

PRESS KIT – TOTO AND HIS SISTERS (TOTO SI SURORILE LUI)  
by Alexander Nanau

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62

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strada film

# TOTO AND HIS SISTERS



What does it take  
to be a family?

HBO EUROPE PROGRAMMING PRESENTS A STRADA FILM PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH ALEXANDER NANAU PRODUCTION A FILM BY ALEXANDER NANAU WITH HORVATH ILIE, GABRIEL NICUSOR, PETRE ANDREEA, IOLETA ANA-MARIA BADULESCU AND SIMINICA PETRE CAST BY ALEXANDER NANAU, GEORGE CRAGG AND MIRCEA OLTEANU. SOUND DESIGNER AND MIXER: MATTHIAS LEMPERT. EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: BIANCA DANA. HBO EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: ANTHONY K. ROOT AND CARMEN HARABAGIU. PRODUCERS: VALERIU NICOLAE, CATALIN MITULESCU, ALEXANDER NANAU AND MARCIAN LAZAR. HBO EUROPE PRODUCER: HANNA KASTELICOVA. PHOTOGRAPHER AND DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: ALEXANDER NANAU.



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A production by HBO EUROPE and STRADA FILM  
in co-production with  
ALEXANDER NANAU PRODUCTION

**Characters:**

Toto Ilie Nicusor Gabriel Horvath

Andreea Petre

Ana Badulescu

Siminica Petre

**Team:**

Written and Directed by: Alexander Nanau

Director of Photography: Alexander Nanau

Edited by: Alexander Nanau, George Cragg, Mircea Olteanu

Sound Mix and Design: Matthias Lempert

Exec. Producers: Bianca Oana, Antony Root, Carmen Harabagiu

Producers: Valeriu Nicolae, Catalin Mitulescu, Alexander Nanau, Hanka Kastelicova

Production Country: Romania

Genre: Observational Documentary

Duration: 93 min

Sound: 5.1

Aspect ratio: 2.35: 1

Format: Color - DCP

**Premiere:** September 2014 @ San Sebastian Film Festival

**Awards:** Best International Documentary @ Zurich Film Festival | Best Documentary @ Warsaw Film Festival | Silver Eye Award @ East Silver Market, Jihlava | Audience Award @ Festival dei Popoli | Honorable Mention Int. Competition @ Dok Leipzig | Prize of Ecumenical Jury @ Dok Leipzig | Prize of the Trade Union ver.di @ Dok Leipzig | Grand Prix @ Premiers Plans Festival | Best int. Documentary @ Luxembourg City Film Festival

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**SYNOPSIS**

From Emmy-Award winning director Alexander Nanau comes an amazing family story. His latest observational documentary tells the story of 10 year-old Toto, who lives together with his two sisters, Ana (17) and Andreea (14) and their drug-abusive uncles. They are waiting for their mother to come back from prison after a 4 years absence. As the film unveils, it delivers an intimate account of the lives of children growing up in a tough environment. Each one of the siblings tries to push through the hard times in his very own way. As Toto finds his new passion in dancing and learning how to read and write, his two sisters are trying to keep their family together, in a world that has long forgotten what childhood is all about.

***Director's Notes***

The question of what makes us who we are, and how we chose or models as children is a central issue for me in this film. After six months of research, I have decided to tell the story of Toto and his sisters, a story that deals with the difficulty of children of different ages to grow up without their mother, in an environment dominated by poverty, violence and drug abuse, yet finding the strength to see the richness of life beyond that.

Their story is a metaphor that can be applied to many children whose destinies seem already determined at some point in their lives. The fact that some are born in the circumstances of our protagonists is, from my perspective, an accident of fate and has nothing to say about the abilities and aspirations one has. More crucial for the development of one's perspectives and imagination are the models chosen and the kind of life pursued.

The focus is the development of three young lives of different ages within a year. Whether it is their life in the ghetto, the struggle at the Children's Club, going to school, visiting their mother in jail, court sessions or fights with their uncles, each one is waiting for the mother in his or her own way.

Learning and dancing become dominant in Toto's world. Words, reading, numbers, dance moves take over his mind and his behavior and make the nights he spends at home just fragments of a faraway reality.

It is important that the film to remains accessible to the viewer without trying to shock or to emphasize the misery of the ghetto. The violence and drug abuse must be perceived just as the protagonists live and see these things: as a normal part of life. The camera that shoots mostly at the characters' height supports this concept. Thus, the film's attitude is not of looking down to the children, as if they were "small and vulnerable." We will always look through their eyes, at their own height, from a position of equality.

An important element sustaining the story's intimacy is the video material that Andreea herself shot, documenting their life. It is a film made with them, not only about them.

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**CHARACTER DESCRIPTION**

**Toto** was six when his mother got arrested. Since then, he survived living among his drug addicted uncles by drifting away in his fantasy and dreams and eating whatever was left over or what his neighbors would spare for him. He didn't go to school, but when he was nine years old he was brought by a friend to the alternative educational club within the neighborhood school. School became his new home. In only one year, he learned how to read and write and he discovered his passion: dancing. He is a hard worker and, as time goes by, he learns how to live by himself, with the help of his elder sister, Andreea. His biggest challenge is to make it in the professional dance scene, by going to Hip Hop International competition. When their mother's release gets postponed several times, Toto and his sisters become aware that they have to find a way to live by themselves. Gradually, Toto loses hope that his mother is ever going to save him.

**Andreea** (14) is a fighter. At first she tries to stay away from home and the drugs in their apartment and always sleeps at her friends. Being illiterate and without any preoccupation, she spends some time at the alternative educational club where she is struggling to learn to read and write. She documents her life with the help of a handy cam that she got from the film classes held in the club. She is always careful about her looks and loves her friends. When her mother's release is postponed, she realizes that they have to do something in order to survive without her, and she decides to take matters in her own hands. Although she is only fourteen, she manages to take care of her little brother and tries to save Ana from her tumultuous life.

**Ana** is 17 years old. Since her mother was taken away (when she was 13), she lives with her brothers and her drug-addicted uncles and she picked up the habit. Constantly defying authority, Ana is a tough girl to handle, even with her younger sister. She is hot tempered and loves her mother. She always does what she wants, sometimes even at the price of her freedom. She tries for a while to take care of the house and even deals insignificant quantities now and then. She never stops hoping that the return of their mother is going to save the family.

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**PRODUCTION PROCESS**

Shot over a period of 14 months in one of the toughest neighborhoods in Bucharest, 'Toto and his sisters' started off with an intensive nine months research in Ferentari.

The development team of Strada Film, led by Valeriu Nicolae, set out to make a film about Roma communities. After joining the team, and after six months of research, Alexander Nanau decided to focus the future film on the children in Ferentari and to tell a story from their perspective. Guided by Valeriu Nicolae, (who was familiar with the Ferentari area through his social work) the director gained access in the ghetto, where, among a huge number of families and their children, he met Toto, Ana and Andreea, whose personalities, life stories and resilience convinced him to focus a 100% observational film on them. Alexander visited the mother of the children in February 2011 in prison, after which he started filming their lives. From then on, the story unfolded.

In November 2011 Alexander Nanau and Strada Film pitched the project at the IDFA Central Pitch in Amsterdam, getting the interest and participation into the project of The Sundance Institute, RTS Switzerland, TVO Canada, YLE Finland and YesDocu Israel.

Given the successful collaboration with Alexander Nanau for the Emmy Awarded production "The World According to Ion B" and impressed by the new story, HBO Europe decided to join the project as co-producer.

During the 18 months long editing process of this multi-character story, the project won in 2012 work in progress prizes at the Docu Rough Cut Boutique and at CineLink Work in Progress both being part of the Sarajevo International Film Festival.

"Toto and his sisters" was awarded a Sundance Institute Documentary Film Grant in 2012. In 2013 the project participated in the Sundance Documentary Edit & Story Lab.

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**Film team**

***Alexander Nanau- Director, DOP, Writer, Editor, Producer***

German film director born in Romania, he studied directing at the Film and Television Academy Berlin (DFFB). His documentary film, THE WORLD ACCORDING TO ION B was awarded in 2010 an International Emmy Award. The film traveled in over 70 festivals world-wide. Nanau's first feature documentary, PETER ZADEK INSZENIERT PEER GYNT (2006) premiered at the Munich International Film Festival and was released in cinemas across Germany and Austria in 2006. Nanau is a fellowship holder of the Sundance Institute. His latest documentary Film Toto and His Sisters is playing successfully in international festivals winning in many of them awards. Toto and His Sisters will have its theatrical release in France, Italy and Romania in 2015.

***George Gragg- Editor***

He began working as an editor at the BBC in 2004. In 2009 he edited Shirin Neshat's "Women Without Men" which went on to win the Silver Lion at the Venice film festival. Since then, George has worked on numerous feature films by directors including Ulrich Seidl, Bertrand Mandico, Marco Van Geffen and Måns Månsson. He has also worked on several video installations including those by artists Anri Sala, Carsten Höller and Shirin Neshat.

***Mircea Olteanu- Editor***

Born in 1981 in Bucharest, he graduated from The National Film University (UNATC) in 2004. Filmography: "Weddings, music and videotapes" (documentary, director Tudor Giurgiu 2008), "The World According to Ion B" (documentary, director Alexander Nanau 2009), "Beyond the Hills" (Cristian Mungiu 2012).

***Matthias Lempert- Sound Designer/ Re-recording Mixer***

German sound mixing engineer born in Moers. He is the sound effects, or sound editor as well as re-recording mixer of more than 100 productions, among "Cloud Atlas", "Perfume: The story of a murderer", "Run, Lola, run". He teaches sound design at Robert-Schumann College in Düsseldorf and sound mixing as a guest teacher at HFF "Konrad Wolf".

***Hanka Kastelicová – Producer HBO EUROPE***

Hanka Kastelicová is the Executive Producer of Documentaries for HBO Europe. Based in the Budapest head office she works closely with HBO Europe's production centers in Warsaw, Prague and Bucharest, and is responsible for the development and production of HBO Europe's documentary films.

She earned a Master of Arts degree from the Faculty of Film and TV Documentary Department at the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague. She continued her professional career in Slovenia, where she worked for more than 25 years as a documentary director and producer, lately as Head of Development of documentary programming. As an experienced and dedicated documentary filmmaker, she has lectured on documentary filmmaking and participated in master classes, industry seminars and courses.

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***Catalin Mitulescu- Producer***

Catalin Mitulescu was born in 1972 in Bucharest, Romania. He graduated from the UNATC (National University of Drama and Film Art) Bucharest, film Directing Department. In 2004, he was awarded with the Palme d'Or for his third short film "Traffic". Both his feature films have been selected in Un Certain Regard competition of Cannes in 2007 ("The Way I Spent the End of the World") and 2011 ("Loverboy"). He produced several award-winning short, documentary and feature films, among which "A Good Day For a Swim" (Golden Bear for Short Film Berlinale 2008), "If I want to Whistle, I Whistle (Jury Grand Prix and the Alfred Bauer Award Berlinale 2010 ) and "Turn Off the Lights" (Best Documentary Sarajevo 2012).

***Bianca Oana – Executive Producer***

Bianca is a freelance screenwriter and a documentary producer. She has graduated screenwriting at the Romanian Film Academy in Bucharest in 2009 and since then has been working in developing, producing and promoting several film projects at Strada Film and beyond. She has helped in developing and promoting "If I want to whistle, I whistle", Berlinale 2010 Grand Prix winner by Florin Serban. She is the co-writer and executive producer of "Life in squares" feature documentary by Ivana Mladenovic and co-writer of "Loverboy", directed by Catalin Mitulescu. "Toto and His Sisters" is the second feature documentary that she is developing and producing.

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