

### Focus Estonia at TIFF.24: Provocative Sci-Fi, Irreverent Comedies, and Nordic Angst

*Cluj-Napoca, May 14, 2025.* Estonian cinema takes center stage at the **24th edition of the Transilvania International Film Festival (June 13–22, Cluj-Napoca)** through the **Focus Estonia** program — a curated selection featuring both recent releases and rediscovered classics, screened in restored versions.

**Focus Estonia** is made possible with the support of the **Embassy of Estonia in Bucharest** and the **Estonian Film Institute**.

Tickets and passes for TIFF.24 are available online at <u>tiff.eventbook.ro</u>.

**The Black Hole** (2024) is a dark sci-fi comedy in which director Moonika Siimets seems unafraid to push boundaries. Structured in three parts and inspired by short stories from Estonian writers, the film follows a cast of eccentric characters whose mundane lives are thrown into chaos by aliens or a giant spider.

Martial arts, punk monks, black metal music, and pitch-black humor — these are the ingredients of *The Invisible Fight* (2023), a must-see screening at Bonțida Castle as part of the *Weekend at the Castle* event. The film premiered at the Locarno Film Festival, where it won the Special Jury Prize. Director Rainer Sarnet, also honored in the *3x3* section, will be in attendance at TIFF to present two additional titles: *The Idiot* (2011) and *November* (2017).

*Alien or: Valdis' Escape in 11 Chapters* (2006), Rasmus Merivoo's student short about a deadbeat who forgets all the things he loved — alcohol, brawls, and women, among others — after a crowbar to the head, quickly gained cult status. Its long-awaited sequel arrives nearly two decades later: *Alien 2 or: The Return of Valdis in 17 Chapters* (2024), where the protagonist discovers that his hometown is no longer what it once was. Both irreverent parodies will be shown as a double feature — an ultraconcentrated blast of raucous humor and abrasive satire.

A landmark in Estonian cinema, *Smile at Last* (dir. Leida Laius, Arvo Iho, 1985) tells the story of a 16-year-old girl forced to survive in a harsh orphanage after the death of her mother and her father's abandonment. Starkly naturalistic and featuring mostly non-professional actors, the film premiered at the 1987 Berlin Film Festival, where it won the UNICEF Award. At TIFF, it will be screened in a restored version.

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Another unmissable classic is *A Woman Heats the Sauna* (dir. Arvo Kruusement, 1979), a quietly intense drama about a woman who must confront her past when she's tasked by her bosses with preparing the company sauna — located in the village where her ex-husband's family still lives. The screening is part of a *double bill* exploring sauna culture in Estonia, alongside the short *Sauna Day* (dir. Anna Hints, Tushar Prakash, 2024), a kind of masculine sequel to the multi-awarded documentary *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood*, previously shown at TIFF.22.

In *Aurora* (dir. Rain Tolk and Andres Maimik, 2025), the titular character — daughter of a religious leader — begins an extramarital affair that threatens her relationship. The crisis peaks during the celebration of her wedding anniversary.

Six characters overwhelmed by loneliness inhabit the world of **Autumn Ball** (2007), a film steeped in angst but not devoid of humor. Veiko Õunpuu's debut won the *Orizzonti* award at the Venice Film Festival — the most prestigious accolade ever received by an Estonian film — and also a cinematography award at TIFF in 2008.

The action of *Life and Love* (dir. Helen Takkin, 2024), another remarkable debut, unfolds in 1933 during the Great Depression. At its heart is a young woman who leaves her village to pursue her dream of becoming a writer in the city — a path complicated by a strange and toxic relationship with a charming but destructive man.

The *Coming Up Next* section, dedicated to series lovers, features the first two episodes of *My Dear Mother* (dir. Doris Tääker, 2025), a Nordic noir-style thriller about a woman whose life spirals out of control after her mother's death.

The full TIFF.24 program — featuring over 200 films, cine-concerts, and special events — will be announced soon.

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The Transilvania International Film Festival is organized by the Romanian Film Promotion Association and the Transilvania Film Festival Association.

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