MEASURES *for a* FUNERAL

a film by SOFIA BOHDANOWICZ

GENRE	Fiction
LENGTH	142 minutes
SHOOTING FORMAT	HD
ASPECT RATIO	2:39.1
DISTRIBUTION	Vortex Media
SALES	Totem Films

CAST

	Deragh Campbell
	María Dueñas
	Melanie Scheiner
	Mary Margaret O'Hara
	Maxim Gaudette
	Eve Duranceau
	Eileen Davies
	Rosa-Johan Uddoh
	Yannick Nézet-Séguin

CREW

Producers	Aonan Yang, Andreas Mendritzki, Sofia Bohdanowicz
Co-Producer	Priscilla Galvez
Cinematographer	Nikolay Michaylov
Editors	Pablo Alvarez-Mesa, Sofia Bohdanowicz
Costume Designer	Mara Zigler
Production Designer	Jessica Hart
Re-Recording Mixer	Lucas Prokaziuk
Supervising Sound Editor	Stefana Fratila M.P.S.E.
Original Music by	Olivier Alary
Written by	Sofia Bohdanowicz & Deragh Campbell
Executive Producers	Ryan Krisvoshey, Simone Urdl, Mustafa Uzuner
Music Producer	Amanda Abdel Hadi

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Audrey Benac (Deragh Campbell, *Anne at 13,000 ft*) confronts her history and destiny as she dives into the life of forgotten Canadian violinist Kathleen Parlow. Leaving behind her dying mother, herself a failed violinist, Audrey is haunted by her mother's unfulfilled dreams. She begins her journey through archives and memories, from Toronto to London to Oslo. It's not just about bringing Parlow's music back to life; it's a quest for closure and understanding, seeking peace with her mother's legacy through the echoes of a lost concerto dedicated to Parlow entitled 'Opus 28'. *Measures for a Funeral* is a haunting epic of a woman in transition between the past and the future from director Sofia Bohdanowicz (*MS Slavic 7*).

LOGLINE

From Toronto to Oslo, we follow the journey of a young academic Audrey Benac. Audrey undertakes a quest towards one woman — the acclaimed early 20th-century Canadian violinist Kathleen Parlow — as she simultaneously flees from another, her failed musician mother.

Sofia Bohdanowicz is an award-winning filmmaker from Toronto. Her work has been showcased at prominent festivals, including BFI, NYFF, The Viennale, The Berlinale, Locarno, the Toronto International Film Festival, HotDocs, the Sheffield Film Festival, and DocLisboa. In 2016 she won the Emerging Filmmaker award for her first feature *Never Eat Alone* at the Vancouver International Film Festival. In 2017, the Toronto Film Critics Association honored her with the Jay Scott Prize, and in 2018, her documentary *Maison du bonheur* was nominated for the Rogers Prize for Best Canadian Film.

Bohdanowicz's third feature film, *MS Slavic 7*, premiered at the Berlinale, graced the cover of 'Cinema Scope' and the Argentinian newspaper 'Página/12', and was featured at the Harvard Film Archive.

Her fourth feature, *A Woman Escapes*, co-directed with Burak Çevik and Blake Williams, won the Churubusco Prize at FICUNAM's rough-cut workshop, CATAPULTA. The film had its world premiere in the International Competition at FID Marseille, receiving an honorable mention for the CNAP prize. She was also recently named one of *The 22 Most Influential People in Canadian Film* by Barry Hertz in 'The Globe and Mail'. Her short film *Point and Line to Plane* won Best International Short Film at the Las Palmas Gran Canaria Festival. An MFA graduate of York University's Film Production program, she is also an alumna of Berlinale Talents and the TIFF Talent Accelerator.

Bohdanowicz's most recent film, *Measures for a Funeral*, won the Kodak and Silveryway Award during FIDMarseille's co-production lab in 2020 and is premiering in TIFF's Centerpiece programme.

Bohdanowicz's films are available on the Criterion Channel.

Conversation with Beatrice Loayza, critic and writer for the New York Times, Criterion, the Atlantic, etc.

BEATRICE LOAYZA

SOFIA BOHDANOWICZ

Audrey Benac is the protagonist of several of your films. What made you want to return to this character once more?

Audrey Benac is both a family detective and historian. *Veslemøy's Song* is about seeking out a recording and the materiality of that object. In *MS Slavic 7*, she is assembling a literary estate with Audrey's great-grandmother's letters, and trying to understand how all the written parts she produced come together. *Never Eat Alone* is about locating Audrey's grandmother's long-lost love. All these films are about a kind of detective work; about trying to shape things into language or a form that feels whole and legible. Yet that's a goal that's never really achieved in any of these films, and that's intentional. I tried to keep things very loose and open, whereas *Measures for a Funeral* is a departure from that approach. I decided to continue Audrey's journey because I felt she needed to officially end her odyssey; finally finish her work and put a cap on all of her research. We go on this journey with her where we really feel her suffering and deep isolation and disconnection from others, but also see that she's succeeding in something marvelous. She's finally able to hear the voice and output of this incredible artist who was long forgotten.

The artist you're talking about is the Canadian violinist Kathleen Parlow, who is also a subject of interest in previous films of yours like* Veslemøy's Song. *I'd like to hear more about what drew you to her in the first place.

Kathleen Parlow has always been this ominous figure in my family. When I was younger, my grandfather, who was a violinist, really wanted me to play. Because he died when I was very young, playing the violin made me extremely sad. It reminded me of him and his career, which ended so abruptly. I was weighed down by the pressure of him giving me this instrument in front of our whole family, and I could never bring myself to play it — I chose the piano instead. When I was young, I'd go to the Toronto Symphony and watch him perform. Those are some of my most powerful, pride-filled memories. He wasn't a famous violinist; he was second chair, though he did play in the Toronto Symphony, with The Guess Who and Glenn Gould. The point is, he had a career, and he was able to raise four children on a violinist's modest salary, and he achieved this in part because of what Kathleen Parlow had taught him.

Kathleen was the first woman admitted to the St. Petersburg Conservatory as an international student. She was also the first woman to do sound tests with Thomas Edison on the cylinder phonograph. She had this incredible, decorated career, but she also had terrible luck because her career was interrupted by World War I. After the war, she was no longer an in-demand performer, so she had to sustain herself through teaching. Her finances weren't properly handled, so her life became quite difficult toward the end. On paper, you'd think she was a failure: she didn't marry and she died in poverty, and yet, in my mind, she led an incredibly successful life because she was able to do what she wanted with her time. She had this courage and stubborn persistence that I find very beautiful. Frankly, I don't know why someone hasn't already made a film about her.

'Opus 28', which was dedicated to Kathleen by the Norwegian composer Johan Halverson, was considered lost until recently. How does* Measures for a Funeral *connect to this rediscovery?

It's actually because of my uncle that the film exists! He saw this article published in the Toronto Star about the discovery of *Opus 28* in the Edward Johnson Music Library. He sent me the article and told me I should make a film about this [laughs]. I became extremely curious, and I was desperate to hear what it sounded like. I was one of the first people from the public to go to the library and look at the transcript in 2018, even before it was performed. Eventually, I developed a relationship with a man named Houman Behzadi who had discovered the concerto. He shared a recording with me from a performance, which was done in Norway, and I was stunned by it. Then I thought, well, is anyone in Toronto going to perform it? It's such an important part of Canadian history, and what a gift it has been discovered after all these years. In general, there's been an ambivalence toward the piece of music; Canadian orchestras haven't been keen to perform it, so it became my mission — alongside our music producer Amanda — to make it happen. The movie provided that opportunity, and ultimately it was Orchestre Métropolitain in Montréal that took on the challenge.

You're resurrecting 'Opus 28' but you're also resurrecting Kathleen, most obviously in the voiceover narration. What kinds of materials informed those parts of the script?

Deragh and I co-wrote the script and Kathleen's narration was built from pieces, like letters and day books, from the Edward Johnson Music Library. We were able to get a good sense of what she was doing every day because she wrote out her activities in her day books — she even wrote down when she was having her period! It's true, there's so much of her voice in the film, but the sad part is that Audrey can't actually hear it. She wants so badly to connect with Kathleen, and though she's all around her, she can't quite hear it and can't entirely connect. In the end, through the music, is when that connection finally happens.

What about the rest of the script? This might be your most dialogue-heavy film and there are scenes in which we hear characters explaining complicated processes. How did you and Deragh go about writing these parts?

The script was definitely influenced by Deragh's love of literature and theater. But then we combined that sensibility with an attention to detail and a desire to capture these experts in their fields authentically. That left us with wordy dialogue, though some of it was based on their actual words and speeches. For example, we have Andrea Zarza, who's a real sound archivist at the British Library who is played by the performance artist Rosa-Johan Uddoh. The dialogue in that scene is based on a lecture she did on cylinder phonographs that I attended at the Thyssen in 2019. Andrea talked about cylinders as these kinds of talismans; objects that bring you back to a certain point in time because they contain the physical engravings of waves of sound. We often forget that sound creates a vibration in space that we can feel — it's literally a vibe. So it's fascinating to me that

these sound waves could literally become a weight that is imprinted on an object. When you're listening to a cylinder, in some ways it's like a séance; you're engaging with a ghost and the vibrations that have imprinted themselves on an object at a certain point in time. The challenge was to create a script that represented those ideas, so we had to be very detailed and occasionally didactic. Mischa, for example, is based on a violinist named Chingiz Osmanov. When I visited St. Petersburg, Chingiz offered to play 'Opus 28' for me with the St. Petersburg orchestra. I recorded a lot of our conversation, and transcribed it, and we worked on those parts of the script together.

The film is something of a ghost story. Besides the narration, in what other ways does Kathleen "haunt" the film?

Audrey leaves her dying mother to pursue her master's thesis on a deceased violinist, and she's possessed by a fascination with this ghost. Kathleen is this force that pulls Audrey through all these spaces, makes her commit all of these strange acts — like running away from the house tour in Meldreth, or obsessively carrying Parlow's old violin. The film works like a séance in this regard. Which spaces did Kathleen inhabit? What were the objects she used? What were her values? What was her perspective on music and life? That's why I made a point to go to all of these different locations. We're in the actual rooms where her archives and *Opus 28* are housed; we go to Kathleen's house in Meldreth. We go to the National Theater in Norway. Our costume designer, Mara Zigler, did a lot of research to make a dress that resembled the kind Kathleen would've worn during a performance, and she ultimately modeled the cobalt blue dress Maria Dueñas wears in the finale after one of Kathleen's gowns. I wanted to conjure Kathleen through these spaces and the objects she possessed, so that her story could be felt as this underlying magnetic current.

Stefana Fratila, the sound editor, and I were collecting sounds for the sound editing phase and it was her idea to get an electromagnetic microphone and record the waves of activity around the area where Kathleen is buried — it's a mass grave. Whenever you hear static in the film, that's from Kathleen's grave. In fact, during the sound editing and mixing phase, a lot of creepy things happened. Several of us were hearing banging sounds in the middle of the night, even though we were sleeping in different places. Multiple people's hard drives suddenly died.

Can you talk about the connection between Audrey, Kathleen, and Audrey's mother? As the title suggests, this is a film about mourning, death, grief, and memory, so I'd like to hear about how you make sense of this web of different women.

Audrey's is the story of a tragic heroine. She's a person with deep internal struggles, and in this regard I drew a lot of inspiration from Angela Schanelec, whose films are in part about internal pain that's expressed in difficult, disturbing, and silent ways. Audrey isn't an easy person to be around because she's a vessel for her mother's grief. As her mother slowly dies, Kathleen becomes more present in her life, and Kathleen is someone in whom she finds a lot of warmth and hope.

She's a reanimating force. Audrey has difficulty expressing her intense feelings, and she has this great fear of being misunderstood, and now she's in a state of emergency but also in denial of that emergency. For me, grief isn't a linear emotion, so I wanted to depict the non-linearity of this grieving process — the steps we take and the phases we go through to accept the passing of a loved one, and in this case, a loved one whose impact on Audrey's life hasn't been entirely positive.

The violin Audrey carries is such a loaded object. At the beginning of the film, Audrey's Mother asks to be cremated with it, and we see that play out in the finale.

On the one hand, it's a manifestation of her mother's dreams, and a trophy that represents Kathleen's successful career. These forces are in tension. Audrey's mother wanted what Kathleen had, but ended up being a mother instead, so she in turn was emotionally abusive toward her daughter. Audrey and Mischa discover that the violin is a Guarnerius Del Gesù, which is what Kathleen played in the best part of her career. It's an object that carries all these blemishes and imperfections created by its maker, and it holds the histories of its previous owners. But these imperfections are what makes the sound it produces much more original and unique. Likewise, there's no right or wrong way to live a life. I wanted the object to ring true as a representation of that. Athina Rachel Tsangari, who was one of our mentors through the Oxbelly Lab, told us the film is essentially a samurai movie. The violin is Audrey's sword. She's seemingly cold-hearted in all of her decision-making — like an asura in a Japanese horror film — because of her fixation on this tortured quest to avenge her mother's pain.

María Dueñas is one of the most celebrated violinists in the world. How did you manage to bring her on board and what made you feel that she was the right person for this part?

At the risk of sounding maudlin, I really do feel like she's sort of a reincarnation of Kathleen Parlow. She is a remarkably skilled musician and, like Kathleen, she also made her debut in San Francisco. She also plays a Del Gesù (though it's a different model than the one Kathleen used). María travels around with her mom, who also makes a lot of her outfits — that was also the case with Kathleen and her mother Minnie. When we wrote the role of Elisa, it was based on a Russian violinist that I had met while doing research in St. Petersburg. But when we presented the script to María, she immediately identified with it. Initially, it was quite hard to get in contact with her. I called her agent every two weeks during the pandemic. When I finally broke through to him, he told me that he wouldn't present the project to María, but that he'd have her listen to 'Opus 28'. He said if she connected with the music, then he'd present her the script. And fortunately for us, the music resonated.

Did you direct María's violin performances?

As Elisa, she's playing someone who's a bit younger than she is, and she also has to convincingly rehearse in the film. There's a certain vulnerability there. I had to tell her,

can you play this a little badly? Maybe a bit faster than you normally would, because Mischa needs to be able to give you notes. I did not direct her final performance of 'Opus 28' in any way. I left it up to her.

The finale, in which Audrey finally witnesses the performance of 'Opus 28', is such a major moment — not just within* Measures for a Funeral*, but across your body of work. Tell me about your vision for this epic scene.

Our shooting ratio was tied to the performance because, indeed, it's the most important part of the film. An orchestra fits perfectly in a 2:39.1 aspect ratio. For every Audrey Benac film, we've used a different format. We've shot on 16mm, in 4:3, 16:9, and 3D. I wanted to make this final film in a super sleek format, so we shot it on an Alexa 35A with these incredible Cooke TLS Speed Panchro vintage lenses which were determined by our cinematographer Nikolay Michaylov. We had this great camera operator named Simran Dewan for our Montréal leg of the shoot, who did the zoom-out of the orchestra on the ground floor of Maison Symphonique — that might be my moment in the film. The whole movie is working up to this final performance; the end of an entire series is a hybrid of documentary and fiction. It was important for me to honor the culmination of all these things. In the editing, I had to remain very firm about the fact that the concerto would not be cut in any way, shape, or form. The entirety of *Opus 28* mirrors what Audrey is going through; through the music, you can feel all of her temperatures, her ups and downs, and her entire journey in fact. So it was very important to me to record this moment as a live event, so as to underscore its historical importance as well.

The performance was also a real-life public event. How did you handle these logistics?

We had an amazing production team led by Priscilla Galvez (co-producer) and Nikolay Michaylov (cinematographer), who set up seven different camera angles. We had two technical scouts look at every possible angle in the auditorium, and thankfully Maison Symphonique was very flexible. In order for us to get the right assemblage of shots, we needed to shoot the performance twice. It's an exhausting piece so they couldn't do it more than two times anyway. So there was a rehearsal and a live performance, which was a sold-out event. For that, we thank Yannick Nézet-Séguin, the conductor of Orchestre Métropolitain, who is very beloved in his hometown of Montreal. He's also a star conductor who has a habit of presenting pieces of unknown music that he's found in archives. He saw the value in Kathleen's story and in the piece of music itself.

Speaking of your cinematographer — this is your first time working with him, though he's collaborated with several other Canadian filmmakers like Kazik Radwanski and Antoine Bourges. What made you want to involve him?

One of the biggest reasons I wanted to work with Nikolay was because of his relationship with Deragh Campbell. He was the cinematographer on *Anne at 13,000 ft* and since then, they've had an incredible bond. In fact, as they were shoot-

ing, he was holding her hand right before she jumped out of the airplane. Nikolay is also someone who is used to working with very little. Like me, he's a bit of a raccoon in that he's spontaneous and likes to improvise. However, it's funny that this film is the opposite of that. It's very measured and calculated. We shot listed for three months. We did location hunts in all the places where we filmed, and we did this in a very thorough way to develop the language of the film collaboratively. He also did a lot of research independently — the two big influences on the film were Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Blue* and Otto Preminger's *Bunny Lake is Missing*. He found out that those films used Panchro lenses. We're both so used to improvising, but he ultimately advised that that couldn't be possible with this project since we were shooting in different locations almost every day. We couldn't afford to screw up a day and go back, because if we missed one day of photography it would throw the whole schedule off.

You've collaborated with Deragh on several films but this is obviously your biggest project together in terms of length, resources, and budget. How did that affect your collaboration and Deragh's approach to Audrey, if at all?

It was wonderful to see Deragh evolve and adapt to this huge role, which was very dialogue-heavy, not improvised (which is how we're used to working) and required her to remain in this dark and difficult place for a long time. But the magic of working with Deragh is that across all these Audrey films, in one sense she remains the same, but she also reinvents herself. Because the camerawork is very static that also demanded a rigorous approach to performance. Then there's also the fact that Audrey is in her own orbit, and that's an energy that the other actors have to contend with. She's the pillar of the film; the only element that remains constant.

For media or interview requests please contact samanthachater@gmail.com.