



SERIOUS TALKING

Filmmaker Yulia Romanova talks about Gender, her project that tackles some of the serious issues facing the industry today



Yulia Romanova thinks the time is just right for her latest project in light of the controversy that has been surrounding the filmmaking industry of late.

"Nowadays the film industry and its projects are becoming more international and collaborative, and more and more serious issues are being addressed in movies," she states. "Our project has both of these elements, with a cast and crew from all over the world who worked on *Gender*. It raises an important topic that is being actively discussed and dealt with."

Special operation

The filmmaker is also pretty

chuffed with the way the operation has gone too. "We had an amazing international cast and crew," Yulia elaborates. "Starting with myself, being originally from Russia, I took on the role of producer and one of the leads in the film. If we wanted to bring this script to life, we needed great actors and crew to make it happen, and we're so glad we had the opportunity to work with them. I used to work in event organising for several years, but two years ago I decided to take up film producing as I was already acting and wanted to create my own projects. That's where my event and acting skills came in handy. When it comes to

organising an event or producing a film, you need to be prepared to deal with a lot of aspects and to prepare everything, even for emergencies, but fortunately I am a big control freak and I love to micromanage. So with *Gender* I was lucky enough to do two of my most favourite things: producing and acting."

Strong storyline

Gender is a drama about inequalities in the work place. It shows how women struggle emotionally and sometimes physically in order to make

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themselves noticeable and still get overlooked just because of some gender prejudices, which as Yulia explains, becomes frustrating. "The turning point of the narrative is when one of these women raises her voice and tries to stop that unfairness," she says. "We wanted to deliver a message that when



everything seems wrong and you can't do anything, you still have your courage to stand up for what's right and do something that may change lives. Don't be afraid to fight any mistreatments that come your way."

Great inspiration

Yulia says that she and her friend, co-collaborator Gisele Mauvecin were attending a private acting

course at Pinewood Studios two years ago and since then they have stayed in touch. Last year they subsequently decided to make a film together because their film vision was very similar and it was easy for them to work with each other. "So we started to play around with ideas for a film until one day, when I was visiting my family in Russia, she sent me the script," notes the

filmmaker. "The topic of the script intrigued me, plus it was partially based on her life. Gisele wrote Gender before she became a full-time actress and screenwriter. She has a degree in Social Communication and was working for two big companies. In one of them she was a woman in charge of an area for six years, and



Producing duties

Yulia was duly enlisted to produce and was super-keen to get stuck in on the project. "When I was back from my holidays last autumn, I acquired the funding and began to think what we should start with," she says. "We had some production meetings and wanted to polish the script first. I then started to look for a director, and all was going well, but we were running out of time as Gisele needed to get back to Argentina for a while and we were lost in terms of locations. We needed a modern office space but didn't have that much in our budget to rent an office in, for example, Canary

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that was the moment when she noticed the gender inequalities in her company. Almost all of the high-ranked positions were occupied by men, even her friends/colleagues from other companies. So she decided to express that unfairness in a script that would be made into a film and watched by people to make them aware of the issue."





Wharf or Waterloo or any other place that was offered to us at very high prices. We already thought that Gender might not happen until Gisele found a really nice company (Space Works) who rents out offices for affordable prices. We loved the place straight away and the Director with the DOP were also happy with that. After that, everything was easy. Naturally, there were minor throwbacks, but as I already had organizational experience it was just about dealing with the problems as they came along and avoiding any

stress to keep working towards our goal."

Suitable funds

"And," adds the filmmaker on the point of finances, "I'd say we had a decent budget for a short drama. Our location turned out to be very nice, so everyone was happy to be there. The other location was a great apartment loft and we were also lucky with the owner as she gave us a good price. We had enough money to have all the crew we needed. Thankfully we didn't need any VFX but I did have to rush with

post-production as we wanted to apply for Cannes Film Festival, so the editor and a composer did an amazingly quick job! At the end of the day, what matters more is the people you work with and I was lucky to work with such a professional cast and crew who knew what they were doing. Of course, sometimes I had to rush everyone as time is money, but that was my job, so we were great as a team and were all helping each other."

Equipment essentials

The production team ended up using a Blackmagic Cinema Camera with several different lenses. "Our DOP Magda knew her stuff," reckons Yulia. "She was very precise with her angles and the resulting images left me very happy. We also used a couple of Arri lighting rigs, but some of them stopped working right in the middle of the shoot so we had to improvise, as is always the case in filmmaking. It was a



bit tricky in the office when it got darker, but luckily our DOP had some of her own lights, so we were saved!"

Positive spin

The filmmaker reckons that now it has been completed, the project is doing a great job at raising the profile of the issues she has been keen to raise. "Since the film's been finished, it's been rewarding to hear that I've inspired people, not just as a woman in film, but also creatively," states Yulia.

"When I receive messages or comments - not only from women - that all the work that I do is great or inspires them to create and grow professionally, that's where I am really happy with what I do. Hopefully this film will be one of many and I can continue to make films that deal with important issues and that inspire people in some way. Gender is doing its festival run at the moment and it's going well. Even before any screenings or interviews it has won three awards! Two for Best Drama and

another one for Inspiring Woman in a Film for my character Anna, along with other nominations (including me for Best Producer, and our cast for Best Ensemble).

"I'm also working on a horror feature, which is predominantly set on a coach"

Gisele and I were also honorably mentioned as the best duo. On top of that it has been selected for a couple of other festivals. We are sure this is only the beginning of its journey."

Developing projects

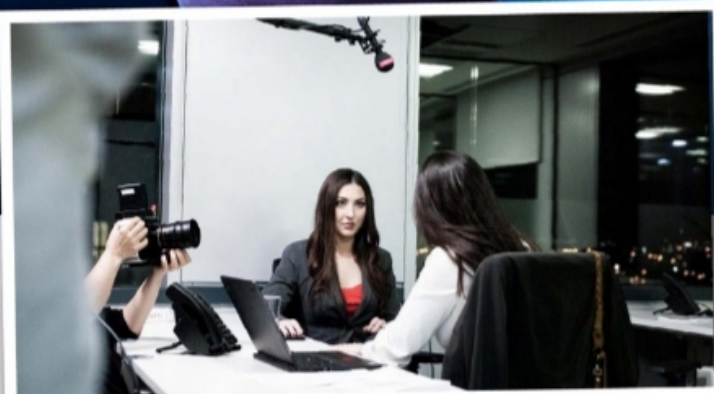
Yulia is also in the middle of pre-production for her next project, which is a sci-fi thriller called Safe Again. "I developed an idea a year ago and then got two amazing writers on board to help me with a story," she says. "After a year of development, it became a very interesting project



that I am extremely excited about. The story is similar to a Black Mirror episode (although I haven't watched any episodes during the film's development), with a twist and serious message. I'm also working on a horror feature, which is predominantly set on a coach. I can't say any more at the moment, but the project was based on the idea of the amazingly talented director James Bushe, who introduced me to this project. Each project is different from one another, most notably

the genres of each piece: Gender is a drama while Safe Again is a sci-fi thriller and the next project is a horror. I like to explore different genres both producing and acting-wise. Each has its own challenges and perks. With every new project I learn a lot and never get tired or bored with them. But I've noticed I do like films about serious topics or with powerful messages. That is why I am so excited about Safe Again. Just like Black Mirror, it has a simple but poignant message that sticks





with you and makes you think deep after you watch it."

Cutting edge

"I think that's why my favourite genre is thriller," adds the filmmaker. "You can't go wrong with it - unless it's shot poorly, ha! You get to play around with human emotions and the art of suspense. It's amazing to act/produce/shoot something that will make an audience jump or have other strong reactions. I love movies that can keep you on the edge of your seat until the end and make you think after you leave the theatre and even right before you go to bed. In my opinion, that's what film is about; it's not just about the entertainment value, but also to have your film resonate in peoples minds for some time after. When it comes to watching

movies, I personally prefer horror thrillers as they combine two of my favourite genres, like the Saw movies, which I love."

City slicker

The filmmaker currently lives in London, which is a place where she feels perfectly at home it seems. "There's a lot going on here," says Yulia of her current situation. "From film festivals and premieres through to networking events. The UK industry is so influential and active and London is such a great place to make contacts and get your projects made. The amazing thing about London as a city in general is there is always something happening, and that includes film. I'm just a quick ride away from any event that's occurring centrally. The area I live in specifically (South East) has a

pretty active filmmaking life as well. I was lucky enough to be close to the venue where the London Independent Film Festival was held and there were quite a few networking events too. This year the Gold Movie Awards were held literally next to my house, although I was not able to attend, but it was nice to know that my area is so film active and friendly. I am also just minutes away from the London Horror Con venue this year, which I am planning to attend. It's a shame that they had to postpone it, but luckily for me, location-wise I am all set."

Building blocks

Yulia also has ambitious plans for the future too although, it has to be said, is still in two minds about whether she wants to be in front of, or behind the camera. "I don't know what I love more; producing

or acting," she chuckles. "Each of them gives me such a thrilling feeling. I love organising a shoot, but I also love being a part of the story and there is no other feeling than being on set creating a character. The best thing is when you are able to do both at the same time. It can be exhausting, but the rewards are so worth it. Recently, I've actually set up my own production company called Romanoff Pictures and I'm planning on expanding it and collaborating with other companies on my future projects. I have also already been cast for some films, so have a lot on my plate this year. In the future I would still love to produce my own projects from time to time, but my main focus will be on acting as I love creating characters that can inspire or influence you in some way." ■