

Children of Solidarnosc

(Piosenka i zycie)

A Film Written and Directed by Rafael Lewandowski
Produced by Kuiv Productions & Studio Filmowe Kalejdoskop

Synopsis:

August 2005. Poland celebrates the 25th anniversary of Solidarnosc (Solidarity). Klementyna was born at the beginning of the movement that changed her country's history. In 1980, her father wrote a song for her, *To my daughter*, that became the anthem of the anti-Communist opposition. Like Kasia, Lukasz and Artur – other "children of Solidarnosc" – Klementyna lives in a Poland that is finally free and democratic. Heirs to their parents' battles, these four young Poles reflect on their country's recent history and its near future.

Key Credits:

74' - France / Poland - 2006
16/9 - Digibeta Color (shot in HDV)
In Polish with English subtitles

Written and Directed by:	Rafael Lewandowski
Image:	Radek Ladczuk
Sound:	Jarek Wojcik
Editing:	Jacek Tarasiuk
Original Music:	Andrzej Smolik
Producer:	Mark Edwards
Co-producer:	Janusz Skalkowski

In association with Planete, RTBF, TSR, SVT, TVP SA and LCP Assemblée nationale.

With support from Centre National de la Cinematographie (CNC), the Procirep and the Polish Film Institute (PISF).

Contacts:

KUIV Productions
55 bis, rue de Lyon
75 012 Paris
Mobile: + 33 614 551 364
Fax: + 33 144 757 919
Tél: + 33 144 757 915
mark.edwards@noos.fr
contact@kuiv.com

Studio Filmowe Kalejdoskop
ul. Chelmska 21
00 724 Warsaw
Mobile: + 48 601 283 184
Tel: + 48 228 412 135
Fax: + 48 228 511 779
skalkowski@kalejdoskop.art.pl
studio@kalejdoskop.art.pl

Director's Note:

I was 11 years old when martial law was declared in Poland on December 13, 1981. My father, a Polish artist living in France since 1967, immediately joined Solidarnosc in its opposition against the Communist regime. Banned for his activism, we were denied entry into Poland and lost contact with our family there for several years.

These events had a great influence on my life and reinforced the Polish half of my dual cultural identity. After my University studies, I decided to live and work on Warsaw. Fascinated by Poland's recent history, I have devoted my work as a filmmaker to recording the changes taking place in the country. My goal is to examine how unprecedented and rapid change is continually tripped up by ghosts from the past.

Directing *Children of Solidarnosc* was an opportunity for me to meet young people who were born at the same time as the first free labor union in the Eastern Bloc. Unlike me, these young Poles have very few memories of Communism and the battles that were fought to end it. They grew up in a country that is nothing like the one they were born in. What do they know about the past? What are their personal and collective memories? In what ways, both consciously and subconsciously, have they been affected by the battles waged for them by their parents?

The children of this generation, now in their twenties, find themselves in a paradoxical situation that makes them all the more interesting to observe. Benefitting from a level of freedom that their parents and grandparents could only dream about, they have also run into many of the problems facing the Polish economy during the transformations of the last 15 years (unemployment, individualism, ruthless competition, personal debt). Ill at ease in their own country, many choose to emigrate. Since Poland joined the European Union, more than 1 million young Poles have left to find work in England and Ireland. Will they return?

Rather than trying to analyze a whole generation, I chose to tell the particular stories of four children whose parents were militant members of Solidarnosc. After a long period of research, I settled upon Klementyna, Kasia, Artur and Lukasz, whose stories were emblematic in different ways. Each comes from a different socio-economic background. Like many of their compatriots, they share feelings of bitterness for their country. The pride and respect they show their parents seems to dissolve when they consider all the broken promises. Indeed, to what extent does today's Poland resemble the hopes and ideals of the project that was crafted in the early 80s by the workers and intellectuals who founded Solidarnosc?

Like my previous films, *Children of Solidarnosc* is a film about memory. Memory that is individual and collective, historical and intimate, conscious and unconscious. The film is a portrait of Poland and its people at a particular moment in its history, a moment during which the "undigested" past returns to counteract the country's mad scramble into the future.

Main Characters:

Artur was born in June 1980, two months before the start of the strikes that led to the creation of Solidarity at the Gdansk Naval Shipyards. Like thousands of other workers, his father **Andrzej** protested by occupying the shipyards for 15 days. The strikes were non-violent and well organized, and the movement quickly spread to the rest of the country, catching the attention of the media worldwide. Led by Lech Welesa, an ordinary shipyard electrician, the strikers defied the threat of a Soviet intervention and nearly brought down the Polish government. On August 31, 1980 a historic agreement was signed that established workers' rights to form free and independent labor unions.

It's now 2005, and for the 25th anniversary of these events, Poland has decided to organize a series of ceremonies to remind Europe that the end of the Berlin Wall began in Gdansk. Artur, who has worked in the shipyards for two years, participates in the commemorations. Like his father, he is an active member of Solidarnosc. But the union is no longer the vast movement it once was; in 1981, it counted over 10 million members and peacefully gained power by forming a giant opposition voting block. Today, its founders fight over its legacy. Meanwhile, the Naval Shipyards are on the verge of bankruptcy, leaving the workers apprehensive about their future.

Our portrait of **Artur** shows his admiration for the strikes of the past and his skepticism of the results of the economic transformations of the last 15 years. We follow the young man in the context of his long days at work and observe the ceremonies from his point of view, revealing deep feelings of pride mixed with a touch of bitterness.

During the occupation of the Naval Shipyards, in 1980, a group of actors and artists decided to support the movement by putting on shows for the workers. A song composed for the occasion, "To My Daughter" was performed at one of these shows and quickly became the movement's anthem. The man who wrote the lyrics was **Klementyna's** father. Journalist and dissident poet, like many intellectuals he joined the struggle against the Communist regime. Fired from his job at a newspaper for his political writings, in 1981, he left Poland for good.

Today Klementyna is 26 years old. She sees her father only once a year and considers him more of a friend than a father. An only child, she was raised by a mother who was also a militant activist. She is studying modern literature at the University of Krakow and has lived for the last five years with Wojtek (whose father was also the founder of a secret opposition newspaper). They're a typical couple from Krakow, and their artsy lifestyle blends in well with the country's historical and intellectual capital. Proud of the legacy of Solidarnosc, they remain critical of the changes in their society in the last 15 years. They feel that their generation lacks ideals, vacillating between respect for the Catholic tradition and a rejection of its hierarchy, a utopian refusal of consumer culture and a pragmatic acknowledgement that the free market is here to stay.

Klementyna is studying to become a teacher. Aware of the low salary that awaits her, she and Wojtek have decided to live in Dublin for a few years. They will join the thousands of other young Poles who, unable to find work in Poland, earn their living in Ireland. We will accompany them as they prepare for the trip.

Lukasz, 28, comes from a village in the Southeast, not far from Lublin. It is one of the poorest regions in the European Union, with an unemployment rate of over 30%. The local people, mostly farmers, benefited from special treatment under the Communist regime (land was not nationalized in most of Poland), and were consequently not very interested in opposition movements. In the fall of 1980, Lukasz's father nevertheless had the courage to confront local apathy by creating the rural branch of Solidarnosc. Arrested several times during martial law and constantly under surveillance, he never gave up his fight. In 1989, he participated in the Round Table negotiations and became a senator during the first free elections that followed. He died of cancer in 1999, leaving his wife alone to run the farm and raise their 9 children.

Lukasz, the oldest child, is proud of this family history and likes to have long discussions about it with his mother. A perfect product of the changes taking place in rural Poland, he achieved a very high level of University education (paying his own way by working on construction sites in the US) and holds a good job in a media company in Warsaw.

Every year at the end of September, he takes a week off to join his brothers and sisters to help in the fall barley harvest. We accompany him on this family visit, meet his family and discover his exceptional story.

Kasia was two years old when her father was killed by state militiamen, along with eight other miners. The killings happened on December 15, 1981, two days after General Jaruzelski declared Martial Law in Poland. Workers at the Wujek mine had gone on strike in protest of the arrests of hundreds of Solidarity members across the country. The police were called on to quell the movement and finished by shooting into the crowd.

In September 2005, for the third time in 25 years, a new trial opened in an attempt to bring the killers to justice. Once again, they appear on the witness stand with their retired bosses, including Jaruzelski himself. But all of the defendants benefit from a lack of evidence (some of it was destroyed) and may succeed in obtaining a third acquittal.

Kasia feels very uncomfortable watching the proceedings. She is disgusted by the idea of having to look once again at the spiteful faces of the men who killed her father. Her story points to the difficulty, common among countries that have suffered civil wars or dictatorships, to establish who exactly was responsible for repressive crimes.

Our portrait of this young woman plays out against the backdrop of the trial and her visits to the mine. Echoes from the past continually resonate in her daily life as a young mother, reminding her of the father she barely knew.

Annex

To My Daughter (Do coreczki)

"I haven't had time for you these days,
And I haven't seen your mother for quite a while now.
Wait a bit longer and grow...
One day we'll tell you about these events,
These days full of hope,
These discussions and stormy debates,
These long sleepless nights,
These hearts beating so fast,
These people that had sensed
That finally they were home
Fighting, together
For the present, and the future.
The future that belongs to you.
Don't be sad and wait with expectation
For this new day when you'll return into our arms.

Song written by M. Pietrzyk

Lyrics: K. Kasprzyk

Taken from "The Man of Steel" by Andrzej Wajda (1981)

Screenings:

Festivals in which *Children of Solidarnosc* already took part:

"6th Era New Horizons" (New Polish Films Competition) in Wroclaw (Poland)

"Festiwal Mediów Człowiek w Zagrożeniu 2006" (out of competition) in Lodz (Poland)

"6th Watch Doc's; Human Rights in Films" (out of competition) in Warsaw (Poland)

"Fipatel 2007" in Biarritz (France)

"One World 2007" (Main Competition) in Prague (Czech Republic)

"Rozstaje Europy 2007 - Crossroads of Europe" (Main Competition) in Lublin (Poland).

"Travelling Film Festival Watch Doc's; Human Rights in Films 2007" (Slupsk, Torun, Opole, Myslowice in Poland)

"5th International Festival Dignity and Work" (Gdansk, Poland)

"8^{ème} One World Slovakia Documentary Film Festival" in Bratislava

"17th Traces de Vie" (France, Main Competition)

"Document 5" (Glasgow ; Scotland).

Children of Solidarnosc has also been screened in Warsaw, Paris, Lille, Gdansk, Lodz and Katowice.

A shorter version for television (52') also exists. Countries that have already or will soon broadcast the film include France, Poland, Sweden, Belgium, Nederland and Switzerland.

Press Excerpts:

"The films presented at the Era New Horizons festival take an uncompromising look at politics and history. In the Polish films competition, the documentary selection is stronger than the fiction (...) In particular, "Children of Solidarnosc" by Rafael Lewandowski. The young inheritors of the workers and farmers who, under Communism, created Solidarnosc find themselves face to face with their parents' past. With great subtlety, the filmmaker shows the consequences – and the pain – that these stories represent in their lives today."

Rafal Swiatek (Rzeczpospolita - 26/07/06)

"At the Era New Horizons Festival, in the New Polish Films selection, the documentaries save the day for our national cinema (...) Rafael Lewandowski's "Children of Solidarnosc" proved very interesting. It consists of portraits of children born to militant Solidarnosc activists, and who came of age after 1989. Coming to terms with recent history, the director attempts to understand this generation, as well as the disappointments created by the transition to a market economy. The film constitutes a relevant voice in the current debate on the legacy of our past."

Krzysztof Kwiatkowski (Zycie Warszawy - 29/07/06)

"Rafael Lewandowski has created a group portrait of the Children of Solidarity (...) His film is well developed, courageous, sincere and new."

Artur Majer (Fluid N° 66 - 09/06)

"From these confessions and conversations, directed in a carefully crafted manner, a troubling disillusionment emanates, especially since these young people have no nostalgia for Communism. Through these individual destinies, the film revisits history and draws the portrait of an anxious generation growing up in a society based on competition and individualism. It's a state of mind that's even harder to bear for a country that thought it was inventing a different future."

Samuel Gontier (Telarama N° 2970, 13/12/06)

"This documentary brings us a compelling testimony of the way that the children of former strikers look at the political legacy they have inherited. Many of these children of Solidarnosc would like to believe that the spirit of the past is still alive."

Hortense Villatte (Nouvel Observateur - Supplément TV - 16/12/06)

An important film to see, filled with moving metaphors, but also with fundamental truths about the world in which we live.

Patrycja Mic (Laboratorium reportazu, 22/12/06)