



**WAR  
CORRESPONDENT**

**producer:**

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**distribution première: 31.10. 2024**

**trailer:** [www.vimeo.com/souderground/war-correspondent-trailer](http://www.vimeo.com/souderground/war-correspondent-trailer)

**website:** [www.valecnyzpravodaj.cz](http://www.valecnyzpravodaj.cz)

**material to download:**

[www.valecnyzpravodaj.cz/#ke-stazeni](http://www.valecnyzpravodaj.cz/#ke-stazeni)

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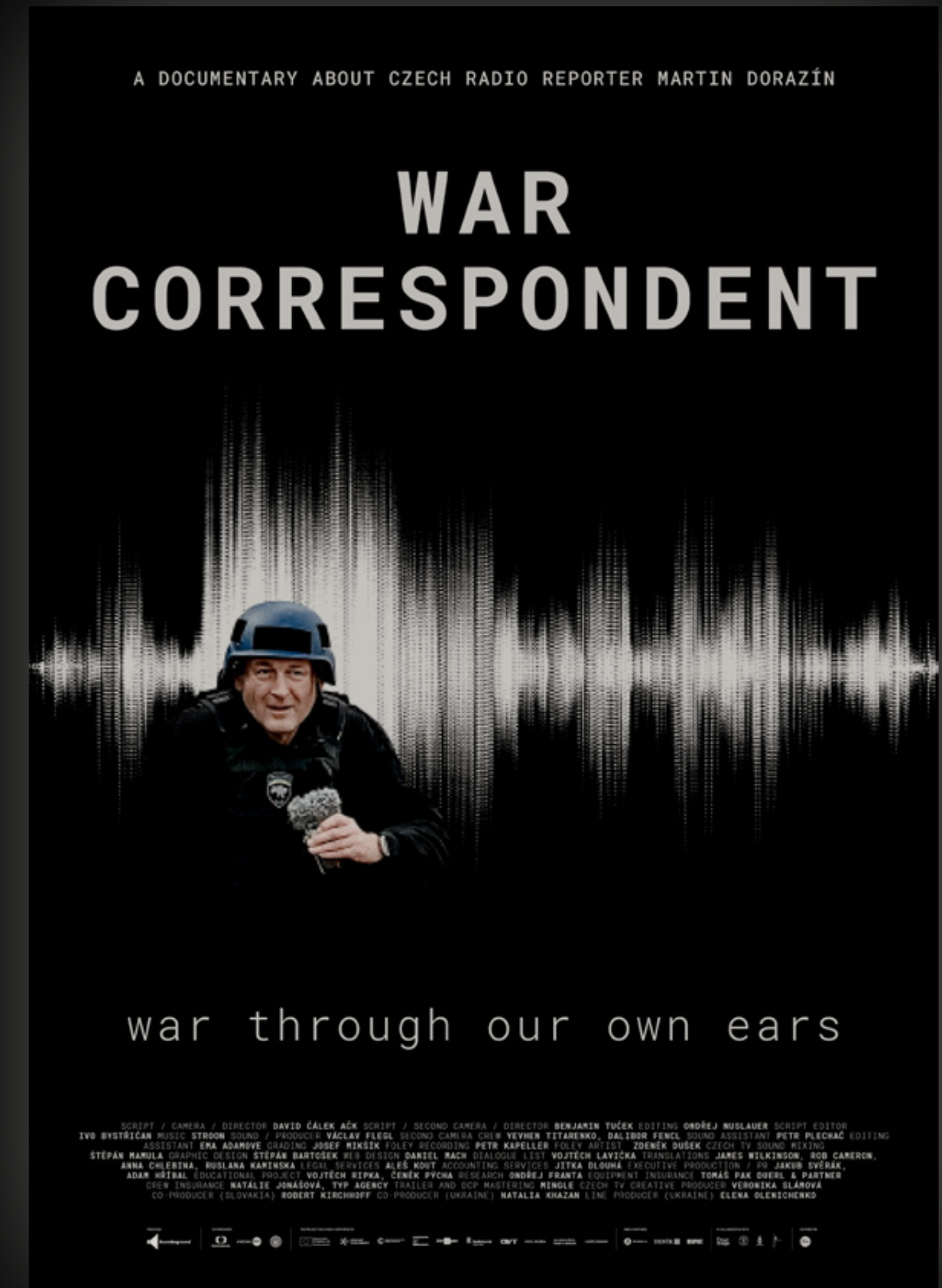
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A film that will leave  
no-one indifferent

## Synopsis

Through the reporter Martin Dorazín, through his character, we discover the everyday life of ordinary people, who have been subjected to the effects of war for a long time. We are showing the force that actually decides wars. It is not victory on the frontline, but the resilience of the civilians. The theme of social resilience is explored through the eyes of a war correspondent, through his work with sound in radio reports. In the film we also refer to the non-war context – a society is only as strong as its weakest individual. Failure usually does not occur where people have come together, because coming together itself increases the chances of survival of the collective. This is a theme that also speaks to a society that is not directly threatened by war.

The documentary provides an insight into the life and work of one of the Czech Republic's most experienced war reporters, Martin Dorazín. This disturbing film, co-directed by David Čálek and Benjamin Tuček and produced by Václav Flegl, tells the stories of people directly affected by the war, offers a view of the current conflict in Ukraine and highlights the wider context of the war and the importance of conflict reporting as a whole.

## A man with a mission

Martin Dorazín has worked as a war reporter for Czech (and previously Czechoslovak) Radio since 1990. His career has taken him to various war zones around the world, from the Balkans to Afghanistan to Ukraine. Dorazín sees reporting from war zones as his life's mission. In January 2022, anticipating things to come, he left his post as a permanent correspondent in Warsaw for the then-flourishing Ukrainian port of Mariupol, from where he risked his life to report on the start of the Russian invasion. Even after the capture of Mariupol, he remained close to the heaviest fighting. In October 2022, he took up the newly-established position of Czech Radio permanent correspondent in Ukraine. In February 2023, he received the prestigious Ferdinand Peroutka Award for Journalism. In the summer of 2024, he was nominated for the highest state award by the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Czech Parliament.

## Stories of ordinary people in the middle of war

War Correspondent tells the stories of people in the midst of war. In his reports, Dorazín speaks to those living in constant fear, often cowering alone as the conflict rages around them. Their stories show the strength and resilience of ordinary people facing unimaginable difficulties. No matter what your view of war, the human stories portrayed in the film are universal and touch everyone.

The film offers an authentic look at how people overcome these extreme situations. It brings inspiration to anyone facing life's own challenges. Knowing that one can survive and even thrive in the most difficult of circumstances can provide a new perspective on one's own problems and their solutions.

The work of war reporters is fraught with ethical and emotional challenges. The film portrays Dorazín's search for a balance between the need to inform the public and show respect for human suffering. This aspect of the film will appeal to anyone interested in ethics, journalism and human behaviour in crisis situations.

Directors David Čálek and Benjamin Tuček chose to use the medium of sound as a key element in what is after all a film about a radio reporter. What they offer the audience is 'war with their own ears' – a trip to near the front line, mediated by the tension of the sounds of war and radio reportage. This innovative approach brings a new dimension to traditional war reporting.

## Film as an educational tool

War Correspondent is not only a documentary film, but also has the potential to become an important educational tool. The film is part of educational programmes available in both Czech and English. These programmes enable students and the general public to better understand the complexity of conflict and the role of journalism in reporting on them. The programmes include analyses of specific news stories, discussions of the ethical and practical challenges faced by war reporters, and workshops focused on practical journalism skills.

One of the main objectives of these programmes is to expose students and young journalists to the realities of working in a war zone. The film shows how journalists have to prepare for different situations, how to manage stress and how to deal with ethical dilemmas. This educational aspect of the film may also attract those who are not interested in the war itself but have an interest in journalism and its challenges.

## Historical and cultural context

The war in Ukraine, which the film documents through Dorazín's reporting, is the largest military conflict in Europe since the Second World War. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sparked, among other things, a massive humanitarian crisis and international condemnation. The film offers a deeper understanding of the cultural and political contexts that led to the war.

## The future of war reporting

War Correspondent also launches a discussion on the future of war reporting and the role of journalists in modern conflicts. The film shows how important the work of war correspondents is in informing the public and the challenges and dangers of this work. At a time when misinformation and propaganda are rampant, independent and objective journalism is crucial to society's ability to take informed positions.

War reporters like Martin Dorazín play a vital role in documenting conflicts and bringing accurate news from the front. Their work informs the public, contributes to the protection of human rights and supports international efforts for peace and justice.

War Correspondent offers an in-depth and authentic look at the war in Ukraine and the work of war reporter Martin Dorazín. The film will appeal not only to viewers who are interested in the war in Ukraine, but also to citizens who are weary of the war, even if they have not experienced it or are not inclined to side with Ukraine.





# Interview with Martin Dorazín

## **What makes you want to go to war zones?**

I want to be where history is being made. I want to bear witness to it. Talking to people on the ground is the most important thing to me, because everything else I can find out by reading, watching video footage, maybe calling someone from Prague. But it's not the same. It's not authentic.

I always try to create a network of local people. For one thing, they help me, and they also know a lot more about local security measures – where to go, where a car can get through etc ... And I also spend moments of sadness and despair with them. In shelters, passing the time, you get to know what people are really like. That's what really interests me.

I still force myself to think about everyone I knew who's disappeared. Maybe they died. Or the Russians took them somewhere and nobody knows where they are. I think about that a lot. The amazing thing about the Ukrainians is that they have not succumbed to depression and a sense of doom or chaos, and are instead trying to live completely normal lives.

## **Do you have to be accredited to film the war in Ukraine?**

You have to have accreditation from the ZSU – the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and a special pass is required for some locations. But sometimes we also get into conflict with the locals because they are afraid that the material we film will be noticed by the Russians and they will then become targets. They even tried to break our equipment once, but fortunately Pastor Oleg Tkachenko smoothed over the whole situation, so we managed to escape without losing our equipment – and without a scratch.

## **When you're near the front, how much protection does your PRESS sign give you?**

None, which is why I don't wear it. It's better not to. Often, it's safer not to let others know you're a journalist. Plus, any prominent sign makes you a target – for snipers or FPV drones, for example.

## **Does a foreign journalist in Ukraine feel that he is part of the information war, or does he do everything to not be part of it? How hard is it to verify information?**

When the conflict started, I was in Donetsk, in separatist territory. It was very interesting to bring their perspective. Now it's no longer possible. Either they wouldn't let me in, or they would kill me. Moreover, Russia doesn't even want anyone to see the situation from their side. They have an official mouthpiece, spreading the approved truth, which nobody can verify. But now there are other 'independent' media outlets operating there. Most of them are ultra-nationalist, of course.

**In the course of your work as a war correspondent, you come across some very powerful and sad stories. How emotionally immersed do you become in them?**

I think emotion is a natural part of it. It's impossible to do the job of a correspondent mechanically, like a machine. It's not a good thing, and no-one will be interested. From my point of view, it's always possible to find new topics, even though the audience often doesn't perceive it that way and feels that we reporters are repeating ourselves. But that's to be expected. That's what Russia is counting on, and that's why we mustn't stop. War brings horrors that one cannot even imagine.

I try to describe everything. I report, photograph and publish even the terrible things, because I think people should see that war is not pleasant, it's not nice, it's not an adventure for boys. Some of my colleagues are angry with me for publishing things that can be very unpleasant for a sensitive viewer. But it's supposed to be unpleasant. Of course it is! Although I'm reminded of the footage of those Wagner fighters smashing in the head of one of their former comrades with a sledgehammer. I don't think I'd publish that footage again.

**You studied in Russia under the previous regime. Why did you decide to do that?**

Well, where else could I have gone to study in Czechoslovakia during those depressing years of the Jakeš regime, when socialism was

on its last legs? I didn't know what I was getting into, but I thought it couldn't get any worse. It's darkest directly under the candlestick, and so it was. But it turned into a bright light, and then we brought samizdat literature from Russia to Czechoslovakia. Today it seems completely unbelievable, paradoxical.

I studied in St Petersburg in the late 1980s. It was already clear from 1987 that things were going in the right direction, that things were changing. At that time there was great hope. Of course, we had no idea then that the Soviet Union was going to break up, although many people probably wanted it to. We didn't even dare dream of that happening. We thought that there would just be a new form of socialism with a more human face. I'm so glad I was there. I watched historic events unfold as they happened. I was there for the beginnings of Russian democracy, which, unfortunately, Vladimir Putin trampled on and eventually crushed. He took society back to Stalinist times and unleashed this insane war.

I still have some very good friends among Russians and Russian citizens. I can't break away from them completely, never talk to them again and just stay angry forever. Maybe this is what Putin wants, maybe this might even help him in his master plan. But I lost a lot of my classmates because they turned into hyenas overnight. People who only wish the worst for Ukraine, and us. I still can't understand where all this evil came from. And I'm talking about educated people...



**Certainly Russian propaganda has a lot to do with it...**

Well, these are people who are professors, associate professors, assistant professors, my classmates. They're people who should be able to maintain a professional distance, but who seem to me to have lost their minds. They've studied how propaganda is created, and they themselves have succumbed to it. On the other hand, a lot of people have not!

**The 'co-star' of the film as it were is Oleg Tkachenko, a Protestant chaplain and in fact a baker. How did you meet?**

We were introduced by our mutual friend Ivo Dokoupil just before the Russian invasion began. I visited Oleg in Maryinka, in the Donbas, near Donetsk, when I was filming a report on a bakery that had been established thanks to Czech aid. Oleg bakes and delivers bread along with spiritual comfort wherever it's needed. The people there say – you can smell the bread, that means life is returning here.

**What equipment do you use?**

It's important that your gear is as simple as possible and can be moved quickly. I have a small studio in my Ukrainian apartment, which makes the work quicker. I have a small tape recorder in my emergency suitcase and a mobile phone for videos. But for film you need to have a lot more equipment with you to set up and there wasn't always

enough time to do that. And then more and more often you need a generator. Or a large powerbank to power the Starlink – the satellite internet.

**How did it come about that you became the protagonist in a documentary about a war correspondent?**

No idea. When you find out, let me know...

**What did you get out of making the film? What surprised you the most during shooting, and what did you find enriching?**

I know the work of TV crews because I worked for Czech Television for six years as a correspondent in Russia and as an editor and presenter in Kavčí Hory. Making a documentary film is similar, but in many ways different, which I found very interesting. The sequences are constructed differently. They're of a different length, and the atmosphere and good sound is more important. Shooting a film documentary is slower and more time – consuming, which is hard to digest at first for someone who's used to working as fast as possible. But now I know how hard it is for actors on a film set... And I've also met great people who I count among my friends, and I'm sorry that the filming, the traveling, and all that is over.

# Crew

**script / cinematography / directing** David Čálek

**script / second camera / directing** Benjamin Tuček

**editing** Ondřej Nuslauer

**script editing** Ivo Bystřičan

**music** Stroon

**sound / producer** Václav Flegl – Sounderground (Czech Republic)

**co-producers** Czech Television, Atelier.doc (Slovakia), Braha Production Company (Ukraine)

**filmed and produced** in 2024 in Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Slovakia

**dialogue** in Czech, Ukrainian, Russian and Slovak

**projection formats** DCP, MP4

**running time** 78 min

**genre** documentary

# Technical specifications

**audio format:** multichannel 5.1 for cinema distribution, 2.0 and 5.0 EBU for TV broadcasting

**video format :** 4K, 1:1.85 DCP 25fps for cinema distribution, UHD, 16:9, 25p for TV broadcasting and VOD







## David Čálek

creator, cinematographer, director

[calek.cz](http://calek.cz)

Since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, I felt it necessary to become personally involved in a war that is being fought not just overtly in Ukraine but covertly in our country as well. Not only by donating money, but by becoming involved on a personal level. My grandfather, Jaroslav Hlad'o, fought for our country when it was occupied by the Nazis – in 1941 he joined the RAF as a fighter pilot. I am no pilot, but I am a filmmaker, so together with my colleagues I attempted to depict the life of a man who has decided to fight on the front line – using his words against tanks.

I was surprised to find that the Ukrainians as a people are far more peaceful than us. They're determined not to become part of Russia's evil empire, whatever the cost. They know exactly what they want to achieve. That is the kind of clear direction we lack here in Europe.

David Čálek studied cinematography and documentary directing at FAMU. He is a member of the Association of Czech Cinematographers. As a director, he has made 21 original documentary films and written three feature film scripts. At FAMU in Prague he was twice awarded the Best Cinematography Award and his graduation film *Dotek obrazu / Touching Pictures* won the Association of Czech Cinematographers Award.

### Selected works:

**Feature-length documentaries:** *Bezesné noci / Dreamless Nights* (2004), *Berkat a Maršo – štěstí a svoboda / Berkat and Marsho: Happiness and Freedom* (2007) Main Prize at the Femina Film Festival, *Nebe Peklo / Heaven Hell* (2009) for HBO – premiered in the USA at the SXSW Festival in Austin, and awarded at the Finále Plzeň Festival in 2011, *Pirátské sítě / Pirating pirates* (2014), *Cesta vzhůru / Climbing Higher* (2015) received the Best Director award for a feature-length documentary at the 2017 BANFF Festival in Canada; *Stop Time* (2023)

**Feature films – camera:** *Rychlé pohyby očí / Rapid Eye Movement* (1998), *Kanárek / Canary* (1999), *Kuličky / Marbles* (2008), *Mamas & Papas* (2010), *Mars / Trash on Mars* (2018), *Pohani / Heathens* (2023), *Můžem i s mužem / We Can with a Man* (2023).



## Benjamin Tuček

creator, second camera, director

[benjamintucek.com](http://benjamintucek.com)

How does radio news work, who creates it and what images does sound conjure up in our imagination? These are the questions we wanted to answer when we started this project – an endeavour which provided answers to many more questions. Apart from confirming the age-old truth that it is ordinary people – who did not start this war – who suffer the most, there is also the helpless anger that it is happening again. I was surprised by the intermingling of two different professions – journalist and humanitarian worker – in our protagonist, and his dedication to helping those in need. My intention, my wish was to convey to cinema audiences situations that I hope they will never have to experience first-hand.

Benjamin Tuček holds degrees in journalism and photography at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University and screenwriting and dramaturgy at FAMU. He writes television and film scripts, directs feature films and documentaries. His collection of short stories *Velmi krátké vlny / FM waves* (2009) was published by Labyrint. He is the co-owner of the Altenburg freight ship, which has been converted into a centre of alternative culture.

## Selected works:

**Director:** *Mars / Trash on Mars* (2018), *Děvčátko / Girlie* (2002), *Tantra* (2011), *Plán / The Plan* (2014), the documentary series *Provedu! / Yes Sir!* (2017).

**Screenwriter:** *Mistři / Champions* (2003), *Protektor / Protector* (2009), *Polski film* (2012), *Kinetická encyklopedie všehomíra* (1999 – 2001), *Terapie / Therapy* (2008), *Svět pod hlavou / The World Beneath the Head* (2017), *Kancelář Blaník / Office Blaník* (2015-2018), *Prezident Blaník / President Blaník* (2018), *Táta v nesnázích / Dad in Trouble* (2023).



## Václav Flegl

producer, sound director

[sounderground.cz](http://sounderground.cz)

With War Correspondent, I can't help but recall the words of Mstyslav Chernov, director of the film „20 Days in Mariupol“: „We would prefer if such films never had to be made.“ Unfortunately, the situation is different, and our film too had to be made.

The documentary was also produced in response to the unprecedented Russian aggression in Ukraine. I've always wondered what and who is behind the news we see, hear and read every day. How does the correspondent on the ground perceive the war and how does he or she convey it to radio listeners?

During filming, I was deeply impressed by the coexistence of humanism and professionalism within our film's protagonist. It was both interesting and inspiring to see how a highly respected journalist fulfils his professional mission while selflessly helping other people. This is why I believe in the great educational potential of our film.

Václav Flegl has worked as a film industry professional since 2002. Before then he studied sound production at FAMU and London Middlesex University, and musicology at FFUK. He has extensive practical experience in numerous domestic and foreign productions, both in the shooting and post-production phases. He has recorded and completed over ninety feature projects as a sound director.

In 2008, he founded Sounderground studio, which has been involved in countless (at least 100) projects encompassing various genres and formats. The studio focuses mainly on film, television and multimedia projects with a special emphasis on sound. As co-producer, he has supported a number of exceptional films. He is the producer of the film Plná 6. He is currently a teacher at FAMU in Prague and together with director Tomáš Bojar, he organises the „Kino Hájovna“ community film screenings.



**Stroon**

music

[stroonmusic.net](http://stroonmusic.net)

Stroon has been a vibrant element on the Slovak music scene for more than a decade. Not only thanks to the vibraphone – his main instrument – but also owing to the range of projects and collaborations in which he leaves his unique signature. Dreaminess, contemplation, striving for weightlessness, conceptuality – all these are his musical ideas. In his compositions he accentuates modality and works with distinctive rhythmic structures with a nod at minimalism. He expands his palette of compositional techniques by implementing distorted sounds and elaborate surfaces. His ability to work with film sound material (*Good Old Czechs*, 2022) has won accolades. His live performances as well as productions are specifically created according to the place, time, audience and the project in question. The result is a blend of electroacoustic compositions that seek to explore new horizons and convey an immersive experience.

## Ready-to-use educational programme

The film's potential in both formal and informal educational settings is being developed by an educational programme (see [www.valecnyzpravodaj.cz/edu](http://www.valecnyzpravodaj.cz/edu) for a full introduction). It works not only with the film itself, but also with unique excerpts taken from 150 hours of raw footage. It offers insights into the creative process, including in-depth interviews with crew members. Using this material and other sources, it explores three essential areas:

- newsgathering in areas of armed conflict
- dealing with the military conflict itself
- developing the theme of documentary filmmaking

The curriculum offers hands-on experience using research-based learning methods that combine online interactive learning activities with manuals for offline workshops. The Institute for Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, [Občankáři.cz](http://Obcankari.cz), the USC Shoah Foundation and Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty contributed to its development.





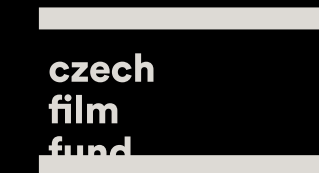
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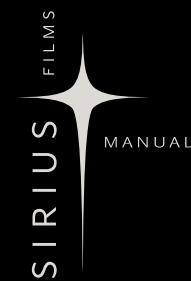
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