

izidor

To belong is to be alive

IZIDOR STORY LLC PRESENTS IOSUA BARBU SARAH PADBURY LUCIAN IGNA "IZIDOR" MUSIC BY JESPER ANKARFELDT EDITED BY CHRISTINE LOJOKO HASLETT
MARK HASLETT AND TONY LEECH DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DANIEL WYLAND ANIMATION AND VFX SUPERVISOR JOHN KUJAWA PRODUCED BY IZIDOR RUCKEL
SARAH PADBURY AND DAVID KABBE CO-PRODUCER ELENA BEUCA WRITTEN BY SARAH PADBURY DIRECTED BY DAVID KABBE

T. Pelucchi '24



IzidorStory.com

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LOGLINE

Trapped in a horrid, animated asylum, an orphan discovers a beautiful, real world exists outside the gate.

SYNOPSIS

Disabled children are banished in 1988 communist Romania. But one daring nanny resolves to take 8-year-old Izidor outside for the very first time. She never could have imagined the consequences.



Title	IZIDOR
Project Type	SHORT
Genre	DRAMA
Format	LIVE ACTION/ANIMATION
Production Years	2021-2024
Country of Origin	UNITED STATES
Country of Filming	ROMANIA
Language	ENGLISH
Run Time	29 MIN 56 SEC
Screen Ratio	16 x 9
Shooting Format	DIGITAL
Sound Format	5.1 and STEREO

FULL SYNOPSIS

Eight-year-old Izidor is a disabled orphan trapped in a world of animation. He lives in a hidden asylum where “defective” children are banished and abused in 1988 communist Romania. Izidor spends his days staring out the window at a world he is not allowed to touch. That is, until the day nanny Onisa takes him home for the night.

Once they step outside the asylum gate, the world mysteriously transforms into live action – it’s real! Izidor is spellbound by the sights and sounds of nature and village life. He delights in the beauty of love and belonging in Onisa’s family.

But all too soon, Izidor remembers where he really belongs. Was Onisa’s courageous act of kindness a terrible mistake?

Based on a true story

THE ORPHANS' ANIMATED WORLD

Dark, Eerie, Uncomfortable, Unreal

The children exist in an animated world, an asylum confined by a cement wall topped with barbed wire. The children are not treated as real humans and in fact, are not even aware they are human – until the day Izidor passes through the gate, and into the real world.





PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

Sarah Padbury



As Mom to seven children, all of whom joined our family through adoption, I am driven to give voice to children who are missing a mom to speak up for them. I am also passionate about writing, film, and acting. Promoting Izidor's story brings together my talents to advocate for children beyond my own family.

I met Izidor Ruckel in a coffee shop a dozen years ago. We began collaborating to help vulnerable children around the globe. This led to traveling to Romania to research and write both a short film and a limited series about Izidor's extraordinary life. Putting his story on screen will inspire and educate more people than a lifetime of speaking engagements, bringing hope and help to millions.

Portraying the day Onisa took Izidor home presents our message in one powerful anecdote everyone can relate to: the need to belong. IZIDOR is a success when it moves viewers to help neglected children experience belonging in this world, because to belong is to truly be alive.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

David Kabbe



Sometimes the best stories find you. I have traveled and documented stories of survival and resilience in some of the most desperate circumstances in this war-torn world. I wondered how these stories could ever be made into films. They are too hard, too real, too sad.

In 2015, I met Izidor Ruckel and Sarah Padbury who wanted to bring Izidor's personal story from script to screen. They asked me to read Izidor's autobiography and research the mountain of news coverage about his life. When I reached the story about a nanny who took him outside for the first time at 8 years old, I was so moved that I had to put the book down and take a long walk. There are just too many stories of children in situations they shouldn't have to endure. How many more stories like this do I have to read, witness, or document?

Five years later, the memory of that feeling was still with me when they asked me to be a part of the development of a beautiful series about Izidor's life. After many conversations, we kept coming back to this one crucial event: going "outside." It became clear it isn't just a story we should tell; it is the story we MUST tell.

SOURCE MATERIAL

Izidor Ruckel

Author, Speaker, Advocate



IZIDOR is based on an awakening event in Izidor Ruckel's childhood as revealed in his autobiography, *Abandoned for Life*. The book recounts his life as a neglected Romanian orphan, ensuing adoption by an American family, and ongoing struggles as an adoptee. Izidor uses his story to advocate for vulnerable children, changing hearts and inspiring initiatives to better care for at-risk children and people with disabilities.

Izidor has presented to adoptive parents, college students, churches, nonprofits, and government policymakers across the United States and Romania about the effects of institutionalization on children. His hands-on involvement includes mentoring at a facility housing HIV positive patients, volunteering at a care center for abandoned elders, and serving at a Haitian orphanage. He also regularly fields calls from distressed adoptive families looking for support.

IzidorRuckel.com



IZIDOR'S 30+ YEARS OF PRESS COVERAGE



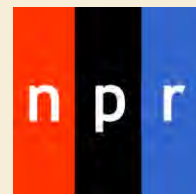
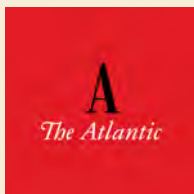
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: For twenty-four years, Romania's communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu pressured families to have at least five children in order to build his army. Meanwhile, he stripped the population of resources to care for them. In December 1989, Romania's citizens, inspired by the fall of the Berlin Wall, launched the Romanian Revolution. Ceausescu was arrested, tried and executed for crimes against humanity. Western media poured into the country and discovered tens of thousands of maltreated children in secret government "hospitals," including 10-year-old Izidor.

OUTCOME: Dozens of global media outlets have featured Izidor's story, drawn by his place in Romanian history and as a poster child for "the orphan." But Izidor always leads the discussion away from the past and to the future: What can we do to ensure that today's vulnerable children are protected, cherished and treated with dignity?



[CLICK HERE](#)
for a list of
short film
press coverage

Click the image below for Izidor Ruckel press coverage.



10 QUESTIONS

1 What inspired the idea for this film?

COURAGEOUS KINDNESS: Kindness is more than just being nice. Kindness shocks us because it takes courage. It requires great personal risk with no guarantee of reward. Yet in a moment when most people shrink, ignore or run away, others are compelled to *do something*. Humanity is awed and inspired when someone abandons good sense and safety on behalf of another.

IZIDOR is about an act of kindness in the darkest of places by a person who had no idea what the end result would be. All Onisa knew was that these forgotten children needed love and a home despite the fact the system was set up to keep them hidden away until they died. She didn't know just two years later Communism would fall and Izidor would go on to be adopted by an American family. She didn't know he would later describe the visit to her home as, "The day I discovered hope!" while speaking to large audiences. And she certainly didn't know a film would be made about her risky decision to shine a tiny light in the darkness for one small child.

We want to amplify Onisa's testimony to the power of courageous kindness.



2 The film is based on a true story about an orphan. How did you prepare for handling such a tender subject?

AUDIENCE OF ONE: From the beginning, we focused on making a film about orphans – *for orphans*. (By "orphan" we mean: all vulnerable children who are missing parental protection.) That drove our decision-making from the storyline to how we talk about and promote the movie. How can we truthfully represent the orphan experience and then positively impact their situation? We also understood that anyone with childhood trauma could also be affected by this film.

We spent 100s of hours researching the subject matter. For historical accuracy, we interviewed orphan survivors and locals who lived under Nicolae Ceausescu's regime. We examined the effects of communism and fascism on Romania, sifting through hours of old footage. To better understand the orphan, we talked with current and former orphans, young and old. We visited a Romanian family group home. We reached out to orphan care workers and nonprofits, adoptive and foster parents, psychologists, and social workers.

Finally, we will provide audiences with a how-to-help guide. The storyline itself provides a beautiful example of how to make a difference. Upon public release of the film, we will offer linked resources on our website. These plans are being developed with input from many of the people listed above.

3 What techniques were used to give the film its unique style?

ANIMATION AND LIVE ACTION: In the cinematic universe, when live action and animation are paired, the animated world is typically the fantastical, whimsical and beautiful world where the protagonist escapes the difficulties of life and learns a valuable lesson. (Examples: *Mary Poppins*, *Christopher Robin*, *Pete's Dragon*, *Narnia* series, *IF*) Our tale turns this film trope on its head: The animated world is a terrible world, a scary place you don't want to be. And the live action world, the real world, is full of beauty and goodness.

The animation has the feel of dark, European expressionistic art with its exaggerated realism. Our Animation Supervisor, John Kujawa, created an innovative production process that blends traditional 3D animation processes, motion capture, and cutting-edge techniques to achieve the emotional depth the animation needed.



4 Why did you use animation in the film?

REALITY CHECK: We had the challenge of creating an appalling world that is truly dark and terrifying. In communist Romania, tens of thousands of disabled children were warehoused in “home hospitals” that could be better described as asylums. The atrocities the children endured there are too graphic to recreate. (Ask us...) With such high stakes, we were required to make many difficult decisions about how to represent such harrowing experiences. Using animation to depict life inside the asylum allowed us to handle sensitive content with delicacy and compassion, yet still invoke the harsh realities of that life.

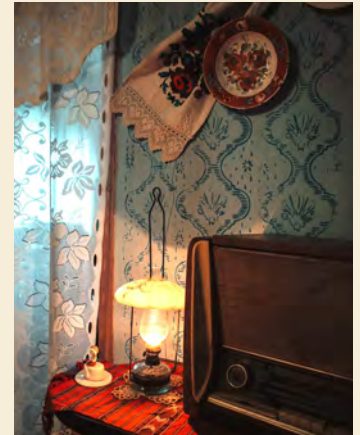
The animated world's location also exists in the film's live action world, so the animation was meticulously built to mirror the real building, inside and out. Accordingly, DP Daniel Wyland and our live action crew worked diligently to make the real world exceedingly beautiful, magical and full of light.

5 How did you find the location and set decoration to pull off a home set in 1980s Romania?

COMMUNITY HELP: We did a lot of research and cultural exploration on homes the Maramures region where this story takes place. We also interviewed people who lived during that time to confirm what typified a home back then. When we arrived on location, we had just three weeks to find a location, decorate it, and complete the shoot.

After sharing photos of the type of home interior we were looking for, a community member led us to an unoccupied, unrenovated house. Several volunteers helped us transform it into Onisa’s home. In fact, a handful of local women took it upon themselves to make sure we got it right, pulling out family heirlooms and traditional textiles for us to use on set.

Moreover, Izidor’s memory and attention to detail as a producer was crucial in getting Onisa’s home to be not only period correct, but displayed endearingly to represent the emotional roller coaster he experienced during this 24-hour period. In the end, several Romanian crew members proclaimed, “I feel like I’m in my grandma’s house!”



6 What was a difficult moment during filming and how was it handled?

ON-LOCATION FILMING: Producing a low-budget film in a foreign country about a sensitive subject, we were really on a knife’s edge where any number of things could have derailed the whole project. We planned to film in Izidor’s hometown of Sighetu Marmatiei (“Sighet”), Romania, where he was institutionalized for the first 11 years of his life. We needed permission to film around the city, as well as in the now-dilapidated building where hundreds of children used to live. However, the topic of Romania’s abandoned children under Nicolae Ceausescu is a delicate matter in Romania. We didn’t know how city officials would respond to us filming there.

A local, hard-working social worker arranged for Izidor and the filmmakers to meet with the mayor of Sighet. We wanted to personally convey that the film was not about bashing Romania’s past. Rather, Izidor represents all orphans, everywhere. He is an example of how children from hard places can overcome and heal.

Mayor Vasile Moldovan welcomed us warmly as we exchanged gifts and told him about our vision. In the end, he loved the message of the film and granted us permission to shoot in the city. In a Facebook [post](#), the mayor said, “...We hope that the period you will spend in Sighet, in the city that offered you a childhood with many challenges, will be a pleasant one, Izidor...”



7 What is a standout memory from production?

SUNDAY MEAL: We wanted to recreate the actual first meal Izidor enjoyed at Onisa's house: soup, cabbage rolls (sarmale), juice and cake. This very special "Sunday meal" means that she spent extra time and money to celebrate Izidor's visit. One of the local grandmothers, whom our director nicknamed Mama Mia, volunteered to cook the traditional meal. She also taught the actress playing Onisa how to roll sarmale correctly. We are grateful Mama Mia helped us reproduce this beautiful memory.



8 What role does music play in the film?

CONNECTION THROUGH MUSIC: We want audiences to experience with Izidor his many "firsts" – first time outside, first time seeing a horse, first bite of an apple, first time eating at a table. The film was written with very little dialogue and designed to lean on music to convey Izidor's emotions and senses as he explores what it means to be human. In effect, the music becomes a lead character. Thus, finding the right composer was super important. We couldn't be happier with the exceptional score created by Jesper Ankarfeldt.

We also wanted to add some distinctly Romanian touches to the music. The score incorporates a dulcimer (traditional Romanian instrument) and folk music themes. In addition, a popular Romanian folk song from the 1980s is played over a radio in the film (Irina Loghin's "Mi-ai dat Mama Cantecul").

9 How did a first-time writer and first-time director attract so many experienced crew members to a low budget short film?

STORY WITH PURPOSE: Our dominant strengths were having an extraordinary coming-of-age story and Sarah Padbury's solid screenplay revealing a powerful way to tell it. We also had a strong grasp of the subject matter, a firm belief this film could help vulnerable children, and a commitment to make a high-quality film if we could convince top-notch artists and crew members to join us. But most importantly, we had Izidor Ruckel's trust that our proposed film would represent him well.

The screenplay opened the door for conversations with talented artists and crew. The next hook was our distinctive use of animation and live-action. This was a fun way to start a conversation about cinematic history and how directors use new techniques to disrupt the status quo. Director Dave Kabbe shared his compelling vision about how the film would introduce an innovative way to construct a story and flip more than one movie trope on its head. Along the way, we discovered many people yearning to put their fingerprints on a film bound to do good in this world.

In the end, some incredible folks took a leap of faith and trusted us with their time, talents, and efforts. We are so very grateful.



10 What is the filmmakers' hope for audiences to take away from the film?

STEP OUT: Orphan heroes make the perfect movie trope because they have no family ties to hold them down, freedom to step out into adventure, and anonymity to move easily across social and economic barriers. But real orphans and foster children *do* have a backstory, they *do not* feel free, and they endure a *multitude* of barriers.

IZIDOR reveals a universal truth about vulnerable children across all history and cultures: adventure and healing come not by pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps, but by outsiders stepping up to help. Through Izidor's eyes, people will better relate to at-risk children in their own communities and abroad through a longing we all have: the need to belong. In addition, Onisa's family presents a model for how to step out, reach into a vulnerable child's life with courageous kindness, and make a difference. We hope viewers will do the same.

THE CAST



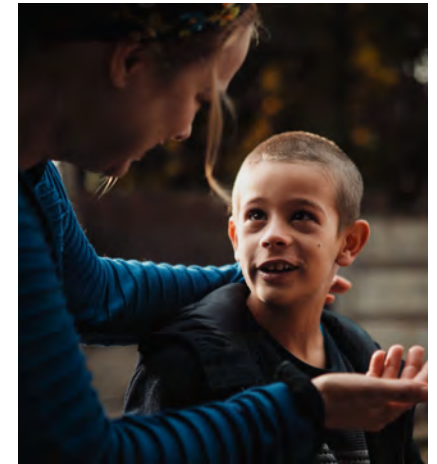
Iosua Barbu as *Izidor* (EE-zee-door)

At age 8, Iosua's standout audition earned him a lead role in his acting debut. Now 11, he enjoys clay modeling, playing guitar, and building STAR WARS Legos. He hopes playing Izidor marks the beginning of his acting career.



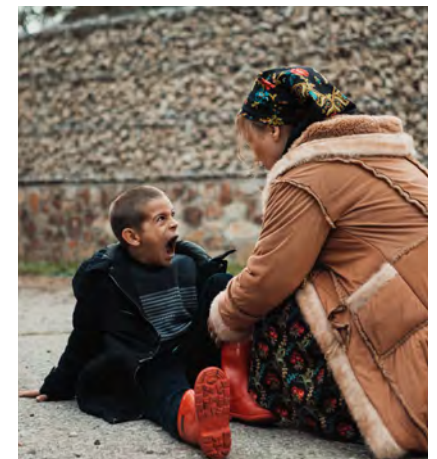
Sarah Padbury as *Onisa* (Oh-NEE-sha)

Sarah holds a Bachelor of Arts in Theater, has performed in community theater, and played a supporting lead in PAMELA'S PRAYER (Dir. Dave Christiano). This film marks her on-screen leading role debut.



Lucian Igna as *Dragos* (DRAW-go-sh)

IZIDOR is Lucian's screen debut in a supporting lead role. By day, he's a full-time dad at a family group home in Romania, as well as a talented pastry chef.



ANIMATION CAST

IZIDOR	Iosua Barbu
ONISA	Sarah Padbury
SOFIA	Elena Beuca Rogers
CRISTINA	Sara Elena Balea
MR. ALBESCU	Warren Williams
HOSPITAL DIRECTOR	David Kabbe



LIVE ACTION CAST

IZIDOR	Iosua Barbu
ONISA	Sarah Padbury
DRAGOS	Lucian Igna
TITI	Yasmina Igna
ALEX	Cristian Irimia
MIHAI	David Igna
NEIGHBORHOOD BOYS	Darius Gherdan, Codrut Gherdan, & Costin Simion
ONISA'S MOTHER	Mariana Candar Loumei
SECURITATE	Jor Van Kline
MR. ALBESCU	Nelu Candar Loumei



THE CREW



DIRECTOR/PRODUCER **David Kabbe**

IZIDOR marks Dave’s narrative film directorial debut, building on his 20 years of experience producing, coordinating, and directing a diverse range of projects—from independent films and television to live events, tentpole premieres, talk shows, and large-scale multimedia productions. He has collaborated with major studios, including Paramount, Universal, DreamWorks, and Warner Brothers.

Dave’s global upbringing ignited a deep passion for telling stories that amplify humanitarian issues. His filmmaking journey has taken him from interviewing Filipino warlords to documenting genocide in war-torn Iraq and recording the recent atrocities in Ukraine. As a foster child mentor, he gained firsthand insight into the struggles of at-risk youth, further fueling his commitment to impactful storytelling.



WRITER/PRODUCER **Sarah Padbury**

Sarah is a producer, writer, actress, and child advocate—now making her producing debut with IZIDOR. She conducted in-depth research on Izidor’s story, interviewing Izidor himself, his family, orphanage friends, former caregivers, and key figures in his rescue, both in the U.S. and Romania. In 2004, Sarah played a pivotal role in launching [Project 1.27](#), a nonprofit dedicated to equipping foster and adoptive parents. Today, the organization leads a national network of 18 bridge organizations, collectively supporting 7,000 children each year. She has seven children by adoption and has trained hundreds of foster and adoptive parents.



PRODUCER Izidor Ruckel

Izidor Ruckel is a Romanian-born author, speaker, and filmmaker known for advocating for vulnerable children. He is the producer of a two-time award-winning film, GIVEN OUR CHANCE, a documentary that explores the lives of Romanian orphans who grew up in the country's notorious orphanage system during the Communist era.



ROMANIA CO-PRODUCER Elena Beuca

Elena is a Romanian-American independent filmmaker best known for producing, directing and starring in TALITA (formerly D-LOVE), which won Best Picture at 10 film festivals. THY NEIGHBOURS is her new documentary about the plight of Ukrainian civilians and the volunteers serving them.



DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Daniel Wyland

Daniel is a Romanian-born filmmaker best known for the short film 27 CHILDREN, which won multiple film festival awards. He is a seasoned cinematographer who also is a director, producer and writer for film, music videos and commercials.



COMPOSER Jesper Ankarfeldt

Jesper is a Danish award-winning composer with more than 100 films and tv shows to his credit. His films have been screened at hundreds of film festivals, broadcast in multiple countries, won dozens of awards and earned several Oscar qualifications.



ANIMATION SUPERVISOR John Kujawa

John is a computer graphic (CG) artist whose extensive experience includes 16 years as technical director for Comedy Central's Emmy Award-winning SOUTH PARK. He also holds credits for several studios, including Activision, Sony Pictures, Disney and HBO.



EDITORS Christine Lojko Haslett & Mark Haslett

Christine is an editor best known for BADGUYS (DreamWorks), HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON (DreamWorks) and TROLLS (DreamWorks). Mark is a writer/editor best known for LET'S GO LUNA! (PBS Kids), HELIX (Syfy Network) and LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT (Universal).



ANIMATION EDITOR, ONLINE EDITOR & COLORIST Tony Leech

Tony's work spans both animated and live action films as writer, director and editor. He is best known for HOODWINKED!, ESCAPE FROM PLANT EARTH and VARIANT. The Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror nominated HOODWINKED! for Best Animated Film (2006).



SOUND DESIGNER Benjamin Jacquier

Ben is a French sound designer and composer who offers sound production and mixing for films, music videos, web content, games, and advertising. This award-winning artist specializes in creating original soundtracks and foley to capture the emotion of each project.



SURROUND & STEREO SOUND MIX Dominic Camardella

Dom is an industry-recognized audio engineer and producer. His vast resume includes recording dozens of musicians, as well as audio mixing and dialogue recording for film and television. Dom has received two Grammy nominations, including winning Best Spoken Word Album.



FULL CREW & CREDITS

DIRECTOR	David Kabbe	ANIMATION VISUAL DEVELOPMENT	Tony Peluce
WRITER	Sarah Padbury	CHARACTER DESIGN & MODELING	Gabe Leonard John Kujawa
PRODUCERS	Izidor Ruckel Sarah Padbury David Kabbe	ANIMATION STORYBOARDS & ANIMATICS	Marc Sanchez
ROMANIA CO-PRODUCER	Elena Beuca Rogers	ANIMATED DREAM SEQUENCE	Edgar Tellez
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS	Jor Van Kline Christine Lojko Haslett	BACKGROUND ARTIST	John Kujawa
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Sarah Padbury	RIGGERS	John Kujawa Ahmed Elmatarawi
COMPOSER	Jesper Ankarfeldt	ANIMATORS	John Kujawa Alani Sanders
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	Daniel Wyland	ASSISTANT ANIMATOR	Tyler Lindsey
ANIMATION SUPERVISOR	John Kujawa	VISUAL EFFECTS	John Kujawa Tony Leech
EDITORS	Christine Lojko Haslett Mark Haslett	VOICEOVER RECORDINGS	Fineas Alexa (Cluj, Romania) Axiom Post Productions (Los Angeles, CA)
ANIMATION EDITOR	Tony Leech	SOUND DESIGN & FOLEY	Benjamin Jacquier
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY & PRODUCTION STILLS	Paul Plesa	SURROUND & STEREO SOUND MIX	Dominic Camardella @ Santa Barbara Sound Design
1 st AC & 2nd UNIT DP	Stefan Aghitoaie	CHILDREN'S WALLA & ADR	Hayden Jinsu Chang 5 th Grade Class @ Champagny Primary School (Champagny, France)
PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER	Daniel Rizea	COLORIST & ONLINE EDITOR	Tony Leech
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR	Dave Rogers	FILM SCORE MUSICIANS	
PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS	Robby Beuca Ruth Beuca	FLUTE	Karolina Ogrodowska
SET DESIGNERS	Alexandra Cadar Lumei, Mariana Cadar Lumei, Elena Beuca Rogers, Izidor Ruckel	OBOE & ENGLISH HORN	Phil Popham
SET DESIGN ASSISTANTS	Florentina Farcaș, Maicariu Marius, Dan Opriș, Dina Roman, Ramona Ivascu, Adina Covaci, Noemi Boje, Bogdan Boje, Nelu Cadar Lumei	CLARINET	Jason Alder
ASSEMBLY EDIT	Daniel Lindeen	BASSOON	Damian Montano
ANIMATION TECHNICAL DIRECTOR	John Kujawa	VIOLIN	Leonard Chong
		VIOLA	Drew Forde
		CELLO	Klara Krklec
		"MI-AI DAT MAMA CANTELUCU" MUSIC, LYRICS & PERFORMANCE	Irina Loghin
		ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE	ABC News VideoSource

GIFs AND VIDEO CLIPS

CLICK IMAGES TO PLAY



Izidor



Mr. Albescu



Cristina



Onisa



Director



Sofia

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BEHIND THE SCENES



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to download
photos](#)



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