co-directed a full-length low budget film Lada Kamenski. The shooting stretched over three years and over this time we not only came together as authors, but also as good friends. It was very important that she came along on this project, not just as a good friend but also as an extraordinary screenwriter and director, who could add that special note which Goran and I might have overlooked at some point.

The focus of the film is the conflict between natives and immigrants, which is treated from a distinctly male perspective. At the center are toxic masculinity and a patriarchal society based on nationalism and hatred of the Other. Even the protagonist of the film is ultimately a part of this mentality, but tries to distance himself from it during the course of the film. Which segment of society did you want to address the most with Rok's character?

The beginning of the scriptwriting process was marked by the time of a big wave of migrants from the East. Masses of people rushed towards Western Europe and passed our homes. It was truly a moment that our generation has never experienced before. When we watched these clips on TV, the idea for a story started to arise. It was the reaction of ordinary people that was the most interesting to me, because when we live in our own bubble we are tolerant and understanding towards others. But when things start feeling threatening, like in the case of migrant crisis, the way people think starts to change. I was very interested in how quickly a common mentality can change within a person. At that time, various negative campaigns started, including hate speech and fake news, which were sort of the beginning of it all. It was interesting for me to observe how a neighbor that you would meet on a daily basis, started expressing political views you would never expect. That is because of the fear of something unknown, of something we see on TV, where fear is being fueled. A lot of fake news fuels the fear of what will happen to us, whether we will continue to exist or not. The film does not go to great extremes, instead we wanted to keep the feeling of an everyday life, while still striking out the horrors of such extreme views. In a case of Wake Me, at a first glance ordinary-looking society gets a different shape once the real attitudes come out. The film is addressing an average person who found oneself in a moment of fear, which changes the persons opinions.

In recent years we have noticed an increasing rise of fascism in Europe, which is why the monologue of Jure Drevenšek shocks us the most. It is full of hatred for no reason, yet it is a deeply rooted prejudice that many people blindly believe in. What inspired this character? Do you think there is an increase of such people in the

world; do you believe that among them there are many people like Rok, who are able to see through their erroneous thinking, to change, to "rehabilitate"?

We started writing in 2014, and it was difficult to stay in a relevant topic for 8 years until 2022. I wanted to make a film that would communicate something to the society we live in. In that time, we were constantly accompanied by the risk of not remaining relevant, by being run over by time, due to the pandemic and other problems. Now the same topic is coming back again as if we are spinning in a circle. There is new rise of petty fascism in Italy and Sweden, carrying a certain spirit of our time. Even when we were filming during the pandemics, all these problems accumulated and brought out frustrations that were accumulating in every person. Everyone should be aware of whether they are a "Damjan" or "Rok". I believe that every person can put an end to their fear and anxiety and not let them develop as it did for the character of Damjan. His character is portrayed by Jurij Drevenšek, and he was Rok's best friend in his previous life. Due to his memory loss, Rok is starting to get to know what his 'friend' is really like. The monologue you mentioned was written by Goran, and we wanted to get the most out of it, which we achieved by improvisation. The actors improvised the scene while me and the DOP Ivan Zadro filmed them. Drevenšek and Henigman improvised this scene for 40 minutes, and so the monologue burst out of Drevenšek. All the recorded scenes were then transcribed and edited. That's how we ended up with what you can see in the movie. The inspiration probably came out of Jurij's real life situations and experiences.

The film has an extremely strong cast - Jure Henigman, Timon Šturbej, Živa Selan, Jurij Drevenšek, Nataša Barbara Gračner ... How did you choose the actors?

When we started auditioning for the main male and female roles we called about 20 actors and actresses, whom we tried out for the characters of Rok and Rina, and in the second round, we somehow figured out who those two main actors will be. Živa Selan was Rina and Jure Henigman was Rok. Based on this audition we also found Timon Šturbej for the role of the brother Jure, whom I always wanted to work with. As for Nataša Barbara Gračner, it was already the third film that

we had worked on together, including a short and two feature-length films. She is an exceptional actress and coworker who always manages to elevate her role. Interestingly, I always called her for the role of the mother. She has played three different mothers and she has managed to do something unique for each one of them. It's a real pleasure to work with her. I saw Jurij Drevenšek in Damjan Kozole's film *Half-sister*, where I saw he can play roles with a certain note of darkness in them, despite being a funny guy. It was clear to me that he was suitable for the character of Damjan, as he is able to get something more out of the character. Many other actors are of a younger generation. I know them from various theatre plays, movies or the academy, and it was a great pleasure working with them. I didn't know all of them before, but I think they got along well with each other. The time of our principal photography was in a difficult

period for the Slovenian film. Due to the pandemic, the film center was blocked and we didn't know when we would shoot. During that time, when we were waiting from week to week to get a green light to start filming, we would simply meet with actors and rehearse. In this time we really got to know each other well, relationships of the characters matured and characters got under the actors' skins.

Rok's younger brother Jure manages to get into the same bad company Rok was once a part of. How would you explain the character of Jure; the psychology of his decision to follow in his brother's footsteps, which have already been proven to be bad and lead to trouble?

The role of the younger brother is very important. He is part of a generation that has a distorted picture of history. He is a representative of a generation that does not

know much and is influenced by the Internet. Jure has created his own image of the world and it reflects an ignorance that I think is very present in today's society. He reads little and follows ever-changing digital content. He easily finds himself in an environment where he creates a false image of history for himself. If he were asked certain historical questions, he probably wouldn't know how to answer them, or would even give a wrong answer convinced he is right. At one point during the rehearsals, I was considering to include a scene where the mother and the two sons would have such a historical debate, through which the audience could see a generation which is convinced of the wrong, not distinguishing fact from fiction. He is a representative of such a generation which is why it is very important that the character of the older brother Rok tries to set him on the right track, to let him know that the opinions he hears and creates are



wrong. There is simply no denying that some facts are true and others are false.

What about Rok's mother Nevenka? Her character seems to be caught in a difficult dilemma. If she wants to keep her sons by her side, they are doomed to a problematic society; if she wants to save them from involvement in the local gang, she will have to stay alone in Jesenice.

I somehow see gen-y parents as a generation whose ideals dissipated at some point. Who knows, maybe we will be the same at their age. Perhaps at a young age they still hoped to have done something good for the world, but then, at some point, it became clear to them that reality is much harsher. Their generation did not make the world a better place, it rather lead it towards a different direction from what they expected. The character of the mother is caught as an observer of her own small world. Her sons went down the wrong path, she raised them on her own and there was clearly something missing in their education. Things have gone wrong it is hard for her to admit her wrongs. She just wants to move on. She worries, but pushes her emotions aside, a mechanism which she developed especially in the case of her older son, Rok. She probably blames herself for the fact that her two sons are criminals and that she didn't manage to get them to achieve more in life. To me, that is her main point. To answer the question of whether she is a tragic character or not - I believe that when the pain related to her sons passes, she lives contently in her micro world - between her apartment and the grocery store.

Some members of the Islamic community appear in the film. Among them are those who try to be as inconspicuous as possible to avoid the xenophobic outbursts of the locals, while the character of Benjamin Krnetić represents his space more sovereignly and does not allow himself to be intimidated. Were their characters inspired by real people? There are also a few film references, such as Grbavica: The land of my dreams, The Long Vacation...

Goran especially stood out in this part of the scriptwriting. He knew such movies very well. He is the one who initiated the scene of watching and talking about films, which proved really important. Mentioned films - Grbavica: The land of my dreams (2006), dir. Jasmila Žbanić and

The Long Vacation (Dolge počitnice, 2012), dir. Damjan Kozole are the films that appear in the cultural center. Both films are extraordinary and they somehow merged with our film, they supported its sub-context.

Benjamin Krnetić acted an extraordinary role for which he found inspiration in his private life. In addition to him, Tamara Avguštin and Blaž Setnikar also acted in the cultural center. It was a great compliment to the actor, when a friend of mine saw Blaž in the film and asked where he found that Bosnian actor. He didn't recognize him at all.

The story was not intentionally written for Jesenice, but when we were looking for a suitable environment for it, I really liked it. We had extraordinary collaborators there, Gašper Stojc and Armin Čulić helped us understand its environment and combine it even further with the film.

The mayor and the whole community were very kind and helpful, which is why I would like to take the opportunity to thank them. At the time I was preoccupied with the production of the film and I didn't managed to. So thank you people of Jesenice for helping us with the realization of our film and for welcoming us so warmly.

Perhaps a word about the visual aspect of the film. The camera is mostly handheld, capturing an interesting perspective of life in Jesenice: an industrial environment surrounded by mountains that suggest confinement. How did you and the DOP create this visual language?

The space and scenography definitely contributed something to the film. The surrounding hills created a kind of enclosure of a post-industrial environment. Jesenice undoubtedly enhanced our story and gave it its own stamp, even though they were not originally intended for the film.

You yourself come from Croatia, from Split. Did this perspective influence your screenwriting process in any way? Can we also find elements of your own experiences in the film?

I have been in Slovenia for 20 years and after about 15 years I realized that this is the place where I have lived the longest. I feel more at home in Slovenia as I do where I was born. That is why I feel I had the right to express something about its society. When I was still studying, I

saw everything as positive in comparison to my previous environment. Now, after 20 years, I have developed a basic distance. I have never felt like a foreigner here, Slovenia always felt like home. I thought it was important to hold up a mirror to society, to create a dialogue and provoke thoughts about where we are going and where will we arrive. There is nothing autobiographical in the movie, because a story with different actors could also take place in Split. In that case it would not be about the relationship between Bosnians and Slovenes but between Croats and someone else instead.

In the film, it is vaguely suggested that Rok's partner Rina is also a southerner, but she comes from a completely different world as he and his company do. How does she experience this story?

I watched many films on that theme and they all have similar dramaturgical patterns, including endings. She finds herself in a difficult situation, because the man she loves, doesn't remember anything. She wants to help him. The problem is that he doesn't want her help. At the beginning of the scriptwriting, we were asking ourselves which direction to take, and we decided on the brother's perspective since Rina is defeated in the relation to Rok. All she is left with is to wait in patience. She tries to help him remember things, but since he doesn't want to, she tries to make him fall in love with her again. This was the thread that we then carried forward.

While doing the castings, we didn't know how two actors would "click" together, which is crucial when it comes to characters in an intimate relationship. I was very happy that Živa Selan and Jure Henigman clicked since I really wanted to work with Živa. She appeared in one of my films, but only as an extra, as a nun eating ice cream. We unfortunately had to cut out that scene. We finally had time for serious work on Wake Me. A funny story is, that the character of Rina drives a car in the film, although Živa didn't have a driving licence before the production. She does now. Regardless, she drove very severe. A good actor will always make it look like they know what they are doing. Živa was truly exceptional in this regard.

In the film, you suggest that it is impossible to get out of a bad society without serious and radical consequences.

I found it interesting to make a film in which the viewer could have his own opinion and come to his own conclusion. If each viewer derives from himself, there can be several interpretations of what the past was like and what the future will be like. The film allows the viewer to think. It doesn't lead him by the hand through the story, but allows him to think and form his own point of view instead.

How do you think the film will be received in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia? How do you think the film will appeal to other European countries?

This is a very difficult question. I don't know, I guess it will depend on the political climate of a certain territory. If it will be watched in Italy by people influenced by the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, they will probably not be the most sympathetic to the film's topic. I think it is really a matter of the time when the film will be shown. As for

that pesky problem of intolerance, it is merely disguised in different situations with different actors, it is a universal thread that can be recognizable in each country. Everyone can adopt this pattern and project it onto their own environment.

The film Wake Me is starting its journey at festivals in the following months. As a director, how do you experience this moment when the film takes on a life of its own and you have the opportunity to present it to foreign audiences?

Since we worked on the film for 8 years, I never want it to end. It is difficult to finish the project after such a long time and admit to yourself that it is over now. We've come a long way with the script, and we are satisfied and we like it, although I wouldn't complain if the process would have been a bit shorter. Once the film is finished,

the director has to let it go and that's it. The film then creates its own path and there is nothing more I can do.

Is there a new project, script, idea for the next film in development?

Due to postponed post-production deadlines, we had a certain amount of time for the ideas to mature and to think about other projects. There are already some drafts of the scripts that I'm looking forward to. We might shoot a documentary in Split next year, so there will be something going on. I am looking forward to taking the next step.



ACCOMPANYING TEXT

You are what your memory tells you. For centuries and millennia, the history of philosophy and art has been using and emphasizing the importance of memory. Winners would use a similar method to their advantage. Religious winners would erase past religious holidays and establish new ones; warlords would destroy monuments and symbols of their predecessors until someone would destroy their monuments as well; and, as was the case in Slovenia for the past decades – the authorities would try to eliminate the monuments of past struggles and achievements, to erase and alter our collective memory.

The film similarly tackles memory. **Blade Runner** (1982, dir. Ridley Scott) warned us that all our memories could be just a lie, an illusion, an electronic implant in our replicant robot framework where robots dream they are human. **Memento** (2000, dir. Christopher Nolan) warned us how dangerous memory loss is and how anyone who loses or is in the process of losing memory can be manipulated by anyone, especially by people with malicious intentions. They are metaphors for human history: we don't know who we are if we can't rely on our memory. Without it, we are merely puppets in the hands of manipulative people.

Wake Me continues the tradition of pointing out the importance of memory using a micro-story of an individual. However, it gives us a broader understanding, a warning to the community, the nation or even the continent: a warning against the many dark hidden parts of our memory, many of which would be more convenient to forget. Without memory and the awareness of who we used to be and what we have done, we cannot tackle the future. We will continue to repeat old mistakes, which will lead us to horrifying realizations of who we were but will also help us decide what and who we want to be. By memory, we can recall our past, define our present, and help us step into the future.

The instrument for remembering the past is crucial in creating a (better) future. Wake me up from the past in order to move towards the future.

— Marko Milosavljević,
Head of Communication Department, University of Ljubljana

CURRICULUM VITAE

Marko Šantić is a Croatian-born, and Slovenian-based film director and screenwriter. His short feature film *Good Luck Nedim* (2006) received several international awards, among others *Heart of Sarajevo* for the Best short film, *Tribeca FF Student Visionary Award* and *EFA nomination* in the short film category.

Šantić's previous feature-length works includes a TV feature *Seduce Me* (2013), which was internationally premiered at *29th Warsaw Film Festival*, where he received *Special Mention* in 1-2 competition. The film was also Slovenian submission for the *87th Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film* in 2014.

With Sara Hribar, who is one of co-writers of *Wake me*, Šantić co-directed a feature film *Lada Kamenski* (2018), which had an international premiere on *Montreal Film Festival* and has received 11 awards.

Wake Me (2022) is Šantić's fourth film and his first solo cinema feature.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

Wake Me, feature film (2022)
Marko, short feature (2021)
Lada Kamenski, feature film (2018)
Together, TV feature (2018)
Blue Peter, short feature (2017)
Moderne Kunst, short feature (2017)
Seduce Me, TV feature (2013)
Nothing Personal, short feature (2009)
The Hole, short feature (2006)
Good luck Nedim, short feature (2006)



PRODUCTION COMPANIES

VERTIGO is a Ljubljana (Slovenia)-based production company with a distinctive track Record and extensive working experience on international co-productions and narrow budget films.

They produced more than 40 feature films, as well as more than 20 documentaries and 50 short films and TV productions, incl. the award-winning films such as **THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD** by Teona Mitevska (2022, La Biennale Orizzonti competition, Toronto IFF Competition), **DISAPPEARANCE** by Andrina Mračnikar (2022, Graz Diagonale FF 2022: Audience Award), **SMALL BODY** by Laura Samani (2021, Cannes World Premiere – Critics' Week in Competition, TIFF – Contemporary World Cinema, BFI London Film Festival – Special Commendation), **RECONCILIATION** by Marija Zidar (2021, CPH:DOX, Sarajevo FF, IDFA), **OTAC / FATHER** (2020, Berlinale Panorama: Audience Award and Ecumenical Prize) and **CIRCLES** (2013, Sundance FF World Cinema Competition's Jury Prize), both directed by Srđan Golubović, **GOD EXISTS, HER NAME IS PETRUNYA** (2019, Berlinale Competition: Ecumenical Award and Guild Prize) by Teona Mitevska, **HALF-SISTER** (2019, Karlovy Vary IFF Main Competition), **NIGHTLIFE** (2016, Karlovy Vary IFF's Best Director Award), **SLOVENIAN GIRL** (2009, Toronto IFF) and **SPARE PARTS** (2003, Berlinale Competition), all directed by Damjan Kozole, **AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF AN IRON PICKER** (2013, 2 Berlinale Silver Bears) by Danis Tanović, **ALEXANDRIANS** (2011, Trieste Film Festival Best Documentary) by Metod Pevec and **BREAD AND MILK** (2001, Venice FF's Lion of the Future Award) by Jan Cvitkovič.



PRODUCTION COMPANIES

JAKA PRODUKCIJA is a Zagreb, Croatia based production company established in 2009. Since then, the company has diversified in several directions: production of fiction, documentary, and animation films and series. Their films were selected for many international film festivals and have received numerous international awards. In the last period, special attention is given to co-production and animation. They offer complete service from project development to post-production and have extensive experience in the executive production of local projects and in filming international productions in Croatia.

Founded in 2002, **LIVING PICTURES** is a production, postproduction, and digital camera rental company in Serbia. They coproduced *Wake Me* (2022), directed by Marko Šantić, *Revolt* (2019), directed by Aleksandar Rajković, an omnibus *Skopje Remixed* (2012), directed by Jane Altiparmakov, Ognjen Dimitrovski and Siniša Evtimov, as well as numerous other feature films, short films, documentaries and television projects for major tv networks. Founder and owner is Dimče Stojanovski, member of UFUS (Association of Film Artists of Serbia) with a status of outstanding artist and honourable member of SAS (Serbian Society of Cinematographers). He is also an international award-winning filmmaker, and he works as a director, director of photography and producer for more than thirty years.



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