



presents

Dangerous Acts Starring the Unstable Elements of Belarus



USA | 2013 | 76' | HD

A Film by Madeleine Sackler

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OFFICIAL SELECTION 2013

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Comprised of smuggled footage and uncensored interviews, DANGEROUS ACTS gives audiences a front row seat to a resistance movement as it unfolds both on the stage and in the streets. As the members of the Free Theater confront the choice of either repression at home or exile in the US and the UK, DANGEROUS ACTS reconfirms our belief that the power of art and hope can indeed change the world.

LONGER SYNOPSIS

Creating provocative theatre carries great personal risks: emotional, financial and artistic. For the members of the Belarus Free Theatre, there are additional risks: censorship, imprisonment, and worse. Director Madeleine Sackler goes behind the scenes with the acclaimed troupe of imaginative and subversive performers who, in a desolate country choked by censorship and repression, defy Europe's last remaining dictatorship. When authorities forbid critical examinations of such topics as sexual orientation, alcoholism, suicide and politics, the Free Theatre responds by injecting these taboos into performances that are staged in underground. And yet, because of the power of their message, they receive critical acclaim overseas.

DANGEROUS ACTS STARRING THE UNSTABLE ELEMENTS OF BELARUS picks up the story in 2010 when the KGB is cracking down on dissenters, sixteen years after Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko takes power during the breakup of the Soviet Union. Now, as a dubious new presidential election looms, the KGB targets the Free Theatre's founders Nikolai Khalezin and Natalia Koliada who, along with their colleagues, find themselves torn between fighting for their art and for their and their families' safety.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT - MADELEINE SACKLER

I first heard about the Belarus Free Theatre, an underground theater group in Belarus, in 2010 from a New York theater friend. I learned that their audiences in Belarus could only find the secret location of the theater after getting a phone call from the theater's manager, who gave them directions and also instructed them to bring their passports in case the KGB raided the performance.

I couldn't believe this was happening in Europe, and I assumed that the performances were all overtly political, otherwise why would the government go to such great lengths to shut them down? What I learned was that many of the stories the theater brought to the stage did not seem to be political; they were stories about their friends, their families, struggles with daily life, suicide, homosexuality, alcoholism -- things that in America and most places around the world we can discuss openly. But those stories alone were enough for the government to refuse the theater's requests to rent performance space, legally perform, or sell tickets -- which, without a registration in Belarus, is an economic crime. The one freedom gained by this oppression was their ability to tell the truth about what it is like to live under what is often called "the last dictatorship of Europe." Had they been working as a state registered theater, they would have been subject to the censorship of the Ministry of Culture.

On January 1, 2012, the theater company was forced to flee Belarus after participating in a peaceful protest after a disputed presidential election, and I realized that I had an opportunity to make a different kind of film, one that weaves together artistic versions of reality with reality itself. While I filmed the theater members in New York and the UK, I also found a cinematographer in Belarus who had state accreditation to own a camera, and I began directing her over Skype. Our work together resulted in hundreds of hours of cinema vérité footage that was smuggled out of the country -- footage of families left behind, of the actors who risked returning to Minsk to try to re-establish the theater, and of every day citizens who bravely showed up at ongoing protests against the regime.

The film developed into the story of this watershed year for both Belarus and for the Belarus Free Theatre as they navigated separation from their home and from each other and yet continued to make art about their experience. But it is a similar story to that of many people around the world -- in both free and repressed countries -- who act against the grain to do what they believe is right or simply to follow their passion regardless of its popularity.

FILMMAKERS

Madeleine Sackler- Director

Madeleine Sackler is the director and producer of DANGEROUS ACTS STARRING THE UNSTABLE ELEMENTS OF BELARUS her third feature documentary. Her first documentary, THE LOTTERY, sparked a renewed debate on the future of public education and was shortlisted for the 2011 Academy Awards. DUKE 91 & 92: BACK TO BACK her second film, was co-produced by Turner Sports and gave viewers an inside look at one of the most storied basketball programs in history. Madeleine is the co-founder of Osmosis Films, a new media company dedicated to producing interactive, long form content. A Duke '05 alum, she also has a degree in biopsychology and has previously worked as a freelance editor for television, commercials and documentaries.

Andrea Meditch – Executive Producer

Andrea Meditch is an award-winning documentary film producer. In 2009 she executive produced both the Academy Award winner *Man on Wire* and the Oscar-nominated *Encounters at the End of the World*. She is president of Back Allie Entertainment, which produced several documentaries, including *Buck*, and is an advisor to Michigan State University's College of Communication. Previously she spent fifteen years at Discovery Communications, where she launched and built Discovery Films, the theatrical arm of the company, overseeing the development, production and distribution of numerous documentary films, including Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man*, which won the Alfred P. Sloan award at Sundance in 2005. She also executive-produced *In the Shadow of the Moon*, which won the 2007 World Documentary Audience Award at Sundance, as well as the Emmy-nominated *The Killer Within*. Meditch holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology with a concentration in Mass Media from the University of Texas and a B.S. in Communications from Northwestern University.

Credits

Director:	Madeleine Sackler
Producer	Madeleine Sackler
Executive Producer	Andrea Meditch
Directors of Photography:	Daniel Carter, Larissa Kabernik
Film Editors:	Anne Barliant, Leigh Johnson
Music:	Wendy Blackstone
Sound:	Steve Borne
Associate Producers:	Leigh Johnson

**Production company:
Great Curve Films
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