

Gay & Lesbian

Feeling pink in the red era

Mária Takács' documentary chronicles lesbian life in communist and contemporary Hungary, revealing the challenges that these women faced, and still face. **Tibor Singer** previews the film.

One fittingly rainy day, a woman walks into the MAHIR classified advertising agency, a socialist-era holdover that still survives today, to place an announcement in the papers seeking lesbian interviewees for a documentary. The women in the office refuse the announcement, giving their excuses: 'We may not accept this sort of thing, because of the management ... because of the editorial.' Finally, one woman states matter-of-factly, 'We do not deal with anything against the law, and this is against the law.'

The exchange, the opening scene in a new documentary, 'Secret Years', did not take place during socialism. It happened earlier this year, and it's a clever bit of now-versus-then from a documentary mostly following the lives of 11 lesbian women in communist-era Hungary. Following its premiere at the recent LIFT lesbian festival, it will be debuting for a general audience this month at the Művész Cinema – with English subtitles.

'Secret Years' records the her-story of a dictatorship that sort of tolerated homosexuality but never failed to intimidate gay women, men and their friends at the same time.

The idea for the film dates back to 2005, but filmmaker Mária Takács struggled with financing. After multiple rejections, the Hungarian Motion Picture Fund eventually awarded the film a relatively small grant of Ft3 million.

'I've known these women for a long time, and they came forward to tell their stories,' Takács says. 'They're all really awesome women and most of them were very enthusiastic about the film. I had a close friend, an ethnographer by training, interview them, because I wanted to keep a distance. Still, I had to cut almost 80 hours of material down to 90 minutes.'

The point of all the diverse interviews was to tell a common story.



The 'Secret' is out Mária Takács, right, and scenes from her film

'Fundamentally, my film portrays an era, and not independent lives,' says Takács. 'My interviewees do have a tremendously positive energy, but their history – being lesbian under, and shortly after, socialism – was no cakewalk.'

The documentary evokes 1956, when there was an Uprising in Hungary and when Ilona Gál, now 70, falls in love with her boss. After coming out, Gál is sent off to an internist (!) for an examination. 'I was scared they would cure me,' she recalls. Luckily, her psychiatrist turned out to be a gay man.

In the 1960s, Ildikó Szinegh, of the '80s-'90s alternative band Kampec Dolores, develops a crush on Valentina Thereshkova, the astronaut, and is told that she may not ever become her, or Yuri Gagarin. Also read: she cannot be a lesbian. Anna Lovas Nagy received similar news when she was told in the orphanage that she'd grow out of being lesbian – that 'it comes with orphanage life'.

Fighting the omnipresence of isolation, pretence, the lack of information and an open lesbian network, these women, like most lesbians, still managed to identify themselves. Lovas Nagy comes across the entry in a dictionary at

10 and knows it refers to her, while Judit Szabó, now 60, saw the word on a cover of *Time Magazine*, and understood that she was one too. Gál says she engaged in group sex 'in order to be with women'.

The '80s saw the zenith of Egyetem Presszó – a cake shop by day, a gay club by night, with the legendary Mísike practicing early 'face' control at the door. 'It was liberating to see that I'm not alone, that there are many of us,' says Magdi Timár in the film.

The visibility of lesbians increased more when heavyweight and already canonised director Károly Makk released his 'Looking at Each Other' in 1982. Like all cinema at the time, it was state-approved and state-financed, although it poked at tender spots in the 1950s regime.

With higher visibility for lesbians came inquiries. There were informants all over Egyetem Presszó. Phones were tapped. Mária Bán, later the drummer in the highly acclaimed alternative bands Mora Lisa and A. E. Bizottság, recalls in the documentary that one night the police caught her with a girlfriend at the Buda end of Margithíd: they were carded and registered in the police's homosexual database.



The risk these women ran was unemployment and shame. In communist-era Hungary, there was only one employer, the state.

'Secret Years' also evokes the post-communist/socialist era's red-letter days, among them Agáta Gordon's lesbian novel 'Kecskerúzs' ('Goat Lipstick') and the formation of Lambda-Homérosz, the first self-help gay organisation

In the film's concluding shots, women talk about the situation today: celebrations and acts of coming out – but also the stones and eggs that were hurled at recent Pride marches.

'Secret Years' will be showing this month, with English subtitles, in the Művész Cinema (*VI. Teréz körút 30, 332 6726 /www.artmozi.hu*).

Listings

To be listed, write to:
tiber.timeout@nordtelekom.hu

Parties

Thursday Dec 3, 10, 17

Drag Idol Capella V. Belgrád rakpart 23 (318 6231/06 70 597 7755/www.capellacafe.hu). From 9pm. The most centrally located gay club, and many a trannie's diving board, is once again searching for, bringing out and to you new drag talent. Apply on the premises with a queen's attitude and a stage act to find out if you're called back for more.

Saturday December 5

Gay Santa Claus Show Capella V. Belgrád rakpart 23 (318 6231/06 70 597 7755/www.capellacafe.hu). From 9pm. Admission Ft1,000 till midnight, Ft1,500 after. The most centrally located gay club celebrates Santa. Find out what's in store, well, in the sack for you. Drag shows at 11pm, 12.30am and 2am.

***Free Gobbi Hilda Film Klub, Vis Major Cafe, V. Szent István körút 2 (entrance on Pozsonyi út) 6pm.** Admission free, donations welcome. This gay-friendly café hosts the month's film screening by Labrisz, the lesbian and bisexual association: Drool chronicles an abused wife killing her husband as she plans to escape, and ending up on cross-country with her "best friend" and his corpse in tow.

Wednesday December 9

Behind the scenes Capella V. Belgrád rakpart 23 (318 6231/06 70 597 7755/www.capellacafe.hu). From 9pm. Admission Ft500. The most centrally located gay club bares it almost, and brings onto the stage backstage. Drag shows at 11pm, 12.30am and 2am.

Friday December 11

Liberty in Pink the Club III. Óbudai Hajógyári sziget (06 20 529 0601/www.partyliberty.net). Admission Ft2,000 in advance or at Amstel River Café from 10pm on the day; Ft2,500 on premises. Monthly parties attracting the pretty people with pees for themed soirées of dance, drinks and entertainment acts. Pre-party at Amstel River Cafe from 10pm (V. Párisi utca 6 (266 4334/www.amstelrivercafe.com)).

Sunday December 13

Pikk Dáma Vis Major Café, V. Szent István körút 2 (entrance on Pozsonyi út) 6pm. Admission free, donations welcome. A night for games, for girls.

Saturday December 19

Ösztrosokk Diesel Club (former E-Klub) X. Népliget út 2 (www.ostzrosokk.hu). 10pm-4am. Admission Ft1,000. For women only, this Ösztrosokk bash features the usual two dance floors: club dance and retro. Captain Morgan Spiced Rum deal for Ft550.

***Free Labrisz Relax Labrisz office, VIII. Szentkirályi utca 22-24 (www.labrisz.hu).** 7pm. No admission. Hang with Hungary's lesbian and bisexual community in an informal setting. Entrance on ground level, to the right - press button "Tegy az emberért". Open hours on Mondays between 6pm-9pm.

Friday December 25

White Angel Party Capella V. Belgrád rakpart 23 (318 6231/06 70 597 7755/www.capellacafe.hu). From 9pm. Admission Ft1,000. The most centrally located gay club celebrates Xmas with a special, new festive show. Drag dos at 11pm, 12.30am and 2am.

Xmas Party in coXx Men's Club VII. Dohány utca 38 (344 4884/www.coxx.hu). From 9pm. Admission free,

minimum mandatory bar consumption Ft 1,000. 9pm. The men's club with a finger on the pulse as well as the P-spot keeps men company on the festive days.

Saturday December 26

Xmas Party in coXx Men's Club VII. Dohány utca 38 (344 4884/www.coxx.hu). From 9pm. Admission free, minimum mandatory bar consumption Ft 1,000. 9pm. The men's club with a finger on the pulse as well as the P-spot keeps men company on the festive days.

Sunday December 27

Pikk Dáma Vis Major Café, V. Szent István körút 2 (entrance on Pozsonyi út) 6pm. Admission free, donations welcome. A night for games, for girls.

Wednesday December 30

Ösztrosokk Pre-NYE Diesel Club (former E-Klub) X. Népliget út 2 (www.ostzrosokk.hu). 10pm-4am. Admission Ft1,200. For lesbian and straight women and their friends, this mixed Ösztrosokk bash adds a karaoke lounge to the usual two club dance and retro dance floors, and at midnight puts on a black light UV show. A bottle of bubbly is Ft1,200.

Shirley Bassey Show Capella V. Belgrád rakpart 23 (318 6231/06 70 597 7755/www.capellacafe.hu). From 9pm. Admission Ft500. Capella's Evyka Lapaz does Burly Lassie to warm up to NYE.

Thursday December 31

Club Underground VI. Teréz körút 30 (06 20 261 8999/www.clubunderground.hu). From 10pm. Club Underground's signature drag show featuring owner Noxyma Johnson and her troupe including cabaret-style singer Erik, and other great acts. Two dance floors plus a karaoke room.

Hard Last Night in coXx Men's Club VII. Dohány utca 38 (344 4884/www.coxx.hu). From 9pm. Admission Ft3,000, Ft1,500 of which offsets drinks bill. The men's club with a finger on the pulse as well as the P-spot rises to the occasion for a year's party in its signature style.

Happy New Gay 2010 Capella V. Belgrád rakpart 23 (318 6231/06 70 597 7755/www.capellacafe.hu). From 8pm. Admission Ft2,500 pre-purchase; Ft3,500 on premises. Welcome drink, NYE sausages, surprise acts and paaahyt daaahling. Shows at 11.15pm and 2pm.

Priscilla Queen of the Sauna Magnum Szauna VIII. Csepregy utca 2 (267 2532/www.magnumszauna.hu). From 8pm. Admission Ft4,000. This men only sauna and steam central brings out the cream of its drag queens at 9pm, serves finger food and champagne, plus a NYE cake to ring in the new year.

TBA

Thursday December 31

Liberty (06 20 529 0601/www.partyliberty.net). The party attracting the pretty people with pees hosts a year end bash in a surprise location.

Bars and clubs

The drinks card: Several bars and clubs operate a drinks card system that combines cover charge and bar consumption. Upon entry, you'll receive a slip of paper to record your purchases on. If you don't buy anything, you'll pay a cover charge, or minimum consumption charge, the amount of which is normally communicated before your enter. Otherwise, you'll settle your bill upon departure. Do hold onto your drinks card for dear life or you'll be asked to pay a hefty penalty. Also, we have received complaints of overcharging: do keep tab of your tab.

Action Bar V. Magyar utca 42 (266 9148/www.action.gay.hu). M3 Kálmán tér/night bus 909, 914, 950, 950A, 979, 979A. Daily 9pm-5am. Ft1,000 minimum mandatory bar consumption. Popular cellar bar, recently refurbished, with the

busiest darkroom in town and fancy new toilets with see-through walls. Look out for a non-descript letter 'A' on the decrepit door. Live shows and striptease on Fridays at 12.30am.

Alterego Bar & Lounge VI. Dessewffy utca 33 (06 70 345 4302/www.alteregoclub.hu). M1 Opera/night bus 914, 931, 950, 979. Fri-Sat 10pm-6am. Ft1,000 before midnight, Ft1,500 after. A stylish beacon in the dark night, with a Dorian Gray-esque portrait watching over a well-dressed crowd, Alterego attracts gay men and their friends. Enforced face and dress control.

Amstel River Café V. Párisi utca 6 (266 4334/www.amstelrivercafe.com). M3/bus 5, 7, 112, 173, 178 Ferenciek tere. Daily 12pm-12am. 15 years on, the Amstel, a small and tastefully appointed Dutch café, attracts a comfortable mix of tourists, hetero regulars and gays in an unbeatable central location, complete with a terrace. Also a full kitchen and daily specials.

Capella V. Belgrád rakpart 23 (318 6231/06 30 629 7971/www.capellacafe.hu). M3 Ferenciek tere/tram 2/night bus 901, 908, 956, 973. Mon, Wed-Thur, Sun 10pm-4am; Fri-Sat 10pm-5am. Ft500-Ft1,500. It has been 13 years that the best located gay club has brought a mixed crowd dance and divas, and a couple of interior facelifts in this gutted multi-level space of bars and dance floors.

Club Underground VI. Teréz körút 30 (06 20 261 8999/www.clubunderground.hu). M3/tram 4, 6/night bus 906 Oktogon. Admission free, minimum mandatory bar consumption Ft 2,000. Open Fri 10pm-5am; Sat 10pm-6am. Club Underground's new lease on nightlife has signed on Noxyma Johnson and her partner to turn it into a diva drag digs in the cavernous basement space next to Művész cinema. Complete with two dance floors, Underground lines up some of the best trannies in town: Betty Blue and Miss Mandarin, among others, alongside MC Erik, who also provides live musical entertainment. "Are you sure Barbara is not a biological woman", asked Time Out's own photographer.

coXx Men's Club VII. Dohány utca 38 (344 4884/www.coxx.hu) M2 Astoria/tram 47, 49/bus 7/night bus 908, 921, 973. Mon-Thur, Sun 9pm-4am; Fri-Sat 9pm-5am. Admission free, minimum mandatory bar consumption Ft 1,000. Misleading upstairs gallery/netcafe. Downstairs a separate cruising labyrinth of desire, complete with cages, slings, glory holes, wet rooms and three full bars.

Erotika Centrum VII. Dob utca 11 (351 1000/06 30 444 7900/www.gaybears.hu). M2 Astoria/tram 47, 49/bus 7/night bus 908, 921, 973. 10am-10pm Mon-Sat (shop); 2pm-10pm Mon-Sat (club); 12pm-6pm Sun (shop and club). Admission Ft800 annual one-off membership fee; plus Ft500 Mon, Tue, Sun; Ft1,000 Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat. On three storeys, this sex shop triples as cinema and club, complete with internet access, cabins and glory holes. Bear party on the last Friday of every month.

Funny Carrot V. Szép utca 1B (06 20 942 9419/www.funnycarrot.hu) M2 Astoria/tram 47, 49/bus 7, 8, 78, 112/night bus 908, 921, 973. Daily 7pm-6am. Recently opened in place of the old Darling, this quaint chit-chat bar hangout offers laid-back atmos to chill out to the sound of retro tunes.

GLAM VI. Dessewffy utca 44 (06 30 366 0296/428 2225/www.glambudapest.com). Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat 10pm-5am. Admission varies, from free to Ft1,500. It's all happening here: karaoke on Mondays, early bird drink specials on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays - beer for Ft350 until midnight, among others, "R" action with Rem'z on Wednesdays at 1am. That's on the off days. Fridays see Gem Shows at 1am, while Saturdays, ex the 26th, feature DJ Oli in the main room and karaoke in the small room.

Habroló Bisztró V. Szép utca 1B (06 20 211 6701/www.habrolo.hu). M3 Ferenciek tere/bus 7, 78, 112/night bus

907, 908, 956, 973. Mon-Fri 9am-dawn; Sat-Sun 7pm-dawn. Habroló is a local delicacy. This comfortable bar features a tiny lounge-like space upstairs and a small stage for drag shows. Fridays feature popcorn parties, while Sundays see themed performances. Women welcome.

Le Cafe M V. Nagysándor József utca 3 (312 1436/www.lecafem.com). M2 Arany János utca. Mon-Fri 4pm-4am; Sat-Sun 6pm-4am. Formerly known as the Mystery Bar, Le Cafe M is plopped in the middle of the bank and government district, offering a cool rendezvous spot or a laid back chat corner. 2 for 1 deals and your drinks bill can offset your WiFi charges.

Lesbian

Ösztrosokk Parties, Diesel Club (former E-Klub) X. Népliget út 2 (ostzrosokk@femfata.hu/www.ostzrosokk.hu). M3 Népliget. Second Sat of the month 10pm-4am. Ft1,000. Women-only groups hold court for the lesbian community with resident DJs and theme parties.

Vis Major Café XIII. Szent István körút 2 (239 4451/www.vismajor.hu) Tram 2, 4, 6/night bus 906, 923, 931. Mon-Wed noon-midnight; Thur-Fri noon-2am, Sat 4pm-2am, Sun 4pm-midnight. A literary café by name and not exclusively a lesbian establishment, the space multitasks as a gallery featuring exhibitions alongside theatre performances, talk shows and a film club, and it regularly and frequently hosts events of lesbian interest such as the Gobbi Hilda Film Club on the first Saturday of every month starting at 6pm - the now deceased Ms. Gobbi being Hungary's Greta Garbo. The fortnightly 'Pikk Dáma' on Sundays starts at 5pm and offers an afternoon of games. Entrance to the bar is around the corner from the körút, on Pozsonyi út.

Saunas

Magnum Szauna VIII. Csepregy utca 2 (267 2532/www.magnumszauna.hu). M3 Ferenc körút or Kálmán tér/night bus 914, 950, 950A. Mon-Thur 1pm-12pm, Fri 1pm-4am, Sat 1pm to Mon 1am. Ft2,100-Ft2,900. Over 500sqm, the recently face lifted Magnum is a labyrinth with diversions like sauna, steam room, showers for two, lounge area with TV, internet, a sizeable fitness room, dark room and cabins. Fridays see dark out parties at 8pm, and a fetish party at 10pm. There are drag shows or free pizza on every Saturday at 8pm, theme days, and on Saturday to Monday morning the operation is non-stop. Those between 18 and 29 pay only Ft900 on Mondays, and on Wednesdays everyone pays a discounted Ft1,490. You can also have a relaxing massage. Occasional HIV testing on the premises.

Szauna 69 IX. Angyal utca 2 (210 1751/www.gaysauna.hu). Tram 4, 6 Mester utca/tram 2 or bus 15 Boráros tér. Mon-Thu 1pm-1am, Fri 1am-2am; Sat 1pm-6am; Sun 1pm-1am. Ft1,590-1,790. Finnish sauna, Jacuzzi and private rooms attract a younger crowd to an aqua-inspired blue mosaic-clad lounge. Of the massages, the 90-minute chocolate massage promises extra moisture. Happy hours for Ft1,200 on Mondays and Tuesdays between 1pm and 6pm, while under 25s get in for Ft1,100 on Thursdays. Internet and bar also.

Sport & dance

Atlas Sport and Friss Gondolat (www.atlazzsport.hu/www.badmintong.hu/www.vandormasok.hu) is Hungary's gaysports association, offering activities from badminton wrestling swimming and handball. Sports for the boys and girls, and their gay-friendly friends and family. The two groups are also in charge of the organisation of Eurogames in Budapest in 2012. The hiking group, Vándor Mások and Gemini, the dance group, also operate under Atlas's auspices. For all other schedules and locations, consult the websites.