



“After having seen 150 cities, Budapest is still amazing”

INTERVIEW WITH ESZTER CSEKE AND ANDRÁS S. TAKÁCS



Eszter Cseke and András S. Takács, the creators of On The Spot have shot their iconic documentaries in more than 60 countries around the world including the Himalayas and Afghanistan. They have won several international film awards inclusive of the Golden Nymph Award, not to mention that the BBC considered their work “rare and exclusive”. We talked to Eszter and András about their upcoming season and of course our never sleeping city, Budapest.

HOW DID THE IDEA OF A DOCUMENTARY SERIES FIRST COME TO YOUR MIND?

András S. Takács: We studied at the University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest. When we started to think about where we could tell the stories of distant cultures at home – we were much more interested in the Middle East than Hungary’s domestic politics – we were completely puzzled what to do next. Human stories behind foreign news were barely covered on Hungarian TV.

Eszter Cseke: That is why András applied for an internship at CNN and BBC World Service, while I was shooting my very first film in Lebanon. One year later he was studying at the New York Film Academy; as for me, I took part in ARTE’s workshop for film directors. We were trying to learn the art of storytelling from various sources.

A.S.T.: At the university we were told there were three things Hungarian viewers don’t watch: anything with subtitles, current affairs and documentaries. Despite all the uncertainties, we shot the pilot of On The Spot which, in fact, was a documentary with subtitles based in the Gaza Strip. After four rejections, the fifth TV channel in Budapest we showed the episode to was looking for something just like our series, so they ordered the first 10 episodes of On The Spot. This fall the eighth season will be aired on Duna TV.

SPEAKING OF THE LATEST SEASON, WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

E.Cs.: It focuses on coping with traumas. The previous season walks the viewer through ten different births in war zones, refugee camps or a peaceful birth house in Bali. We could see what awaited for these babies, what we couldn’t film how the circumstances of their birth affected their lives. We could only show that decades later. In a sense, the new On The Spot season is the sequel of the previous one, as it is about people who were born and/or raised in the darkest eras of history – let it be a concentration camp in North Korea or the toughest prison of Khmer Rouge. We tried to find out how people coped with these difficult starts and early childhood traumas.

WHAT DOES BUDAPEST MEAN TO YOU?

A.S.T.: Home. I was born and raised here, while Eszter is originally from Cluj-Napoca, Romania but has lived here since her high

school years. It doesn’t matter how many places we visit, Budapest is our favourite city in the world.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE IN BUDAPEST?

E.Cs.: In our neighbourhood we like Kelet café, the kid-friendly tapas bar of La Nube and Gross Arnold Gallery where Kata makes the best flódni (a traditional Hungarian Jewish cake stuffed with walnut, poppy, apple and jam) in town!

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT BUDAPEST, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

A.S.T.: The city needs to get rid of the dog poops. But there are deeper problems than that: the depression and the aggression are tangible on the streets right from 7 in the morning. We tend to be rude to each other giving strangers a shove and rebuking the bus driver. However, these are only signs of deep-rooted problems of our society that has nothing to do with Budapest. After having seen 150 cities, this town is still amazing. Here you can travel faster the same distance by public transport than in London; the buildings are not as tall as in the U.S., so you can see the sky; due to its size you can practically walk home from anywhere, actually among great miracles of architecture; one bridge is more spectacular than the other, under them flows one of the most beautiful European rivers; and if you are still fed up with everything, the Buda hills are just 15 minutes away.

