

# THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

BY BEATA PASZYC

It was a hot July night in 2018 when my high school friend Anna and I sat down in the Rialto movie theater in Poznan, Poland. This historic theater has been through a lot since it was built in 1937 - it survived the war, bore witness to the rise of communism and oppression, and later became an art house movie theater. So the atmosphere for watching the film *Cold War* by Pawel Pawlikowski could not have been more fitting.

The film depicts a love story between Zula and Wiktor that spanned the post war years of 1949 to 1956. An impossible love in impossibly difficult and convoluted times. Pawlikowski was inspired by and dedicated the film to his parents, whom he described as, "the most interesting, dramatic characters I've ever come across ... both strong, wonderful people, but as a couple, never-ending disasters."

Without giving away too much of the plot for those who have not had a chance to see this brilliant movie nominated for an Oscar in three categories, this is a story of two people caught in an unbearable situation during times that made no sense. That even when the war ended, there was no freedom. That escaping from one's homeland and risking life to finally make it to the West was not a guarantee of living the dream. This is a not-so-rare story of longing, belonging, self sabotage, vulnerability, love and death.

We first meet Zula (played by Joanna Kulig), a bit innocent but feisty, as she auditions for a place in a coveted *Mazurek* ensemble inspired by the real-life *Mazowsze* folk dance group. There she meets and falls in love with Wiktor, the company musician and conductor. The traditional folk costumes they wear, that are colorful and vibrant in real life, are subdued and reduced to a black and white format, which is appropriate for the films and photography of the time. It also symbolizes the dullness of life under the extreme suppression of communism, with hues of gray and sharp contrasts between black and white, good and evil, love and hate.

Zula's sultry voice is enchanting and captivating. Music plays an integral part of the film; it is the soundtrack of the characters' lives, from plaintive folk songs of rural areas to smoky jazz arrangements in Parisian night clubs to the 50s tunes of communist Poland. The phenomenal music and spectacular cinematography by Łukasz Żal makes for a heart wrenching tale that can be summed up by its theme song's refrain..."The two hearts and the four eyes that could not meet."

Just like the Rialto movie theater, my family endured war, post war, and communism, where daily propaganda and threats were very real. And just like the characters in the film, they were faced with unimaginable circumstances. It is really hard to comprehend now what Polish people experienced then; often torn by what to do to survive, forced into oppression by the brutality of communism, and caught in the power struggle between the West and the East. Though I did not live through those times, somehow I feel because my parents did, I have absorbed the sentiments of those gloomy days. Maybe the family stories that circled around me have made me aware of what life must have been like in Poland.



And then, like Zula and Wiktor though in a different era, I got a first-hand taste of living abroad and becoming an immigrant. Different times and circumstances, and yet the film's portrayal of longing for one's homeland and adapting to a new life truly resonated with me. The story is timeless because it is about the human condition in times of ambiguity, uncertainty and totalitarian cruelty.

*Cold War's* emotional rawness lingers long after the final credits have rolled. It makes you feel gratitude for being alive in much less complicated times. It stays with you.