

FILM STUDIO MISTRUS MEDIA

# MARIA'S SILENCE

BY DĀVIS SĪMANIS



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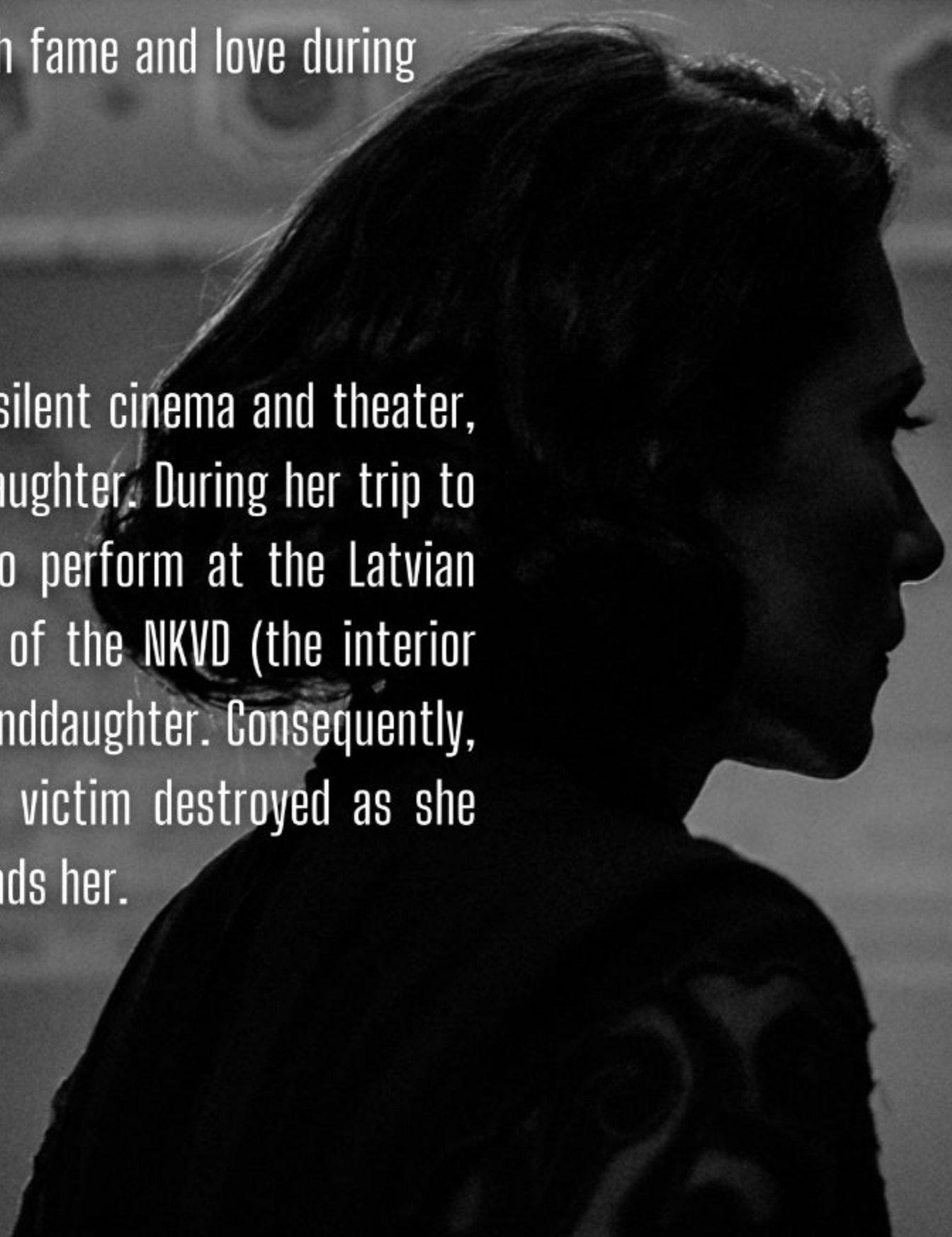
# LOGLINE

The true story of Maria Leiko, a famous actress who struggles with fame and love during Stalin's totalitarian regime.

# SYNOPSIS

This historical drama set in 1937 portrays Maria Leiko, the star of silent cinema and theater, who travels back to the Soviet Union upon the birth of her granddaughter. During her trip to Latvia, Leiko passes through Moscow, where she is convinced to perform at the Latvian theater "Skatuve" (Stage). Soon after, she is faced with violence of the NKVD (the interior police of the Soviet totalitarian regime) who brutally kidnap her granddaughter. Consequently, Leiko is forced to play her life's most tragic role – an innocent victim destroyed as she struggles between her ideals and the murderous regime that surrounds her.

Teaser - <https://vimeo.com/786911374/6794604b3c?share=copy>





# HISTORY

The national operations of 1937 and 1938 became the main line of work of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). The orders issued by the NKVD essentially legitimised the widespread persecution of various ethnic groups. The turn for mass destruction of Latvians came at the end of November 1937. In these national operations, it was the so-called "dvoika" (two-man team) deciding on the fates of the arrested. This team consisted of the NKVD foreman and prosecutor. They evaluated the investigation data and decided which one of the two penal categories should be chosen. Category 1 meant capital punishment - shooting; category 2 entailed the imprisonment up to 2, 5, even 10 years. Every day, 200-300 cases were reviewed. Within two months, NKVD reviewed 105,032 cases, and only 137 people were released. All the arrested were charged with affiliation to the Latvian nationalist (also: fascist, counter-revolutionary, military, espionage, saboteur or terrorist) organisation, with the purpose of espionage and gathering intelligence for Latvia against the existing regime.





# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Our film, "Maria's Silence" unfolds the true story of Maria Leiko, a Latvian-born German silent film and theatre actress. The film delves into the concluding chapter of Maria Leiko's life, a period marked by her journey to the Soviet Union to care for her new born granddaughter. Here, she inadvertently becomes a witness and, tragically, a victim of the ruthless persecution of Latvians instigated by Stalin in what became known as the national operation of the NKVD. The characters embodied by Maria Leiko, her distinctive style, and expressive acting, transcended mere artistic representation. They mirrored her political convictions and avant-garde sensibilities, ultimately shaping the tragic trajectory of her life. Having lived through the most progressive and creative era of the 20th century, starring in films like Friedrich Wilhelm's "Satan" and gracing the stage at Erwin Piscator's German political theater, she envisioned an ideal society where individual rights were revered, sparing the majority from a wretched existence. The roles portrayed by Maria Leiko and her unwavering belief in the transformative power of art in the face of political oppression positioned her against Stalin's brutal regime. As is often the case in history, she found herself on the losing side of this struggle. Nevertheless, much like millions of other innocent souls, she imparts a profound historical lesson. Surprisingly, this lesson resonates with heightened relevance today, less than a century later, amidst the inhumane conflict in Ukraine, internal repressions in Russia under Putin's regime, global strife, and the unsettling ascent of authoritarian tendencies even within certain European countries.

## ABOUT DAVIS SIMANIS

Davis Simanis, PhD in Arts, is a Latvian filmmaker and theorist. He has directed historical feature films, numerous poetic documentary films as well as cross-genre features that have participated in various major festivals. His docu-fiction *Escaping Riga* (2014) premiered internationally at IDFA 2014 and is still screened at documentary film festivals worldwide. Simanis previously received the Award for Best Debut "Version. LNO" (2006), historical drama *The Mover* (2018) WP in Moscow International Film festival and Palm Springs IFF, received an award "Best Foreign Film" in HAIFA festival, "The Year Before the War" (2021) WP in Rotterdam Film festival.

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# ABOUT MISTRUS MEDIA

Operating since 2000, Mistrus Media has established itself as the leading film production studio in Latvia. In 2022, in honour of Cannes' 75th anniversary, Screen International selected Mistrus Media as one of the top 75 independent European production companies. Actively engaged in the development and production of feature films, working with other co-production partners to create works for arthouse audiences and the global festival circuit.

A few noteworthy co-production titles include feature drama "January" (2022) directed by Viesturs Kairiņš, which won Best International Narrative at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2022. "Natural Light" (2021) directed by Dénes Nagy, was selected for the Berlin International Film Festival, and awarded the Silver Bear for Best Director. "In the Dusk" (2020) directed by Sharunas Bartas, selected for the Cannes Film Festival in 2020. Limited TV series "Queen of the Press" produced by Mistrus Media was released in 2021 and the dark comedy "Samuel's travels" (2021), directed by Aik Karapetian premiered at the Fantastic Fest in USA.





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