



A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY OLGA MALÍŘOVÁ ŠPÁTOVÁ

~ JIŘÍ KYLIÁN ~

RETURN TO A STRANGE LAND

KYLIÁN
PRODUCTIONS B.V.

LONELY
PRODUCTION

HEAVEN'S
GATE

Renowned choreographer Jiri Kylián's craft has always reflected his own life. His final choreography made for his lifelong love and collaborator Sabine is a deeply personal performance that celebrates love, creation, and the ephemeral nature of life.



"Sehnsucht" – meaning "Longing to be addicted"



RETURN TO A STRANGE LAND

~ synopsis ~

In this nostalgic and yet dramatic work, choreographer Jiří Kylián addresses a multitude of themes concerning our very existence as well as the passing of time and our final moments. But mainly it is concerned with the colorful madness of life. His feeling for tragicomic situations is ever present. The working title of this film was "Sehnsucht". It is a beautiful German word meaning "Longing to be addicted".

Jiří created many choreographies for his lifelong partner and performer Sabine Kupferberg. The film centers on the creation of his "final work", and for the first time in his life, he appears alongside Sabine in this film as a protagonist.

It is shot on the island of Terschelling, off the coast of the Netherlands, the country to which Sabine and Jiří moved in 1975. The landscape of this island is extraordinarily magical and symbolic. In many scenes of the film, we will observe how the landscape changes in the unique light which is so very typical for this island, reflecting the fleeting nature of existence, the boundary between life and death.

All artistic creations produced by Jiří and Sabine since 1971 are witnesses of their lifelong personal relationship. They will always try to uncover something often hidden in the deep corners of our souls, something immensely valuable and ephemeral – something we need to be aware of....



JIŘÍ KYLIÁN

~ biography ~

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Jiří Kylián (Czechoslovakia, 1947) started his dance career at the age of nine, at the School of the National Ballet in Prague. He left Prague when he received a scholarship for the Royal Ballet School in London in 1967. Afterwards, he joined the Stuttgart Ballet led by John Cranko. In 1975, Kylián became artistic director of the Nederlands Dans Theater in The Hague (NL). In 1978, he put NDT on the international map with *Sinfonietta*. That same year, he founded Nederlands Dans Theater 2, which was intended to function as a breeding ground for young talent. In 1991, he started the Nederlands Dans Theater 3, a company of older dancers from forty till 'death'. This three-dimensional structure was unique in the world of dance. In 1999, after an extraordinary prolific tenure, with an oeuvre of almost 100 ballets, Kylián handed over the artistic leadership. He remained associated with NDT as house choreographer until December 2009. In the last ten years, Kylián has directed four films, the award-winning *Car-Men* (2006), *Between Entrance and Exit* (2013), *Schwarzfahrer* (2014) and *Scalamare* (2017).

In the course of his career, Kylián received many international awards, including: "Officer of the Orange Order" – the Netherlands, "Honorary Doctorate" – Juilliard School, New York, three "Nijinsky Awards" – Monte Carlo (best choreographer, company and work), "Benois de la Danse" – Moscow and Berlin, an honorary medal of the President of the Czech Republic, "Commander of the Legion d'Honneur" – France and in 2008 he was distinguished with one of the highest royal honors, the "Medal of the Order for Arts and Science of the House of Orange", given to him by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. Kylián received the "Lifetime Achievement Award in the field of dance and theater" by the Czech Ministry of Culture in Prague. In March 2019 Kylián became a member of the Académie des Beaux Arts in Paris. This highly prestigious recognition was complimented with the creation of a new section for "Choreography". In October 2024, Petr Pavel, President of the Czech Republic, decorated Kylián with the "Order of the White Lion", the country's highest honor recognizing Kylián's outstanding contribution to the global dance scene and his role in promoting Czech culture internationally.



SABINE KUPFERBERG

~ biography ~

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Sabine Kupferberg (Wiesbaden, 1951) took her first ballet classes at the school attached to Wiesbaden's Staatstheater. In 1968 she went on to Stuttgart to complete her dance education and consequently joined John Cranko's famous company, the Stuttgart Ballett. In this company she danced choreographies by John Cranko, Kenneth MacMillan and Glen Tetley and many others.

It was there that she met Jiří Kylián who began to create his first choreographies. In 1975 they both joined the Nederlands Dans Theater. During that period, Sabine danced many of Kylián works, as well as creations by other choreographers including Hans van Manen, William Forsythe, Mats Ek, Christopher Bruce, Maurice Bejart, Nacho Duato, Ohad Naharin to only name a few.

Sabine became a founding member of Nederlands Dans Theater 3 which was established by Kylián in 1991 - a unique company especially created for dancers beyond the age of forty.

In 2006 she played the main role in the film *Car-men* by Jiří Kylián and Boris Paval Conen. A film which won prestigious international awards such as the Prix Italia, Golden Prague etc. Sabine has also held leading roles in other Kylián films - *Between entrance and exit* (2013), *Schwarzfahrer* (2014) and *Scalamare* (2017).

Sabine is considered one of the most versatile and inspiring dancers and performers of today. In 1993 she received the Prize of Merit from the Foundation Dansersfonds '79.

In February 1998 the Dutch national television broadcasted a documentary about her: "Sabine Kupferberg, dancer with thousand faces", made by the film producer Reiner Moritz. In October 1998 she received the Dutch Golden theatre dance prize, awarded by the Dutch association of theatres directors.

OLGA MALÍŘOVÁ ŠPÁTOVÁ



OLGA MALÍŘOVÁ ŠPÁTOVÁ ~ director's note

In 2016, I met choreographer Jiří Kylián in the Italian city of Ancona while working on the short dance film *Scalamare*. Jiří directed the film and created the choreography, while my husband, Jan Malíř, and I worked on the cinematography. Since then, we have maintained a friendly connection, and the idea slowly emerged to capture his vital message in a feature film.

The lifelong bond between Jiří and his wife Sabine Kupferberg is the main theme of the film for me. Jiří himself says that he was not a good enough dancer to realize his ballet dreams, so he became a choreographer. His wife Sabine has been by his side for fifty years. She is his 'speaker'. Through her dance, she can express his views on the world. She fulfills his dreams with reverence and grace.

Jiří Kylián, together with the exceptional dancer Sabine, give wings to their creations. They aim to lighten the burdens of life. Jiří himself says that the theater is like a ship where people board as passengers. They will never be the same as when they arrived. They have moved forward. This is not a classic film portrait. The film will be conceived as a film essay.

The main expressive medium is the camera. It will mirror the poetry and dynamism of the dance. The filmed scenes strive to capture moments both sincere and authentic, as well as stylized and absurd.

Another equally important expressive medium is music, both classical and composed. One of the pieces is Beethoven's last string quartet. The acoustic atmosphere of the setting will also express Jiří and Sabine's views on the world.

Archives of famous ballets, in which Sabine Kupferberg often danced over the past fifty years, will be used creatively, not merely as a showcase.

A significant element of our film will be humor, which runs through the work of Jiří Kylián and Sabine Kupferberg. But there will also be moments of genuine and poignant emotion. Creation, love, and reflections on the meaning of our actions.

OLGA MALÍŘOVÁ ŠPÁTOVÁ ~ bio and filmography

Olga Malířová Špátová is the daughter of renowned documentary filmmakers Olga Sommerová and Jan Špáta. Although she unsuccessfully applied three times to the Directing Program at FAMU (the Film Academy in Prague), she became her mother's cinematographer and began working on her own documentaries for Czech Television, focusing on relationships and the lives of esteemed artists. Her filmmaking method, style, and worldview continue the legacy of her parents' work. She has received around forty awards at domestic and international festivals for her films. She made a film about her relationship with her mother titled *Un(censored) Conversations*. Her feature documentary *Far Beyond the Sun*, about a doctor, Aleš Bárta, healing people in a poor Kenyan village, was produced by HBO and nominated for a Czech Lion Award. In 2020, her feature film about a singer Karel Gott becomes in cinemas the second most-watched documentary in Czech history, with nearly 400,000 viewers.

selected filmography

- 2024 **Django** / feature documentary
- 2020 **Karel** / feature documentary
Pavel Černoch - Enfant terrible? / TV documentary
- 2019 **Once a Scout, Always a Scout** / TV documentary
- 2017 **Parents Forever** / TV docu series
- 2015 **Far Beyond the Sun** / feature documentary
- 2013 **Light After Dark** / TV documentary
- 2012 **The Greatest Wish III** / feature documentary
- 2010 **Eye Over Prague** / feature documentary
- 2009 **Phenomenon Gott** / feature documentary
- 2007 **A Walk Worthwhile '07** / TV documentary
Radúza - I'll Go Wherever I Want / TV documentary
- 2005 **Uncensored Dialogues** / short documentary
Love Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow / TV documentary
- 2004 **Triple Play** / short documentary







PROJECT ~ schedule

2020 ~ 2022	Development
March 28 ~ 31, 2022	Location Scouting
September 2 ~ 15, 2022	Shooting on Terschelling
September 4 ~ 13, 2023	Shooting on Terschelling
May 24 ~ 27, 2024	Shooting in The Hague
September 2024 ~ May 2025	Editing
May ~ July 2025	Visual Post-Production
May ~ August 2025	Audio Post-Production
October 2025 to be discussed	DCP delivery TV version delivery

~ formats ~

70 min. version for theatrical, festival and VOD/OTT release

52 min. version for TV release to be discussed

~ rights ~

all rights available for the whole world

BUDGET ~ 606.234 €

MICHAL SIKORA ~ *bio and filmography*

With experience in narrative and documentary films, Michal has taken on an eclectic portfolio of projects throughout the years that includes the Czech-Indian film **Kanya**, which has been selected to prestigious film festivals including Raindance, Rhode Island, or Busan among others, as well as shortlisted for the Student Academy Award®, the Chinese-Czech film **Till Love Do Us Part** that world-premiered at Warsaw IFF and was selected for over 30 other film festivals, or the Polish-Czech film **Forest** that won the Silver Alexander at its World Premiere at the Thessaloniki IDF 2024, the Best Polish Film Award at Millennium Docs Against Gravity 2024 and was nominated for Polish National Film Award Orły. His film **Girl America** premiered in the International Competition at the PÖFF, received three Czech Film Critics' Awards (Best Film, Best Director, and Best AV Production) and three Czech Lion Awards out of 13 nominations, while **Child of Dust** received Special Mention Award at its world premiere at Thessaloniki IDF 2025 and two main prizes Golden Hobby-Horse Award and Golden Horn Award at Krakow IFF 2025 that makes film Child of Dust eligible for the Academy Awards® 2026 in the Best Documentary category. His latest film **Pixie**, was selected to Locarno Kids Screening 2025. Michal has participated in several prestigious programs, including Doc.incubator International (2023, 2024, 2025), East Doc Forum 2025, Emerging Producers 2025, Nordisk Panorama 2025, EUDOC25, and „Mastering green production strategies“ by StepUp Ecoprod.

selected filmography

- 2025 **Child of Dust** / feature documentary
Broken Voices / feature fiction film
Pixie / feature fiction film
- 2024 **Girl America** / feature fiction film
Forest / feature documentary
Fakir / feature documentary
- 2023 **Please Rise** / short fiction film
- 2022 **Till Love Do Us Part** / feature fiction film
- 2020 **Kanya** / short fiction film



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~ JIŘÍ KYLIÁN ~
RETURN TO A STRANGE LAND

STARRING JIŘÍ KYLIÁN, SABINE KUPFERBERG

PRODUCERS CARMEN THOMAS ~ KYLIAN PRODUCTIONS, MICHAL SIKORA ~ LONELY PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE PRODUCER VIKTOR TAUŠ

LIGHTS STANISLAV KLIKA DRONES RAN HENDRIKS ~ DRONE ADDICTS SOUND PETR PROVAZNÍK COSTUME JOKE VISSER, HERMIEN HOLLANDER

MAKEUP SARA MEERMAN SOUND DESIGN TOMÁŠ KUBEC COLORIST TOMÁŠ CHUDOMEL EDITOR ŠÁRKA SKLENÁŘOVÁ

CINEMATOGRAPHY OLGA MALÍŘOVÁ ŠPÁTOVÁ, JAN MALÍŘ CONCEPT SCENES JIŘÍ KYLIÁN DIRECTOR OLGA MALÍŘOVÁ ŠPÁTOVÁ

~ contact ~

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