

MEDAL OF HONOR

A film by Calin Peter Netzer

35mm / 1:2.35 / Color / 105 min. / Dolby SRD

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Synopsis

MEDAL OF HONOR

One day Ion, a 75-year-old Romanian man, accidentally receives a Medal of Honor for some “heroic” actions back in the WW2, times he barely remembers. The medal forces Ion to reconsider his whole life. Maybe he wasn’t all the time a loser. Maybe his life has a meaning. Maybe he means something to his family.

MEDAL OF HONOR

Ion I. Ion’s (75) relationship with his wife, NINA (72), is long gone: she talks to him only when she needs him to do something. Ion tacitly accepts being treated like this. His only desire is to keep the appearance of a normal life and relationship before Nina’s friends.

Things aren’t working with Corneliu (45) who doesn’t forgive him for the way he dealt with his attempt to flee the communist Romania.

One day Ion receives a Medal of Honor for his “heroic” actions back in the WW2, times he barely remembers. In order to find out what's going on, he visits the Vets association and the Ministry of defense. Nobody has time for that insignificant concern that keeps him awake.

Ion desperately searches through the love letters he sent Nina during the war, trying to find anything that might serve to justify keeping the medal. One of the letters triggers the recollection of a moment when he fired a canon. He visits an old war comrade and, in remembering that event, Ion starts to believe that maybe the canon he fired hit something vital for the German army the Romanians were fighting at the end of WW2.

Soon, as the Ministry of Defense employee tells him “we don’t make mistakes” Ion starts to think he deserved the medal and starts wearing it. He decides to use his new hero image to get Nina to talk to him and also to make Corneliu stop considering him “a communist” and “a former informer for the communist secret police”.

As part of the 50-year anniversary of the WW2, Ion is invited to a dinner with the Romanian president. He has now the chance of his life: he can help the block he’s living in solve the problems they have with the heating system and also to prove to Nina he’s someone.

Ion succeeds: impressed by his new status, Nina speaks to him again, the heating issue is solved and he can present himself to Corneliu as someone that did important things for Romania.

Ion’s luck brutally changes when he receives a letter from the Ministry of defense saying the awarding of the medal was an error and he should return it. He desperately tries to find evidences of his inexistent heroic actions.

While Ion's attempts to convince an obtuse Defense ministry employee that he's a hero Cornel announces he'll be visiting Romania with his family soon. The clock is ticking for Ion.

Driven crazy by Ion's insistence and stubbornness, the Defense Ministry's employee snatches Ion's medal from him, in what becomes the reminder of Ion's years of bowing his head and accepting humiliation.

He dejectedly wanders down the street, while Cornelius has already arrived to his home. In desperation and denial Ion buys a Medal of Honor from a jewelry, puts it his chest and goes home to meet his son and grandson.

Ion's humiliation is complete when Cornelius doesn't care about the medal and the grandson sees it only as a toy.

Director's Statement

Medal of Honor is what many would call "a slice-of-life". The great Italian screenwriter Tonino Guerra used to say: "The slice-of-life is not necessarily a slice of cake but rather a slice of bread, sometimes bitter, sometimes sweet and, at times, hard."

I remembered his words which open the argumentation for making this film.

A couple, Ion and Nina, both of them old, lead an unpretentious life in a sort of circle of the existence in which nothing ever happens. Apparently nothing... But even a mundane existence can be caught on film and thought of by means of a poetics of the psychological detail. Nothing happens between the two of them but, step by step, we discover that the old man does all the talking – asking questions and answering them –, while Nina is always silent. It is strange is the fact that her silence does not spread tension, a smoldering conflict and hardly ever leads to tension. It is a lenient silence and her face often shows detachment and an acceptance of her own destiny.

Many years ago, Ion denounced his son, Cornel, – who was planning to run away to Canada – to the Securitate. He did it, in his opinion, with the best of the intentions, as a father worried he's losing his son. He did it fully convinced he was pleading with a helpful, understanding system. But his son, who got arrested, interrogated and then freed, finally left for Canada. In his absence, Nina has punished her husband by not talking to him for years.

Their mundane existence unravels slowly, between silence and monologue, occasional phone calls from their son abroad, daily groceries, routine and the unstoppable passing of time... Until one day when Ion receives a medal for the bravery shown during the war. That medal turns into an obsession and a dramatic pretext – after receiving the award and asking what precisely is it for, then old man enters a phase of unrest, of looking for answers and of petitions, all of them conveying towards a "re-activation" of his memory. Consequently, he remembers the moment, his sole act of courage; he goes in search of his old brothers in arms; in a way, he starts living again. The moment in which he rediscovers himself is impressive because its dramatic construction combines irony, tenderness and, to a certain extent, the tragedy of the situation which is about to follow: he received his medal by mistake.

That mistake means, in fact, one single letter: Ion I. Ion and Ion J. Ion. The situation plays at the edge of the absurd. The medal should have been received by the latter, Ion J. Ion, and not by our protagonist. But Ion, our Ion, has already received it, and he received it from the President's hand – all his neighbors know it, even his son, in Canada, knows it – and now he is someone, someone who's really worthy of this reward.

Unfortunately, the medal must be given back. The structure turns shaky. The son in Canada announces his visit, and he's coming with his family. Ion is left with no alternative but to buy a medal from an antiques shop. This way, he'll preserve his hero image, both in Nina's and Cornel's eyes, while the latter finally introduces his wife and son, both of them mulattos. For Ion, this is the last blow, turning him into a character who doesn't understand anything, who doesn't understand that the world has changed and who doesn't understand the significance of a medal because he has never read Napoleon's notes reading "give worthless trinkets to the soldiers and they will be yours for life".

Ion is unable to understand reality the same way as, years before, he was unable to understand the desperate gesture of his child who wanted to leave the country. And even if his wife, Nina, suddenly

starts talking, between the two of them lingers the same silence and, perhaps, a greater pain for Ion who, for an instant, felt appreciated and fulfilled as a human being. Only for an instant...

Bio and Filmography

CALIN PETER NETZER was born on May, 1, 1975, in Petrosani, Romania.

In 1983, he immigrated to Germany together with his parents.

From 1984 he has been living in Stuttgart where he graduated from elementary school and high school.

After taking his school/leaving diploma, in 1994, he started the courses of the Theatre and Film University of Bucharest, Romania, Film Direction Department, and in 1999 he obtained a diploma as film director.

FILMOGRAPHY

1994 – “Rag Ball” (fiction, video, 8 min.)

Sceneenplay and Director

1995 – “Dry Eyes” (fiction, 16 mm, 7 min.)

Sceneenplay and Director

1995 – Advertising spot (BETA, 20 seconds)

Sceneenplay and Director

1996 – “Hot Line” (documentary, 16 mm, 8 min.)

Sceneenplay and Director

Selected for Attending international festivals as following: Costinesti, Bucharest (DAKINO), MARSEILLE (Vue sur les Docs)

1997 – “Maria” (fiction, 35 mm, 25 min, black-and-white)

Sceneenplay and Director

Selected for attending international festivals as following: Ludwigsburg, Dresda, Munchen, Berlin, Postdam, Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia, Ankara, Bucharest, Tampere, Mar del Plata, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paolo, Aubagne (Meridiens), Sienna, Spoleto, Rome, Istanbul, Tg. Mures, Budapest etc.

International Festivals Awards for “Maria” (short feature):

- Jury Special Award (1997- Berlin- Prix Europe) donation from Europe Council
- “Distribution” Prize (1997- Berlin-Prix Europe) donation from Europe Council

- Kodak Prize for the best image (1997 – Munich)
 - Special Jury Prize (1997 – Bucharest – Cinemaiubit – International Award)
 - Kodak Prize for the best image (1997-Bucharest-Cinemaiubit-International Award)
 - “Best Actress” Prize (1998-Mar del Plata)
 - Great Award for the best short-length film (1998-New European Talent-Barcelona)
- 1998 – “The Snow of the Lambs” (fiction, 35 mm, 20 min., colour)

Scenplay and Director

Selected for attending international festivals as following:

Montpellier, Potiers (Henri Langlois), Clermont Ferrand, Aubage,Trevignano Romano, Dresden, Ludwigsburg, Rom, Tampere, Valencia, Mar del Plata, Rio de Janeiro, Quebec, Sydney (Flickerfest), Vila do Conde, Conversano, Bucharest, Berlin, San Francisco (Golden Gate Awards) etc.

International Festival Awards for “The Snow of the Lambs”:

- Best short film (1999- Tampere – International Film Festival)
- Best Director Prize (1999 – Dresden – International Film Festival)

Screenplays for feature films:

“Pigeos Emperor” 1999, “Maria” 2001 – 2002

2003 – Maria (fiction,35mm,97min colour)

Screenplay and Director

Selected for over 40 international festivals

International Festival Awards for Maria

- grand prize of the jury Locarno 2003
- silver leopard for best actress Locarno(Diana Dumbrava) 2003
- silver leopard for best actor Locarno(Serban Ionescu) 2003
- special mention youth jury Locarno 2003
- Grand prix for best film (Fliegende Kamera) Tuebingen 2003
- Selection of the European film awards EFA 2003
- Nomination for best European actress EFA 2003 (Diana Dumbrava)
- Prize for Best European debut Zlin 2004
- Special mention for best film Festroia 2004

- Grand prix for best film Paris 2004
- Audience award Neisse 2004
- Special mention Cottbus 2003
- Special prize of intern. Film societies Cottbus 2003
- Best debut Cottbus 2003
- Best film and best director Costinesti 2003

2009/2010 Medal of Honor (fiction, 35mm, 105min, colour) Screenplay and Director

Technical Data

Directed by: Calin Peter Netzer

Written by: Tudor Voican

Cinematography: Liviu Marghidan

Editing: Cătălin F. Cristutiu

Sound & Mix: Cristian Tarnovetchi & Alexander Weuffen

Art Direction: Mihnea Mihailescu

Costumes: Alexandra Ungureanu

Make-up: Gabi Cretan

Cast: Victor Rebengiuc, Camelia Zorlescu, Mircea Andreescu, Ion Lucian, Radu Beligan, Costica Draganescu

Production: Scharf Advertising & Pandora Film

Producers: Liviu Marghidan

Coproducer: Karl Baumgartner

Delegate producer: Ada Solomon

World Rights: HiFilm & Pandora film

Format: 35mm, 1:2.35, Color

Length: 105 min.

Sound: Dolby SRD

Original version: Romanian

Subtitles: English

No of reels: 6

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