

PRESS RELEASE

A FILM ABOUT CHOREOGRAPHER JIŘÍ KYLIÁN TO OPEN JI.HLAVA ON FRIDAY NIGHT

30TH JI.HLAVA FESTIVAL TRAILER CREATED BY NAOMI KAWASE

Jihlava, October 20, 2026

The 30th edition of Ji.hlava IDFF begins this Friday in the Czech city of Jihlava, featuring more than 350 films from around the world. The festival will open with the European premiere of *Return to a Strange Land*, directed by Olga Malířová Špátová, about internationally acclaimed choreographer Jiří Kylián. This year's festival trailer was created by Naomi Kawase as an appeal against war. Czech documentary filmmaker Helena Třeštíková and Vietnamese-American filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha will receive the Award for Contribution to World Cinema.

The 30th Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival begins this Friday. This year's programme features more than 350 films across its competitive and non-competitive sections, including 106 world premieres, 28 international premieres and eight European premieres.

"If someone had told me in 1997 that thirty years later the festival would be one of Europe's key documentary film festivals, running for ten days across seven cinemas, accompanied by an Inspiration Forum featuring prominent personalities and with its own international industry programme, I would have found it hard to believe. Not because I thought something like this was impossible, but because I could not have imagined how it would happen. Almost thirty years later, I can see that it has been made possible by the thousands of people who have contributed to Ji.hlava's story. Like a film, a festival is a collective work, and I am delighted that Ji.hlava has managed to harness this potential to such an extraordinary degree," says festival director Marek Hovorka.

Opening Film: Return to a Strange Land

The anniversary edition will open with *Return to a Strange Land* by director **Olga Malířová Špátová**. This poetic documentary follows internationally renowned choreographer Jiří Kylián in a creative process with his lifelong muse and dancer Sabine Kupferberg. The film's unifying thread is a choreography by Kylián that emerges spontaneously before the camera. Although he has created numerous choreographies for Sabine over the decades, now, at the age of 79, he appears alongside her as a protagonist for the first time. Together, they look back on more than fifty years of artistic collaboration and reflect on the meaning of life, the passage of time, ageing and disappearance. The film was shot on Terschelling, an island in the northern Netherlands that holds symbolic significance for Sabine and Jiří. It is associated with the 1970s, when they both emigrated to the Netherlands. The film's central expressive elements are its powerful visual cinematography and music by Leoš Janáček, Claude Debussy, Ludwig van Beethoven, Tōru Takemitsu and Arne Nordheim, composers whose works Kylián has choreographed throughout his career. Archival footage woven throughout the documentary traces their collaboration from 1975 to the present.

"I am fascinated by Jiří Kylián's choreography, through which he explores relationships and human life. His boundless and exceptional sense of humour, so characteristic of his work, never ceases to surprise me. Equally remarkable is his kindness—or perhaps kindness comes naturally to someone of such stature? Through their art, Sabine and Jiří give audiences wings. They strive to bring optimism into life and ease the burden of the human condition," says Olga Malířová Špátová about the film.

30th Festival Trailer by Naomi Kawase

The trailer for the 30th Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival was created by Japanese director **Naomi Kawase**, one of Asia's most prominent filmmakers. For the Ji.hlava trailer, Kawase selected a Corsican lullaby from her personal collection of songs and paired it with images. Through the song, which speaks, among other things, of waiting for someone who will never return, she expresses her opposition to war and her wish for peace. The video stems from her belief that children who grow up listening to lullabies should never become soldiers tasked with killing other people. Three years ago, Ji.hlava presented a showcase of Naomi Kawase's films, and she also gave a masterclass at the festival. In 2005, she received Ji.hlava's Award for Contribution to Cinema.

Ji.hlava traditionally entrusts the creation of its [official trailers](#), screened before each film, to exceptional authors of world cinema – Jean-Luc Godard, Kirsten Johnson, Godfrey Reggio and composer Jóhann Jóhannsson, for example, have all contributed to this tradition.

Award for Contribution to World Cinema: Helena Třeštíková and Trinh T. Minh-ha

This year, Ji.hlava IDFF will present its Award for Contribution to World Cinema to two remarkable filmmakers: Czech documentary director and FAMU lecturer **Helena Třeštíková** and Vietnamese-American filmmaker and theorist **Trinh T. Minh-ha**.

The award will also be reflected in the festival programme. Ji.hlava audiences can look forward to the television series [Bára – Diary of a Rockstar](#), a three-part version of the documentary of the same name, filmed over many years and following the Czech singer across fifty years of her life and of Czech pop music. The FAMU 80 section, subtitled FAMU and Helena Böhmová, will present four student films by Helena Böhmová, later known as Helena Třeštíková.

Ji.hlava will also present an exceptional [retrospective of award-winning filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha](#), one of the leading figures of essayistic documentary cinema. The Vietnamese-American filmmaker, writer, composer and theorist challenges traditional ways of representing other cultures, women, minorities and documentary reality itself. The programme includes her debut [Reassemblage](#) (1982), a landmark of postcolonial and feminist cinema. Shot in Senegal, the film deliberately rejects the conventions of anthropological documentary, in which Western filmmakers assume the role of authorities explaining another culture to an audience. Another key film in the retrospective is [Surname Viet Given Name Nam](#) (1989), in which Trinh T. Minh-ha uses testimonies from Vietnamese women to explore who tells their stories and what happens to them when they are transformed into cinematic images. Here, too, she deliberately disrupts the notion of documentary as an objective record of reality.

Surprise / Film Event of the Year and NAZA

To celebrate its 30th birthday, Ji.hlava is offering audiences a gift: a mystery screening. In cooperation with distributor Aerofilms, the festival has prepared a ***Surprise / Film Event of the Year***. According to early reactions, this documentary overturns established ideas about documentary filmmaking and is among the most talked-about films of this autumn. Critical responses to its New York premiere have described it as “a radical and groundbreaking work of documentary cinema that will make the world look very different after you have seen it.”

Another exceptional film in this year's programme is the chilling documentary ***NAZA*** by Israeli directing duo Rachel Szor and Yuval Abraham, winner of the Special Jury Prize at this year's Venice Film Festival. The investigative documentary uncovers mechanisms behind the mass killing of Palestinian civilians. NAZA is an abbreviation used by Israeli intelligence to denote so-called “collateral damage”: the number of people expected to die in a strike. “How can one group of people allow the complete dehumanisation of another?” ask the filmmakers, who spent three years recording testimonies from 24 former and serving members of the Israeli armed forces. In the film, they reveal sophisticated concealed systems behind the enormous death toll.

Juries of the 30th Ji.hlava

The **Opus Bonum jury** consists of five figures working in documentary cinema, film theory and directing. Spanish producer, mentor and film researcher **Marta Andreu** runs Walden, a platform devoted to filmmaking and reflection on cinema, and organises international workshops, seminars and lectures. Dutch professor of film and media culture **Patricia Pisters** teaches at the University of Amsterdam and wrote *New Blood in Contemporary Cinema*, a book about women directors of horror films. Slovak documentary director **Sára Prokopová** works on independent and television documentary projects and has recently completed her debut film *Retuning*, set in the world of Slovak public service media. British professor of philosophy, art and film **Murray Smith** teaches at the University of Kent and has written extensively on film, art and aesthetics. Czech filmmaker and theatre director **Petr Zelenka** is known for the films *Buttoners*, *Year of the Devil*, *Wrong Side Up*, and *The Karamazov Brothers*.

The **First Lights jury** brings together three figures from filmmaking, film research and festival programming. Italian researcher **Anja Boato** specialises in immersive media and the relationship between technology and cultural production. Since 2019, she has been part of the press office of the Venice Immersive section at the Venice International Film Festival. Italian film critic, programmer and curator **Daniela Persico** serves on the selection committee of the Locarno Film Festival, where she also heads Locarno Academy & Residency. American filmmaker and poet **Lynne Sachs** explores the relationship between personal experience and broader historical contexts, approaching the body, camera and film material from a feminist perspective.

The **Czech Joy competition jury** includes film historian, lecturer and journalist **Jindřiška Bláhová**, who writes about film, television and the cultural industries for the weekly Respekt and heads the Department of Audiovisual History and Theory at FAMU. Slovak cinematographer **Eva Gabrižová** works in both fiction and documentary film. She received a Silver Student Academy Award for her film *Volklore*. Director and producer **Vitaly Mansky** has made more than thirty documentaries screened at international festivals and awarded over one hundred prizes. Last year he also won Ji.hlava's Best Czech Documentary Film award for *Time to the Target*.

The **jury for the Fascinations and Fascinations: Exprmntl.cz competitions** consists of three figures from film and contemporary art: French researcher, writer and art and film curator **Rasha Salti**, who works as a creative producer specialising in experimental documentary at ARTE France; German curator **Christoph Terhechte**, former head of the Berlinale Forum and artistic and executive director of DOK Leipzig; and German artist **Johanna Terhechte**, whose work combines two-dimensional media with sculpture and explores the transformation of images and their transfer into space.

The **Testimonies jury** includes three Czech figures whose work addresses the media, documentary film and human rights. Journalist, writer and presenter **Linda Bartošová** previously worked at Czech Television and is the author of the books *Women Journalists* and *As If All My Strength Had Left Me*. For Czech Radio's *Radio Wave*, she created the podcast series *Beauty and Pleasure*. **Tomáš Hirt**, a visual anthropologist and documentary film theorist, works in visual anthropology, cultural theory and documentary theory. **Anna Šabatová**, an activist and human rights defender, signed Charter 77 and became its spokesperson in 1986. She has also served as the Czech Public Defender of Rights and chair of the Czech Helsinki Committee.

A new feature this year is cooperation with the **International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI)**, which has assembled a jury for the First Lights competition. Its members are Czech screenwriter and author **Tereza Brdečková**, Dutch film critic **Hugo Emmerzael** and Canadian cultural journalist and film programmer **Marc Glassman**.

Three distinguished documentary film professionals will join the **Industry Jury of the 30th Ji.hlava IDFF**: **Katrine Kiilgaard**, Managing Director of CPH:DOX (Denmark); **Anda Ionescu**, Managing Partner and Producer at Tangaj Production (Romania); and **Robert Y. Chang**, Co-Producer of *American Documentary | POV* (USA). Bringing together extensive experience in documentary production, festival programming and international collaboration, the jury will select the winners of numerous industry awards from 29 projects presented at the [Ji.hlava New Visions Forum](#), representing Europe, the U.S., and East and Southeast Asia.

Find all of this year's jury members and festival guests [here](#).

Read previous press releases introducing the programme [here](#).

Find the list of the guests of the 30th Ji.hlava [here](#).

The 30th Ji.hlava IDFF will take place from October 23 to November 1, 2026. Early bird Industry accreditations for film professionals are available until September 30. More information is available at ji-hlava.com. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

To request a press accreditation, please contact us at pressservice@ji-hlava.cz

30th Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival

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