



OFFICIAL OSCAR®  
ENTRY FOR FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE FILM - BELARUS



Karlovy Vary  
International Film Festival  
East of West - Competition



ODESSA  
INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
GRAND PRIX



WINDOW  
TO EUROPE  
XXVI RUSSIAN FILM FESTIVAL  
VIBOKO 2018  
RUSSIAN CRITICS AWARD  
BEST COPRODUCTION AWARD



BFI LONDON  
FILM FESTIVAL  
OFFICIAL SELECTION  
2018

# CRYSTAL SWAN

ХРУСТАЛЬ  A FILM BY DARYA ZHUK



# CRYSTAL SWAN

ХРУСТАЛЬ  A FILM BY DARYA ZHUK

WORLD SALES :

**LOCO**  
FILMS

42 rue Sedaine, 75011 Paris  
[florencia.gil@loco-films.com](mailto:florencia.gil@loco-films.com)  
[www.loco-films.com](http://www.loco-films.com)

US AWARDS PUBLICIST :

**MEDIAPLAN PR**  
FILM + FESTIVAL PUBLICITY ●●●

+1 310-260-2800  
[tatiana@mediaplanpr.com](mailto:tatiana@mediaplanpr.com)  
[shelby@mediaplanpr.com](mailto:shelby@mediaplanpr.com)  
[www.mediaplanpr.com](http://www.mediaplanpr.com)

# CRYSTAL SWAN

ХРУСТАЛЬ  A FILM BY DARYA ZHUK

In 1990s Belarus, a wanderlust young DJ is derailed by a typo in a forged US Visa application, forcing her to a backwater factory town where she is determined to fake her way to the American dream.

Belarus | Germany | USA | Russia | 2018 | 93 min



## Synopsis

In post-Soviet Belarus, unemployed raver Velya dreams of emigrating to the U.S. After purchasing blank letterhead and forging proof of employment to win a much coveted visa, her dream appears within reach... Until Velya realizes the American consulate plans to call the fake phone number on her application to confirm her employment.

Velya's only solution is to endure a week in a small factory town to convince the authorities of her supposed job. She locates the cramped Soviet apartment on the other end of the line, overrun by a family preparing for the wedding of their son.

The imperious mother refuses to lie for her, but Velya negotiates a solution: she can answer the phone during business hours as if she works at the factory.

But Velya's presence soon upends both the family's and the town's order, with potentially disastrous consequences for all.

CRYSTAL SWAN  
ХРУСТАЛЬ  A FILM BY DARYA ZHUK



## Production notes

The film is a production of Demarsh-Film (Belarus) in association with Fusion Features (US), Unfound Content (US), Vice Films (US), Inspiration Films (Russia), Crystal Goose (US). The film was made in association with BelarusFilm (Belarus), Nashe Kino (Belarus).

The film has been supported by grants from New York State Council for the Arts (US), Hessen Film Fund (Germany), Tribeca Film Institute (USA).

Alina Nasibullina stars as Velya. She previously appeared in "How Victor the Garlic took Alexei the Stud to the Nursing Home," which won the East of West Competition at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2017.

The film was lensed by an award winning Brazilian DP Carolina Costa (*They, Flower, The Chosen Ones*).

The script was written by a recognized Russian poet, filmmaker and screenwriter Helga Landauer (Olshvang); Darya Zhuk co-wrote the script.

Crystal Swan premiered at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival where it opened "East of the West" competition in July 2018. The film won Grand Prix at Odessa International Film Festival, Almaty International Film festival. At Vyborg Window to Europe in Russia, the film won the Best Coproduction Award and Russian Critics Award. Most recently, the film won the Audience Award at Pacific Meridian Film Festival in Vladivostok, Russia. It became an absolute hit in its home country of Belarus, beating box numbers of such audience favorites as *Whiplash* (dir. Damian Chazelle) and *Youth* (dir. by Paolo Sorrentino).







## Production Team

director Darya Zhuk  
screenplay by Helga Landauer  
co-written by Darya Zhuk  
producers Birgit Goernbock, Olga Goister, Debbie Vandermeulen, Valery Dmitrotchenko  
executive producers Danny Gabai, Will McCance, Eddy Moretti, Dmitriy Osmerkin, Chris Schumann, Shane Smith, Bernie Stern  
director of photography Carolina Costa  
editors Sergey Dmitrenko, Michal Leszczylowski  
sound design Oliver Achatz  
production designer Andrey Tolstik

## Key Talent

Alina Nassibulina Velya  
Ivan Mulin Stepan  
Yury Borisov Alik  
Svetlana Anikey Veliya's mother  
Ilya Kapanets Kostya  
Ludmila Razumova Alya, Stepan's mother  
Natalya Onishenko Angela, Vika's mother  
Vyacheslav Shakalido Mikhalych, Stepan's father  
Anastasiya Gavrya Vika, bride



## Director bio


Belarus-born award-winning film director Darya Zhuk has been obsessing about filmmaking long enough to see her short films selected to SXSW, Tarkovsky, Oaxaca, Atlanta, Palm Springs, Koroche, Santa Fe Independent film festivals just to name a few. She is a graduate of Columbia University MFA program in Directing. Darya lives and creates between Minsk and Brooklyn. *Crystal Swan* is her feature debut.

## Filmography

- 2018 "Crystal Swan" feature narrative
- 2016 "Like a Dream" documentary short
- 2015 "The Real American" narrative short
- 2015 "What Doesn't Kill You" narrative short
- 2014 "Eat the Tourists" narrative short
- 2013 "WAX" narrative short
- 2012 "Half-Life" narrative short
- 2011 "The Air Inside Her" narrative short



CRYSTAL SWAN

ХРУСТАЛЬ  A FILM BY DARYA ZHUK



## Production company

Film production company "Demarshfilm" was founded in Minsk, Belarus in 1992.

Run by Valery Dmitrotchenko, it produced an impressive number of features, TV films, episodic television, commercials and music videos.

## Key producers

### ***Birgit "Bitz" Gernböck - Producer***

Birgit "Bitz" Gernböck is an independent producer based in New York City and Frankfurt, Germany. Prior to pursuing her MFA from Columbia University in 2016, Gernböck was an executive producer in Germany, she produced TV movies, documentaries, and feature films.

Gernböck is well-versed in international film funds such as MEDIA Desk Europe, CineTirol Austria, Hessen Film Fund, DFFF Germany, and the South African Tax Credit.

While at Columbia University, Gernböck received two Katharina Otto-Bernstein producing awards for her outstanding work. She co-produced Sonya Goddy's awardwinning thesis short film "Sundae", which premiered at NYFF in 2015, and produced Francisca Alegria's «And The Whole Sky Fit In The Dead Cow's Eye», which premiered at TIFF and has thus far screened at NYFF, Telluride, Valdivia IFF, Warsaw IFF, San Francisco IFF, Busan IFF, Melbourne IFF and many more.

The film received Short Film Jury Award for International Fiction during the 2017 Sundance Film Festival.

Most recently, Gernböck produced Sonya Goddy's directorial debut "Holy New York", which is currently in post-production. "Holy New York" is a stylized drama shot on location in New York starring Victor Rasuk, Lone Skye, Gillian Zinser, and iO Tillelt Wright.

### ***Debbie Vandermeulen - Producer***

Savvy in her approach to using tax incentives and maximizing investors' ROI, Debbie travels the globe talking about financing, development and marketing. Innovative and positive, Debbie's projects have earned recognition at renowned festivals, including Cannes, Sundance and Toronto. Just wrapping principal photography and starting post is Hipsters Gangsters Aliens & Geeks. This is a feature sci-fi romantic comedy starring Verne Troyer (Austin Powers) Steve Agee (Guardians of the Galaxy) and French Stewart (Third Rock from the Sun). Directed by Richard Elfman (Forbidden Zone) and music by Academy Award winner Danny Elfman this film will have a fan only screening in ComicCon and then look to have a Premiere at an international film festival in September.

Debbie has producer credits for 10 features, The most recent feature film Crystal Swan winning the Grand Prize for Works In Progress at the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival last November and invited to Premiere at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in the Czech Republic. Then, Brahman Naman in Competition at the Sundance Film Festival in 2016 was sold to NETFLIX. In 2015 Debbie completed Guys Reading Poems starring Patricia Velasquez (The Mummy). Two Kickstarter campaigns secured over \$40,000 of financing and now the film is available on Amazon through a partnership with Gravitas.





## Director's statement

I'm a Belarus-born film director living in New York. I spent most of my young adult life straddling two worlds: the world of my freshly independent home-country, just starting to define its identity after the split from the Soviet Union, and my new home in America where I stayed after finishing an undergraduate degree at Harvard.

Most of this straddling, I spent standing in long cues to the US Embassy in Minsk. I visited my parents a lot, and as Belarus was openly critical of US international policy, the visa requirements were quite brutal.

It's in this long line to the embassy that I first thought of Crystal Swan. People waiting on the permission to go to America were like prisoners waiting for the verdict, - they were so stressed out that they often shared their whole life stories with strangers next to them. The humiliation people had to experience to apply for a visa wasn't always what my American friends thought about or knew much about. I wanted to explore what this process of like.

The story of Crystal Swan is set in mid 90s since this is the time I know well from my personal experience. My protagonist Velya is a DJ dreaming to go to Chicago to visit the birthplace of house music. We meet her in one of these cues to the embassy. She is young and full of illusions, she still feels like she is the center of her world. She is an archetypal American character placed in the post-Soviet mess. Freedom she seeks is not available, and in the reality where she lives, the individualism doesn't always win. Her beliefs and approach to life are constantly challenged with every step of her journey.



## Director's statement (continued)

Can she be a free agent in an unfree world? The unfreedom of people around is what stops my main character from reaching her goal. The history, the trauma of the previous history, catches up with her through the abusive actions of the people who surround her.

Velya's dream is as fragile as crystal swan she is given as a present at the end of the film. Or does swan represent her new friend Stepan who betrays her? Stepan is like Zeus turned swan to go after his sexual satisfaction. Visually, I was interested in the world that recently experienced a geopolitical disaster, where high culture is mixed with low culture in the most unexpected places. Everything is upside down. Clothes are sold together with pianos. Crystal chandeliers sparkle by the highway. Rave party is jumping among the huge sculptures of Lenin and Marx. I tried to add surreal notes to underline general absurdity to a world firmly placed in the real.

I collaborated with my DP, Carolina Costa (*They, Flower, The Chosen Ones*) to create specific visual language to this very particular moment in history. We used 4:3 framing with lots of overhead space to show overbearing prison-like sense of Velya's reality, but added primary colors to keep her hope alive.



## Pictures downloads :

### Backstage

[https://drive.google.com/open?id=1bnGNeZu6Cr22acj\\_U2qP7QXXAM\\_RLZAz](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1bnGNeZu6Cr22acj_U2qP7QXXAM_RLZAz)

### Director's Headshots

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1cTXRq3BXSC3KQJuOc82i1NZJ5Yxyw48J>

### Stills from the film

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1SR81ubWGqHmg98Pbmrr7nCmhvnLQS45A>

## Selected press in English :

### Roger Ebert / Matt Fagerholm

*"the sort of blazing triumph that would hold even the sleepest festivalgoer in rapt attention"*

<https://www.rogerebert.com/festivals-and-awards/kviff-2018-crystal-swan-moments-and-richard-linklater>

### Variety / Guy Lodge

*"winningly small, scrappy debut" "irony-rich, tone-switching script"*

<https://variety.com/2018/film/reviews/crystal-swan-review-1202862728/>

### Screen Daily / Demetrios Matheou

*"Vividly lensed by Brazilian Carolina Costa and featuring an engagingly vital performance by Alina Nassibulina, who evokes Madonna circa Desperately Seeking Susan, this East of the West opener at Karlovy Vary may well have some arthouse legs"*

<https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/crystal-swan-karlovy-vary-review/5130560.article>

### The Hollywood Reporter / Stephen Dalton

*"Crystal Swan boasts a luminous lead performance from rising Russian screen queen Alina Nasibullina, plus a sparky, sardonic script by Zhuk and Helga Laudauer"*

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/crystal-swan-review-1125298>

### IndieWire / David Erlich

*"so effective at capturing the hopefulness of someone who's seized by the promise of a better life"*

*"Zhuk was able to manifest her destiny and make it across the ocean, and her movie offers a compelling glimpse at why that may have been the only choice her country ever gave her"*


<https://www.indiewire.com/2018/07/crystal-swan-review-karlovy-vary-1201981930/>

### Cineuropa / Laurence Boyce

*"Confident and vital" "a clever examination of individual ambition and a thoughtful exploration" "a brilliant central performance, strong cinematography by Carolina Costa and bold direction by Zhuk"*

<http://www.cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/356757/>

# CRYSTAL SWAN

ХРУСТАЛЬ  A FILM BY DARYA ZHUK

WORLD SALES :

**LOCO**  
FILMS

42 rue Sedaine, 75011 Paris  
[florencia.gil@loco-films.com](mailto:florencia.gil@loco-films.com)  
[www.loco-films.com](http://www.loco-films.com)

US AWARDS PUBLICIST :

**MEDIAPLAN PR**  
FILM • FESTIVAL PUBLICITY ●●●

+1 310-260-2800

[tatiana@mediaplanpr.com](mailto:tatiana@mediaplanpr.com)  
[shelby@mediaplanpr.com](mailto:shelby@mediaplanpr.com)  
[www.mediaplanpr.com](http://www.mediaplanpr.com)