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INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM
2022

BUSAN
International Film Festival



BIG SCREEN COMPETITION



— THE ISLAND

A Film by Anca Damian

PRESSKIT



84 MIN

ROMANIA, FRANCE, BELGIUM

2022

2:35

DOLBY 5.1

ENGLISH

A Film by Anca Damian

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— SYNOPSIS

Discover a musical fable on the Robinson Crusoe myth: The Little Prince meets Monty Python.

Robinson is a doctor and his solitude is voluntary in an island invaded by migrants, NGOs and guards. He saves Friday, a castaway, the only survivor of his illegal refugee boat.

During his journey on the island, Robinson encounters extraordinary beings and events. He will confront current affairs through visual poetry and symbolism in a world where everybody looks for its own paradise.

—A CONVERSATION WITH ANCA DAMIAN



**What is the starting point for *The Island*?
What is your relationship to Robinson
Crusoe's tale?**

Near the starting point to *The Island* was a conference on minorities that I attended in Sundance 2019 while I was presenting my short film *The Call*. I remember that Tabitha Jackson (Sundance Director) said that we should retell stories that entered the collective memory as colonialist in a way that will restore the right angle.

I was thinking of Robinson Crusoe's story and knowing the concert of Alexander Balanescu and Ada Milea (based on a reinterpretation of Gellu Naum, a Romanian-Jewish poet) I had the idea to do a musical with a new Robinson, a doctor that has the best of intentions, and a Friday from our days – a refugee - on an Island in our contemporary reality where the world is collapsing.

The story builds-up like a fable: if in the first part we develop the relation savior-saved, ambiguous, as we don't know who is saving whom, and the reality around them becomes more and more absurd, so Robinson starts an imaginary travel in the search for Paradise. However, Friday will be the one who creates it in the end...

How came the idea of making a musical?

I think that music was always present in any representation or show in human history. Music also allows the audience a more joyful perception of the film that is funny and bitter at the same

time, as we contemplate the end of a world. Of course, another strong reason to do a musical was the inspiration I got from the concert *The Island*.

Can you tell us a bit more about your animation choices?

I wanted the reality of the film to be immersive, so the space was developed in 3D, with added fluid elements developed in Houdini – the sea, the clouds. The concept was that everything that is man-made doesn't integrate in the nature, so we have real textures for plastic, metal, fabric. The same texturing we applied also for the cloth of the characters that are in 2D.

In my concept, only what is made by nature remains painted.

Color wise everything is beautiful, like in a Hawaii holiday, but there is also some malaise, a sick feeling behind the chemical pink of the clouds and the green-blue of the sea.

Technology is quite present in the film, with Robinson's iPad having a preeminent place. Do you think technology will be more and more present in humanity; and may solve some of the world's issue?

The technology is a reality, ours more and more, but it will never solve the world's issues. On the contrary, it might lead to mutations, decisions taken algorithmically, generating even more issues. The answer of the solution is always within ourselves, we can change and so the world will follow.

Friday is a migrant. From the invisible, the collective and the anonymous, he develops a unique solar personality and a brilliant intelligence. Can you tell us a little more about his character?

First of all, I must say I did a lot of research on refugees. I met a journalist that followed for two years 200 refugees that were saved from a boat, and one of them inspired me the most. Friday is in harmony with nature, he finds food, water, grows crops, makes the paradise. There is also an alchemical change of the sea in gold during the eclipse, where he gets the superman costume, and like an African prince he becomes the king of the floating people, the people in search of a country.

The film also carries a strong ecological message, with garbage and plastic destroying the land and even being part of some of the characters' body.

What is your view on it?

We live in a world where our garbage already created mutant animals. We think that there still is a point of return. But the unbalance that we created will generate our extinction, if we don't change our attitude.

'Can we be alone together' says Robinson to the mermaid. This line takes a new light following the several lock-downs. Who is she and what does she represents?

The Mermaid is the imaginary woman, as such the perfect company. But the solitude is overwhelming and the only possibility of being together is only by sharing it with each other. The Mermaid is also tempting Robinson and Friday, pushing them to advance.

Each of your movies develop a very original and specific world; is there a link in between them all?

I do movies that are formally different, but in essence all of them tell the same thing: we are all connected, we reflect ourselves in others, and the only thing we should do in life is to learn to love.

What do you think is more connected with ourselves, the dream that we have while sleeping, or the perceiving of the reality while we are awake?

I do believe that the dream, because the subconscious is more connected to who we really are, and here resides the archetypes –in the Jungian meaning, the mental images inherited from the earliest human ancestors, and supposed to be present in the collective unconscious.

I would say the film is born in my subconscious and contains a vivid imaginary that links the visible and invisible worlds in search of a meaning.

Who would be your BFF in the film?

As I love of my characters and I think at them to be lovable, BFF is in each one.



EXHIBITION

Alongside the feature film, an immersive exhibition is available to support a release or as an extension on a festival screening.

Searching for the Paradise A.R proposes to develop an immersive exhibition into the world of *The Island*, having as a starting point a film adaptation proposed by the Romanian director Anca Damian, which brings a contemporary lens to the story.

A universe with a strong visual side, this reinterpretation of Robinson's Crusoe finds new meaning through the use of technology and new media, building an immersive experience where the audience is invited to directly take part in the action, experiencing first-hand the rich universe, through the lens of Anca Damian. Film is an immersive medium, yet it remains in a 2D format that keeps the audience in a contemplative state. Through this A.R. exhibition we want to take the next step and bring the audience closer to living with the subject, exploring a language that is not accessible to film and theater. The exhibition takes the viewer through several acts of the Search of the Paradise, from the seaside where we see Robison's hut, to the sea and then the space beyond the horizon that rewrites as a fable the human civilizations' Purgatory - a tower of Babel and a Carnival of Pleasures attacked by the Pirates and devoured by Mother Nature.

Besides the use of augmented reality in the presentation of the project, the content itself is reimagined through a modern filter, bringing the

story into the contemporary world through the use of social and environmental themes that are at the forefront of international discussions

Sound and music are an essential part of the experience, which is why the project entails the development of a custom soundscape by British artist Alexander Balanescu, who also collaborated on the film's sound design and has been part of a musical interpretation of the play in Romania.

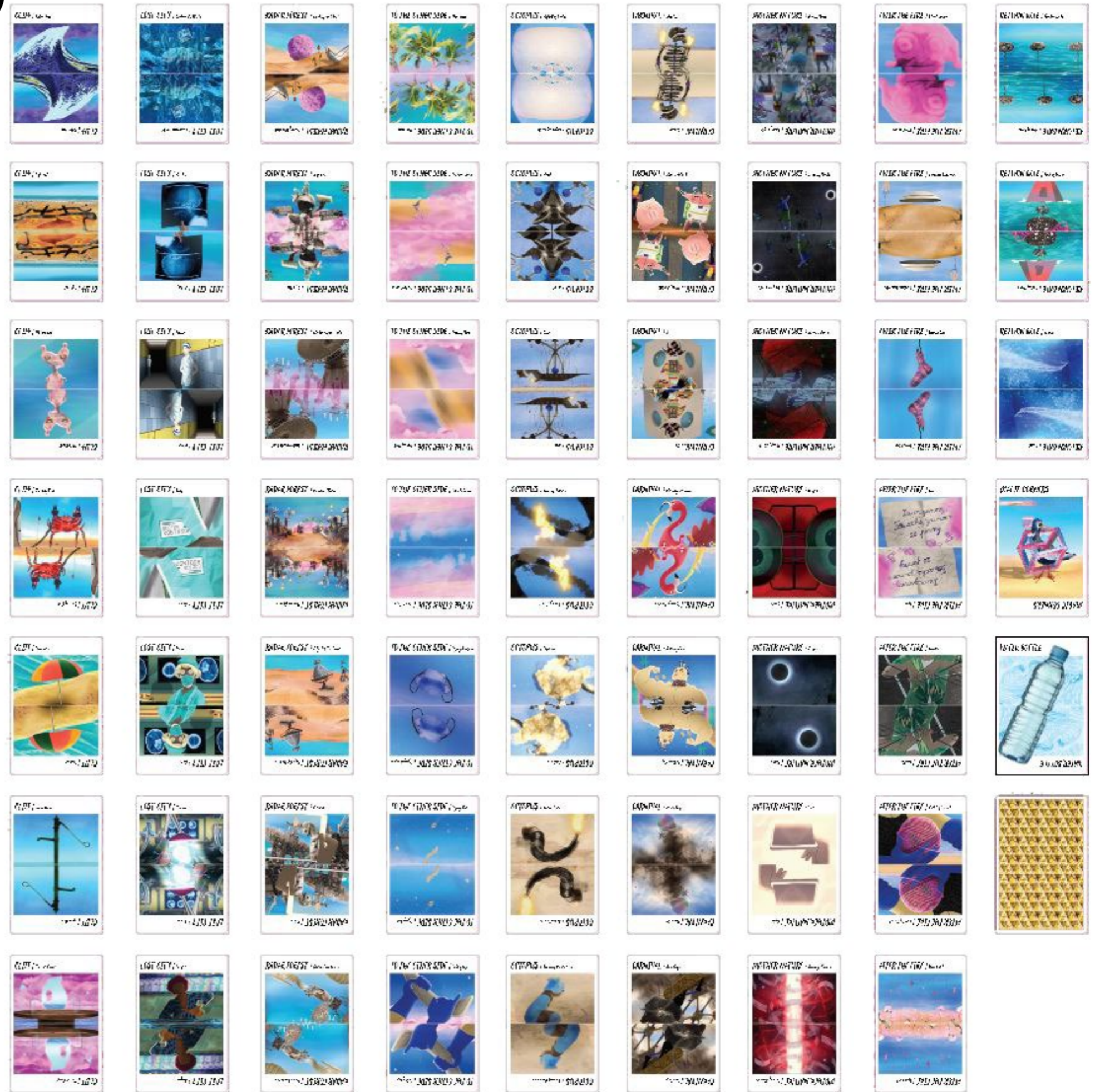
CINECONCERT À FONDATION CARTIER

During one of the Nocturnes at the Fondation Cartier in the summer 2022, the Balanescu Quartet will perform a cineconcert with the singers of The Island.

In the background, the images of the film will be placed on a big screen and the live performance will be in dialogue with them.

— BOARD GAME

On the basis of the Island, a board game has been developed. It can be played by 2-4 players (each one chooses a Character – Robinson, Friday, The Mermaid or Mary), and the aim is to reach the Paradise, going around The Island. There are rules for advancement, you need precise cards to go further, you can get help card from special cards that let you jump a segment or the jokey card – the bottle of water.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

“The Island” is a **musical**, an **animation**, and a cross-genre film. **Post-modern** is a key word, as the used elements, images, art references will get a different interpretation and a new reading.

The narrative pulse is linked to the animation and is meant to flow as a poem. Images and sound (music) are placed in the foreground, emphasizing the fact that the film creates patterns in space, images-representations and vivid paintings.

Images and sound (music) are placed in the foreground, emphasizing the fact that the film creates patterns in space, images-representations and vivid paintings.

Making of this film is possible only by means of mixed animation techniques such as collages, drawings, paintings, that seem to harmonize perfectly with the visual arts and music. The **absurd** and **humour** can be visually supported by the contrast of these elements, and, as a counterpoint, amplified by the audio/music.

The characters are archetypes: (new) Robinson, Friday, the NGO woman/Mermaid, Mary (Robinson's mother and also Friday's mother eventually), the Pirates, Grandma alias Mother-Nature. These characters having a surreal look, half-real, half-imaginary, emphasize both the «surreal» impression and the lightness of a coloured and entertaining cinematographic show at the same time. In a Monty Python style, this visual metonymy will create a gap revealing the drama of the contemporary world through laughter.

(New) Robinson is someone who has left the society. He used to be a doctor before, an idealist sensitive to people's misfortunes. He tried to help people in need, the refugees, and was forced to give up due to society rules. In the hypocrisy of the current context, he questions his legitimacy as an individual integrating a group, a community. Is he allowed to make the choices of his own life?

He now lives, alone in his cabin, on picking things brought by the sea. In his solitude, Robinson is writing a journal / fantasy/ dream of how he sees reality. This is done on his tablet where everything appears through augmented reality (AR).

Friday is the Refugee, the only one from his boat to have survived, when sailing from Africa to Italy. First, he becomes Robinson's friend. Tempted by the Mermaid to be free, he is taking the sea and becomes the king of the floating people in search of a place to live. Later on, Mary - Robinson's mother - helps him recover his identity - his real name is Amadou. He is innocently trying to find a place in the world for himself and also for the people with no solution for surviving in their homeland. Friday has also freed himself from his condition in order to continue his quest, his desire for freedom and integration. The transformation of the character will be followed by that of his costume: he makes a blouse from the thermal blanket, which becomes a jacket while he gets on board of a ship, and becomes a superman costume while he saves other refugees from the smugglers. Robinson and Friday are in fact two faces of the same character, of the same human being, which are somehow opposed - one contemplating and passive, the other one active, yet both of them searching for a meaning in life.

While Robinson tries to escape his own reality by looking for « The Sheep-Shelter » (The Lost Paradise), Friday acts, works, seeds the soil and saves people from the sea, creating The Paradise. As it is an upside down “Robinson Crusoe” 's story, we reversed skin colours of the two characters; Robinson is dark-coloured skinned, while Friday has white skin. Loneliness is Robinson's leitmotif, as well as Friday's, and the song lyrics are poetically repeating it in new forms. *I'm alone, I'm alone, I'm alone... but I'm alive... (...)* A very important layer of this movie is the (absurd) humour, contained in the songs already, but we will try to enhance it in the characters' actions as well.

CONCEPT FOR THE JOURNAL / ROBINSON'S TABLET

During the moments when Robinson constructs his imagination by converting reality into a story, we will be in an augmented reality on the tablet, so in 3D we will see this AR added on a layer.

This augmented (journal) reality is somehow stronger and more powerful, and also influences the reality, by changing the course of events.

The sets will be using real textures (such as metal, plastic, fabric) where it comes to human intervention and painted textures when it comes to representing nature.

We will also use minutely described elements, such as the objects adjusted or turned away from their primary function, thus leading to a futuristic design of a post-industrial world.

The overall feeling should be that we are in a beautiful and fascinating reality, even if there is a sick feeling overall. The colour of the sea will augment this paradisiacal but “sick”/rotten perception.

— BIOGRAPHY

ANCA DAMIAN

Director

Born in Romania, Anca Damian studied at the Academy of Theatre and Film Arts in Bucharest where she majored in cinematography and later obtained a doctor's degree in Arts, Cinema and Media. She worked as a director, screenwriter, and producer for several documentaries on art related topics.

She was director of photography of two long feature films and several shorts.

Her second feature the animated documentary, "Crulic: The Path to Beyond" (2011, Cristal Award in Annecy), has been selected in more than 150 international festivals like Locarno IFF, Telluride, New Director new films, and received more than 35 international prizes.

Her extensive filmography includes *Crossing Dates* (2008), *A Very Unsettled Summer* (2013), *The Magic Mountain* (2015), *Moon Hotel Kabul* (2018), and *Marona s Fantastic*



Tale (2019). Her films were distributed worldwide and she has been awarded with numerous international prizes, including Cristal for Best Feature Film Award at Annecy, Best Director Award at Warsaw, Mirada International Award at Madrid, and Audentia Award by Eurimages.

The Island is her seventh feature.

— BIOGRAPHY

ALEXANDER BALANESCU

Film composer and virtuoso musician

Romanian born Alexander Balanescu is a prolific composer as well as one of the most visionary and exciting violinists of our time. As leader of the Balanescu Quartet, which he established in 1987, he has been instrumental in transforming the string quartet from a 'classical' ensemble into a musical entity at the heart of the rejuvenation of new music, through revolutionising its repertoire and its relationship with the audience.

Throughout his career Balanescu has drawn inspiration from his collaborations. To mention a few; in the world of dance, Pina Bausch or Meryl Tankard, in the theatre, with Pippo Delbono, Matthew Dunster (for the Royal Shakespeare Company), Chiara Guidi (for Compagnia Raffaello Sanzio); in film he has twice been awarded the Gopo prize (Romanian national Award) for best original soundtrack including 2016 'The Magic Mountain' (dir. Anca Damian) and the FIPA prize for *The Scandalous Lady W* (dir. Sheree Folkson, BBC films).



Balanescu has refused to acknowledge divisions between different musical fields, consequently working with such diverse artists as Michael Nyman, Gavin Bryars, David Byrne, Kraftwerk, Pet Shop Boys, Jack De Johnette, Ornette Coleman, John Surman, Goldfrapp, Depeche Mode and Grace Jones.

FILMOGRAPHY

ANCA DAMIAN

2019	MARONA'S FANTASTIC TALE <i>Rotterdam IFF, Tokyo IFF, Annecy AIFF, Goteborg IFF, Mae del Plata IFF - Sold in more than 20 territories</i> Nomination at European Film Awards Special Jury Prize – Animation is Film (Los Angeles) Grand Prize for a feature film & Audience Award – BIAF 2019 Best Long Animated Feature – Tokyo AAF2020 Best long feature, JEF Festival BeTV Award Anima Film festival Best Children Film for 2020 given by European Children Film Association Best Film and Audience Award at Monstra AIFF Prize Andre Martin for Best French Animation Film of 2020 at Annecy IFF - 2021 Grand Prize at Tokyo Anime Festival – 2020 Best Feature Movie at J.E.F. Film Festival – 2020
2018	THE CALL <i>Sundance IFF, Toronto, IFF, Annecy AIFF</i> 2019 Jury Prize in Short Film Competition, Hong Kong IFF 2018 Second Prize (<i>The Silver Pegasus</i>), IAFF ANIMATOR 2018 Jury Special Award, CINANIMA IFCA 2019 Best Short Film Award, Edinburgh IFF 2012 JUKU, short 2010 ENTREPRISSE, short
2018	MOON HOTEL KABUL 2018 Best Director Award, Warsaw IFF 2018 <i>Mirada International</i> Award, Madrid IFF
2016	CARRÉ, short

2015	THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN <i>Karlovy Vary IFF, Annecy AIFF, Istanbul IFF</i> 2015 Special Mention of the Jury, Karlovy Vary IFF 2016 Audentia Award, Istanbul IFF (offered by Eurimages) 2015 Best Movie Prize, Amiens IFF 2016 Best Long Feature, Zagreb FF 2015 MDR Film Prize, Dok Leipzig
2013	A VERY UNSETTLED SUMMER 2014 Best Director, Best editing and Best Music awards, Romanian Filmmakers'
2011	CRULIC : THE PATH TO BEYOND <i>Locarno IFF, Telluride, SWSX, New Directors, New Films New York, Busan IFF, London IFF</i> 2012 Cristal for Best Feature Film (Grand Prix), Annecy IAFF 2011 Special Mention Don Quixote, Locarno IFF 2013 Audience Award and Belgian Television Award, ANIMA - Brussels AFF 2012 Special Prize of the Human Rights Jury, Istanbul IFF 2013 Best Movie, Monstra – Lisbon IAFF

CAST

Alexander Bălănescu	Robinson
Ada Milea	Mary
Cristina Juncu	Mermaid
Lucian Ionescu	Friday

CREW

Director	Anca DAMIAN
Screenplay	Anca DAMIAN, Augusto ZANOVELLO inspired by the theatrical play The Island by Gellu Naum and by the concert The Island by Ada Milea & Alexander Bălănescu
Art Director	Gina Thorstensen
Character Designers	Mathieu Labaye, Gina Thorstensen, Jordan Bruner
Editing	Dana Bunescu
Background Artists	Gina Thorstensen, Jordan Bruner, Patrice Garcia
Music	Alexander Bălănescu & Ada Milea
2D Key Animators	Dan Panaitescu, Mathieu Labaye,
Animators	Gilles Cuveillier, Radu C. Pop
Sound Design	Gert Janssen
Sound Mixer	Benoit Biral
Production	Aparte Film
Co-production	Komadoli, Special Touch Studio, Take Fave, Minds
Producer	Anca Damian
Coproducers	Augusto Zanolello, Joachim Herisse, Sebastien Onomo, Gregory Zalcman, Tomas Leyers, Mathieu Rolin, Alon Knoll
Countries of production	Romania, France, Belgium
International Sales	Best Friend Forever

