

MUNK
STUDIO



Polish
Filmmakers
Association

When it comes to family,
things work out best in photos.



SILENT NIGHT

a film by Piotr Domalewski



SYNOPSIS

Adam (Dawid Ogrodnik), who lives and works abroad, visits his family home in the Polish provinces on Christmas Eve. At first, he keeps the real reason for his visit to himself, but it isn't long before he starts letting one relative after another in on his plans. His father (Arkadiusz Jakubik), his brother (Tomasz Ziętek), who he's fallen out with, his sister (Maria Dębska) and her husband (Tomasz Schuchardt) all have a significant role to play in his scheme. Things get even more complicated when he announces that he's going to be a father. At that point, in line with time-honoured Polish tradition, alcohol appears on the table. Nobody in the family has the slightest suspicion that the ensuing events of that Christmas Eve are going to have a massive impact on all their lives.



DIRECTOR/SCREENWRITER

Piotr Domalewski
CINEMATOGRAPHY
Piotr Sobociński jr

CASTING

Ewa Brodzka

MAKE-UP

Janusz Kaleja

COSTUMES

Katarzyna Lewińska

SET DESIGN

Radosław Zielonka

SOUND

Jerzy Murawski

EDITING

Lech Starzyński

MUSIC

Wacław Zimpel

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Sylvia Rajdaszka

PRODUCTION COMPANY

Munk Studio-Polish Filmmakers
Association

CO-PRODUCTION

CANAL+

COFINANCED BY

Polish Film Institute,
Warmia-Masuria Film Found
PRIZES

Golden Lions Grand Prize of
the 42nd Polish Film Festival
in Gdynia, Best Film;
Award for Best Leading Actor –
Dawid Ogrodnik, 42nd Polish
Film Festival in Gdynia;
Journalist Award, 42nd Polish
Film Festival in Gdynia;
Young Jury Award, 42nd Polish
Film Festival in Gdynia

CAST

Dawid Ogrodnik, Tomasz Ziętek,
Arkadiusz Jakubik, Paweł Nowisz,
Agnieszka Suchora, Maria
Dębska, Tomasz Schuchardt,
Magdalena Żak, Elżbieta
Kępińska, Adam Cywka, Jowita
Budnik, Mateusz Więclawek,
Amelia Tyszkiewicz, Katarzyna
Domalewska
WORLD SALES
INTRAMOVIES

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



The drama played out in the screenplay of *Silent Night* was not inspired by either a newspaper article or a famous person's life. It is a story which speaks of a world I know well, the world I grew up in. The world of my childhood and youth was north-east Poland and a village in the predominantly rural Podlasie region. I have always wanted to portray the communities living there. Where I come from, tradition and family are the values which bind the multigenerational community. I want to talk about that community objectively, without evaluating its members and their behaviour or assessing their decisions and choices. I aim to avoid any sense of agreeing or disagreeing with them. In the screenplay, I adopt the perspective of Adam, a young man who is planning to leave his birthplace for good. He is an economic emigrant who has resolved, by way of a conscious decision, to forge a different fate from that written into his family's tradition of migration driven by economic need. He wants to break that pattern and intends to settle abroad and raise a family there.

From the outset of my journey as a director, I have been fascinated by films which use a simple story, the drama of a central character who is in no way distinctive, to talk about a wider community or a general social problem. My short films, including *Stranger*, *The Moment* and *60 Kilos of Nothing*, were attempts at making that kind of film. Even though I examined a different problem in each of them, working on them consolidated my belief that this way of telling a story is the most interesting artistic direction for me to take and the road I would like to continue following. In my view, the exemplar for this kind of cinema is Asghar Farhadi's Oscar-winning *A Separation*, where it is not only the moving story of the intimate drama played out between the main characters which is laid bare for audiences, but also truths about a society unfamiliar to them. The central characters' drama and their ways of coping with the problems that fate confronts them with convey the situation of the entire nation.

What is important to me is making a film where I can address some truths about Poland and the Poles and the screenplay of *Silent Night* offers an opportunity to do exactly that. The key to achieving this aim lies in finding the right central character, a person with whom a wide audience will be able to identify. Nowadays, a main character like that, of my generation, is not going to be a rebel oppositionist. Neither will it be a member of the wartime Home Army or a gangster. The central character of our time is the economic emigrant; a young person who, after graduating, is seeking their place in a world driven by the values set by capitalism. In a world which presents the illusion that borders do not exist and that anything is possible, the main character is never at home. Everywhere is 'other'.

It is important to me that the central character of *Silent Night*, Adam, arouses the sympathy of the people in the audience, that they will feel able to root for him, that they will understand his motives, that they will follow him and finally, together with him, find themselves trapped, suspended somewhere between what he is aiming for and what he genuinely needs. I want to tell the story of a young man who is capable of giving everything in order to alter his lot in life. He is torn between his

ties to tradition and his powerful urge for change, between his religion and a sense that the traditional values are becoming degraded, between a need for community and an awareness of the limits which that community imposes.

Economic migration is a crucial issue at present and not only on account of the widely discussed matter of 'Brexit', where the outcome will affect the Poles who are making their lives in Great Britain. We are living in a period where, for the first time in history, Polish society has begun to perceive that the outflow of young people is impoverishing it and that, in the none-too-distant future, this egress will bring dramatic consequences in its wake.

Another vital aspect of *Silent Night* is creating an authentic picture of a Polish family. I want my central characters to be real people to the marrow. I want to avoid the falseness which often appears in Polish cinema, where, time after time, we see well-known celebrities in the same hackneyed role as always. Of course I want to use 'A-list' actors, but I shall do my utmost both to avoid typecasting them and to enrich the cast with actors who live and work in Eastern Poland, since what matters to me are powerful acting personalities. For the main characters, the Christmas Eve supper, the focal point of the traditional Polish Christmas, is a boxing ring, a fight over whose sense of humour and arguments will triumph; it is bragging about their successes in life and a battle in defence of their values. My central characters and, hand in hand with that, the actors creating them, will have to face up to themselves in that ring. I make no secret of the fact that this method of handling the dramaturgy springs from my experience of working as an actor. In the stories I tell, the main character always stands in first place, their viewpoint is always the overriding value which determines the visual form and cinematic language. In order to enhance the believability of the world I am discussing, I plan to shoot the film in Eastern Poland, in the places where the action is set.

I have always been fascinated by entangled central characters. Central characters who have to take decisions here and now, in front of the audience's eyes, as happens in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Biutiful*. These are characters who have

to make choices and the consequences intensify the drama in which they are participants. I tested my strengths in constructing my short films on the basis of characters like that. I am also fascinated by confining my stories to a specific, and limited, time span. Christmas Eve, which runs a particular course and has a natural dramatic tension that plays out during the ritual, is a superb background for an intimate, family drama. The selection of this as the moment setting for the action is no random matter. Winter and the Christmas period is a singular time in our culture. For the families of economic migrants, Christmas Eve is one of the few moments in the year when a gathering with the entire family is possible. On the one hand, it is a cultural prism, an element of Christian practices and, on the other, it is an occasion for having fun and getting together with those closest to us.

The atmosphere of the film oscillates between tragedy and absurd humour. This method of presenting the tragedy which touches the family is akin to what Sam Mendes did in *American Beauty*. I believe that a drama told with a large dose of humour and set within a light convention is capable of being more piercing than trauma cinema.

Silent Night will be a film in which audiences can see themselves, which is also why I envisage further work on the screenplay. That work will focus primarily on increasing the depth and authenticity of the relationships between the central characters because those relationships are the carriers of the drama being played out. I would also like to emphasise that Adam is driven by a noble motive and that, even if he does appear to be using the closest members of his family, he is doing so out of concern for the good of his child and his girlfriend.

I firmly believe that, holding to the tragicomic form, *Silent Night* has considerable box-office potential. Thanks to the topicality of the theme it addresses, the circumstances in which it is played out and the sharp sense of humour that springs from the nature of the main characters, who maintain a distance to themselves and the world alike, *Silent Night* will draw large, multigenerational audiences to the cinema.



PIOTR DOMALEWSKI

Film director, screenwriter and actor. His short films have won awards at various festivals across Europe. He is also a playwright. His play *Five square meters* has been awarded at the Metaforę Rzeczywistości Contest, a National competition for playwrights. His film *Stranger* has won Grand Prix at the International Film Festival Cinémaforum in Warsaw. His feature debut *Silent Night* won Golden Lions – Grand Prize at 42nd Polish Film Festival in Gdynia.



PIOTR SOBOCIŃSKI JR

Born in 1983, Piotr Sobociński jr is a third-generation cinematographer, the son of Piotr Sobociński and grandson of Witold Sobociński. A graduate of the Cinematography Department of the Lodz Film School, he is one of Poland's most distinctive cinematographers. He has been working on feature films and commercials since 2007 and has won numerous awards, including some of the most prestigious in Poland, such as an Eagle conferred by the Polish Film Academy and a Polish Society of Cinematographers' Award for the cinematography for *Gods* and an Eagle and Best Cinematography award for *Wolyn*, also known as *Hatred*. He is a member of the Polish Society of Cinematographers.





ON THE ALERT, 24/7

"With *Silent Night*, I'm trying to say something truthful about people. It's my truth. What matters to me is that audiences see it at all, that, amidst the flood of cinematic offers, they come to the conclusion that they'll buy a ticket for *Silent Night* because something about that Polish film stand out and intrigues them. I hope they'll see themselves and the people closest to them in the story," says Piotr Domalewski, who is working on his full-length feature debut as both screenwriter and director.

The greatest fear of a young director is...

The fear of not being equal to that complex effort which is directing the shooting of a film. And also of not being able to do it in a way that means the crew won't realise what it's costing me. Then, of course, there's the stress bound up with whether or not audiences will go for what I've dreamed up. And with whether it'll be my own, original statement.

What was your starting point for *Silent Night*?

As far as the violence, relationships and tension linked to a small, inward-looking community is concerned, the starting point could certainly have been *The Dark House*, but Asghara Farhadi's *A Separation* was much more important to me. When I saw it, I thought to myself that, after those two hours in the cinema, I knew a small piece of Iran, that I knew how the people there think, that I'd encountered some kind of truth about them. I expect the same of my film. That audiences, particularly those abroad, think to themselves that now they know a bit more about us, about the Poles. They know what amuses us and what appals us. What we have problems with and what matter to us.

I wanted to tell a story that's played out between the members of a family. It's a superb space for an intimate drama. What I wanted to portray in *Silent Night* is something that doesn't exist; the family members are condemned to one another, but there's no warmth, understanding or closeness in that

collectiveness. All that holds those people together is the tie of blood. But paradoxically, it's a tie that not even the greatest drama can sever.

Before *Silent Night*, you made six shorts.

I'm very happy about that. The older I get, the more pragmatic I am. I brought a lot away from shooting my earlier films, because it seems to me that what film is and how it's created has to be learned all over again every time. Each time, the shooting revealed new secrets of the craft to me. I can't imagine being set to make a full-length debut after one short.

In that case, what was the road that brought you to this full-length feature? As is normally the case, the screenplay came first or, more to the point, yet another version of it.

Yes, but that was necessary, to me and the film alike. Together with producer Dariusz Dużyński, I submitted the first version to the Polish Film Institute's Screenplay Development programme. And the committee sent it on to the screenwriting scholarships section. In other words, it was sent back for rewrites, along with something I found alarming; a note saying that nothing happens in it. But that was exactly what I was after, the fact that the central characters wanted to establish various relationships with each other, that it was important to them for something magical to happen during that Christmas evening, but unfortunately, in their case, to quote Mrozek, "The party's happening somewhere else"... Nevertheless, I took the committee's comments to heart and approached what I'd heard at the institute seriously. I revised the material, while sticking to my original concepts, and I received a scholarship.

You're an actor and you appear in theatre productions and television serials from time to time. What did your acting background give you when it came to making your debut as the director of a full-length feature?

It's an armament. You know how to direct an actor in order to achieve a particular effect on the screen. But it's also connected with a certain danger, of course; normally there's a distance between an actor and the director. The director has relatively limited knowledge of an actor's work. So a distance is born and, paradoxically, that makes a greater trust possible; it means that you don't step out of your own space and enter into something that's beyond your competence. The director has to accept that some of the actor's knowledge is out of bounds to them and that there are areas of that profession which remain a secret.

But when the director is also an actor, that distance vanishes. An actor comes to the actor-director to ask about everything and to review everything critically. There are no barriers. If an actor doesn't like something, then you'll generally know what. And if an actor comes and asks for a retake, then, in general, although you liked the scene, you have to admit that they're right and do the retake, even if it sometime goes against the grain.

In that case, what should a film artist who's just starting out pay attention to if they're going to experience the luxury of being satisfied with the day's shooting?

I'm sure that it's different for everyone and that something different is important to each of us. From my point of view and in my experience, one thing emerges; you have to be extremely certain about what you want to do. Because then you walk onto the set and all you really have is some paper in the form of the screenplay in your hand and people have to follow you and that document. If something doesn't chime there, then it won't chime on the screen.

The second thing is the choice of producer. That worked for me. I'm really happy. And I'd recommend a situation where the producer also knows what you want to do and accepts it. There can't be any fighting along the producer-director line; there has to be full support and understanding. That pays off at every stage of work on a film.

Shorts rarely make their way to cinemas, which means they rarely come into confrontation with audiences. This time, it'll be different. Do you have any expectations, or aren't you thinking about that?

I want the film to amuse the public and move them. "With *Silent Night*, I'm trying to say something truthful about people. It's my truth. What matters to me is that audiences see it at all, that, amidst the flood of cinematic offers, they come to the conclusion that they'll buy a ticket for *Silent Night* because something about that Polish film stand out and intrigues them. I hope they'll see themselves and the people closest to them in the story. And it'll be enough if, once the film's over, they nod as they reflect, "Yes, that's how things are".

PIOTR DOMALEWSKI WAS TALKING TO ANNA SERDIUKOW





Munk Studio has been functioning within the structure of the Polish Filmmakers Association since 2008. The studio produces short and feature-length debut films and young filmmakers who want to make their first film in a professional environment can count on the artistic, production and promotional assistance we provide.

The studio runs three programmes for the production of shorts: *30 Minutes*, *First Documentary* and *Young Animation*. Script submissions take place twice a year for each programme and a maximum of ten live-action shorts, ten documentary shorts and five short animations are produced annually.

To date, six full-length feature debuts have been made at Munk Studio: Bartosz Konopka's *Fear of Falling*, Maria Sadowska's *Women's Day*, Dariusz Glazer's *The Wall*, Grzegorz Zariczny's *Waves*, Kuba Czekaj's *The Erlprince* and Piotr Domalewski's *Silent Night*. Editing is underway on Ewa Bukowska's *53 Wars*, while Karolina Bielawska's full-length feature debut is currently in development.

At Munk Studio, our overriding concern is enabling young filmmakers to develop their talents in a supportive environment. We operate in the belief that, for any director making their most crucial film, in other words, their debut, a creative atmosphere and individualised conditions for development are vital. We are constantly expanding our fields of interest and, as the studio's Artistic Director, I would like to see us producing genre films such as contemporary comedies, biopics and crime stories, as well. Debuting with a genre movie is equally as possible, especially given that genre in no way precludes auteurism. Munk Studio is open to students and graduates not only of film schools, but of every educational institution with an artistic profile. The camera is also frequently used by art academy and theatre school students as a tool for artistic expression. What is paramount is a good idea and artistic vision.

JERZY KAPUŚCIŃSKI, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF MUNK STUDIO

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