



The Chronicles of MELANIE

FILM STUDIO SIA MISTRUS MEDIA

She survived to tell us.
So we would not forget.

A film by Viesturs Kairiņš, based on the book by Melānija Vanaga Veļupes krastā.





Trailer:

<https://vimeo.com/185318040>

IMDB: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt5541426/>

www.chronicsofmelanie.com

ABOUT THE FILM

The film by the Latvian director Viesturs Kairiņš “The Chronicles of Melanie” is the story of writer Melānija Vanaga’s (1905–1997) deportation to Siberia. It is based on Vanaga’s book *Veļupes krastā*.

On 14 June 1941, the Soviet regime deported to Siberia the elite of Latvian society as well as 7168 women and over 2000 children. Melānija Vanaga, her husband and son also fell into the dangerous social category and were deported. Vanaga’s autobiographical novel *Veļupes krastā* is the most striking description of these events in Latvian literature.

“In war people knew what they were fighting for and what they defended. And if they had to give up their lives, they died with the understanding that their deaths would help others to survive. But here no one was killed outright. Here people were destroyed by famine and the elements. No one could be held accountable for such murders. People died on

their own. [...] The road to the “happy tomorrow” was paved with people’s suffering and lives. In the name of some idea, I was made one of 13 million victims and deprived of the best years of my life, my child had his health and his father his life taken away from them,” Melānija Vanaga wrote.

At some point Vanaga estimated that her journey from the Cēsis station to Tiukhtet in Siberia covered 5169 kilometres. Her journey took almost three weeks. Seventy-five years later, in June 2016, a unique video of 72 hours documented the journey of Vanaga from Latvia to Tiukhtet. It is also important to remember the Latvian women to whose toughness we owe present-day Latvia and our future generations.



SYNOPSIS

The film “The Chronicles of Melanie” is based on the life story of Melānija Vanaga, a Latvian woman who managed to survive her deportation to Siberia. It is a truthful account of the miracle of human character, magnitude of the human spirit and the painful destinies, which were a part of the greatest tragedy facing the Latvian nation. It is the story of Latvian women who had to suffer and survive physically and emotionally in order for Latvia to live.

An early morning of 15 June 1941 in Soviet-occupied Latvia. The authorities break into the house of Melanie and her husband Aleksandrs, editor of a newspaper of independent Latvia, make them wake up their eight-year-old son Andrejs and get into a lorry. At the station, the men are separated from their families. On this day, the Soviets deported about 17,000 people from Latvia (the next wave of deportations came in March of 1949).

The deported are taken to Siberia in cattle cars. Melanie and her son first have to survive – the three-week long ride to the remote Tiukhtet village, the first months in the alien environment, famine and illness – and then to live. They have to make peace with the new life and accept it even though everything seems to have lost its point and reason. This drives some to the point of collapse, yet Melanie is aware of “only one string sounding and that string is hope.” She takes detailed notes that later becomes a weighty literary work about the 16 years spent in Siberia.

Out of her notes, Melānija Vanaga prepared a book of

documentary prose *Veļupes krastā*, which was published in 1991, soon after Latvia regained independence. Later, it served as the concluding volume in Vanaga’s seven-book series “The Gathering of Souls” about the personal history of her family and entire Latvia.

For the entire period of her exile (1941–1957), Melānija writes letters to Aleksandrs without sending them and dedicates a handwritten family chronicle to her son Aleksandrs, for she herself no longer hopes to return to Latvia. In 1957, Melānija is freed. She goes to Riga where she finds out that Aleksandrs barely survived a year in the harsh environment to which he was sent. Melānija spends the rest of her life working as a cow herder.

To maintain hope, to preserve in oneself a person who is stronger than famine, cold, cruelty and even death and is capable of taking on responsibility for another person, to help others – such is the confirmation of Melānija Vanaga, her memories and also this film to the light in the world and in every one of us.



VIESTURS KAIRIŠS,
DIRECTOR:

“Just like the Armenian genocide or Jewish Holocaust, deportations are among the basic factors in Latvian history, which is at the basis of our collective consciousness. Here we are dealing not so much with victims, but with the strength that allowed them to survive. It is on these people, to whom it was important to return and who did not break, that we can build our spiritual bank. That is why Melānija Vanaga seems to me a fundamentally important person. There is no hatred in her book, there is rather love and the ability to deal with very painful issues.”

SAIĪNE TIMOTEO,
ACTRESS; MELANIE IN THE FILM:

“I had a feeling that Melanie was speaking through all these people. It was not only that I embodied Melanie, everyone who was involved in making the film also played Melanie.”

INESE BOKA-GRŪBE,
PRODUCER:

“The film presents a story that needed to be told in a cinematographic language. Melānija Vanaga’s book tells us about the strength of a generation of Latvian women that allowed us to restore our independence and makes us not forget.”

GINTS GRŪBE,
PRODUCER:

“The cinematographic adaptation of this literary and documentary work is our attempt to draw the public’s attention to the fate of Latvian and Baltic nations in the European context, for in the deportee villages of Siberia were the forced destination of the Volga Germans, Karelian Finns and Latvian Jews, whom this tragedy saved from the Holocaust in Latvia. It is the story of the course of history and private memory, which less than often acquires the status of culture in present-day Latvia.”



THE PROTAGONISTS

MELANIE

At the time of deportation, she is over thirty. She has a university education and loves to express her thoughts by writing. The first half of the film is an exercise in survival where a person's character is revealed at the instinctive level. In the course of the film, Melanie's deeper essence comes to the fore. Her trauma of ruined life is transformed to heightened humanity. She sacrifices herself to others and, in the end, people make sacrifices for her. Melanie remains faithful to her husband, intelligence and spiritual life: she remains faithful to herself. Melanie is living proof that under any circumstances humanity can triumph.

ANDREJS, MELANIE'S SON

At the beginning of the film, Andrejs is eight years old. His outlook is brighter than that of the adults, yet, at the same time, it is more tragic. Forced to take on responsibility at an early age, he grows up fast.

ALEKSANDRS, MELANIE'S HUSBAND

Of a distantly German origin, he is the editor-in-chief of a newspaper of independent Latvia. He dies after being deported to the arctic wastes of Russia.

AMPALOV

Russian, director of the cattle depot where Melanie works. "King" of the Tiukhtet village. It is rumoured that he has ended up in this remote village to avoid being sent to the front. He develops a crush on Melanie.

JAKOB KAUFMANN

A Volga German who has spent years in various detention camps; a former philosophy professor. His wife remains in Saratov, but now he has met a fellow deportee, Melanie. Jakob has tuberculosis.

KATRĪNA

Melanie's colleague from Riga. In Siberia they become close friends. Melanie helps Katrīna get over her loss – the death of her baby son, Kārlis. Katrīna is reunited with her husband in exile.

VILMA

The wife of a general in the Latvian Army who becomes Melanie's friend in exile. She begins a new relationship in Siberia and decides not to return to Latvia.



TEAM

Director:	Viesturs Kairišs
Camera:	Gints Bērziņš, LGC
Artist:	Ieva Jurjāne
Producers:	Inese Boka-Grūbe, Gints Grūbe
Co-Producers:	Julietta Sichel, Klaus Heydemann
Editing:	Jussi Rautaniemi
Composers:	Arturs Maskats, Kārlis Auzāns, Aleksandrs Vaicahovskis
Sound:	Aleksandrs Vaicahovskis, Robert Slezák
Director's assistant:	Madara Dišlere
Production:	Elīna Zazerska
Co-Producer:	Elīna Gedīņa-Ducena



CAST

Melanie:	Sabine Timoteo
Andrejs:	Edvīns Mekšs
Aleksandrs:	Ivars Krasts
Katrīna:	Guna Zariņa
Vilma:	Maija Doveika
Ampalov:	Viktor Nemets
Jakob:	Erwin Leder
Biruta:	Evija Rudzīte
Anna:	Baiba Broka
Lieutenant of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs:	Kiril Zaitsev
Melanie's mother:	Astrīda Kairiša
Deported woman:	Lilita Ozoliņa
Katrīna's husband Kārlis:	Ģirts Krūmiņš
Opera soloist:	Evija Martinsone



VIESTURS KAIRIŠS ON THE FILM

History destroys some but makes others be reborn. The film is based on Melānija Vanaga's memoir *Veļupes krastā*. It is the most powerful literary testimony about the genocide against the Latvian people, reaching the level of ancient tragedy. The phenomenon of Melanie's survival is a forceful confirmation of life and nature. The protagonist is continually confronted with her death, with the culmination of being subject to an incredibly complicated operation, which takes place in inadequate conditions, to remove her multiple malignant tumours. All that is happening to Melanie can only be called a miracle. And Melanie changes, too – she literally reaches transcendence over history and the temporality of life. And at the basis of it all are not religious technologies but humanity.

The film is in black and white. First, it is a historical film and the only visual materials that we have from this time are black-and-white photographs. A black-and-white photograph is subconsciously associated with the recent past, the 20th century, from which we have many photographic memories. To a certain degree, a black-and-white photograph creates associations with the time of the Second World War. Second, the black-and-white aesthetic is visually simpler, making us concentrate on the complex inner life of the story. Using the black-and-white aesthetic, it is also easier to avoid banalities, for this is a story where one should feel a degree of neutrality vis-à-vis the facts of suffering and death.

The film is developed from the subjective point of view of Melanie. Despite the fact that the events depicted took place in the past, it is important for the contemporary viewer to identify with the situation where you are awakened in the middle of the night and, totally unprepared, you are thrown into a cattle car and taken to an unknown destination – where your reality instantly switches from living to surviving.

The geographical location plays an important role in the film. The beginning of the film, the journey to Siberia, is physically 'squeezed' into the psychological anxiety of the protagonist and cattle car, but geographically, it is a journey that covers half of Eurasia. Arriving at the Siberian village, Melanie leaves the tight quarters of the cattle car and enters an open world, yet the claustrophobic effect remains, for it is impossible to escape the world created by the trauma.

In the first part of the film, Melanie is subject to the events taking place and her active participation is expressed almost entirely in the wish to survive and to protect her son. She manages to preserve her selfhood only at the level of instinct. Over the course of the film, the survival of humanity is emphasized. It is a film on spirit and spirituality, which, in terms of survival, turns out to be more important than physical fitness. The ethically human essence and actions of Melanie almost turn her into a cult figure for the villagers. And it pays off when Melanie's life is in danger.

There are several culmination points in the film. First, the deportation for which Melanie is totally unprepared, making the audience think that she is so unfit for the situation that she will probably not survive. Second, life in Siberia. There is no place for sentiment, the only thing that one has to think about is survival, first and foremost protecting her son; all the rest takes second place. The third point of culmination is the son's return to Latvia. Melanie remains alone and she has no one to care for – there seems to be no point to her existence. That makes the action now turn from physical survival to spiritual, revealing Melanie's fundamental humanity.

Viesturs Kairišs,
Rīga, 1 October 2016

DIRECTOR

Viesturs Kairišs (born in Latvia, 30 January 1971) has directed films as well as theatre and opera. Kairišs has successfully worked as an opera director both in Latvia and Germany. His films and theatre productions have been shown in many European festivals.

Kairišs's cinematographic debut was in 1998 with the documentary film *Vilciens* (Train), but his first full-length feature film *Pa ceļam aizejot* was completed in 2001 (it was awarded *Lielais Kristaps*, the main Latvian award in cinematography – as the best feature film of the year). The film was included in the programme of the *Karlovy Vary International Film Festival* and received a prize as the best debut at the *Raindance Film Festival* in the United Kingdom. Kairišs's documentary *Pelikāns tukšnesī* (Pelican in the Desert) received the special jury prize at the *Let's See* film festival in Austria.

DIRECTOR

OPERA:

- 2014: Arturs Maskats *Valentīna* at the Deutsch Opera Berlin
- 2014: Giuseppe Verdi *Macbeth* at the Latvian National Opera
- 2014: Karl Maria von Weber *The Magic Archer* at the Cologne Opera
- 2013: Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Berlin Comic Opera
- 2011: Richard Wagner's *Twilight of the Gods* at the Latvian National Opera
- 2010: Giacomo Puccini's *Il trittico: Il tabarro, Suor Angelica, and Gianni Schicchi* at the Latvian National Opera
 - 2008: Richard Wagner's *Siegfried* at the Latvian National Opera
 - 2007: Richard Wagner's *Valkyrie* at the Latvian National Opera
- 2001: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at the Latvian National Opera
- 1999: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* at the Latvian National Opera

THEATRE:

- 2015: *Fire and Night* (Rainis) at the Latvian National Theatre
- 2010: *Kasimir and Karoline* (Odon von Horvath) at the Latvian National Theatre
 - 2009: *Picchio's Ashes* (Jokum Rohde) at the Latvian National Theatre
 - 2008: *Heldenplatz* (Thomas Bernhard) at the Dailes Theatre
- 2003: *Die Dreigroschenoper* (Bertolt Brecht) at the Latvian National Theatre
 - 2003: *The Idiot* (Fjodor Dostoyevsky) at the New Riga Theatre
 - 2003: *The Serpent* (Mirca Eliade) at the New Riga Theatre
 - 2001: *The Dark Deer* (Inga Ābele) at the New Riga Theatre
 - 2001: *Margareta* (Māra Zālīte) at the New Riga Theatre
- 2000: *Hotel Europa* (Goran Stefanovsky) at the Vienna Festival Week

CINEMA:

- 2015: *Chronicles of Melanie* (full-length feature film)
 - 2014: *The Invisible City* (documentary film)
 - 2014: *Pelican in the Desert* (documentary film)
- 2009: *Loengrins from Varka Kru* (documentary film)
 - 2006: *The Dark Deer* (full-length feature film)
 - 2004: *Romeo and Juliet* (documentary film)
 - 2004: *The Monument* (documentary short film)
- 2001: *Leaving by The Way* (full-length feature film)
- 2001: *The Magic Flute* (documentary short film)
 - 2000: *The Wedding* (short film)
- 1998: *The Train* (documentary short film)

More: <http://kairish.com>

PICTURES



FINANCING AND SPONSORS

FINANCING

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EURIMAGES,
State Cinematography Fund Czech Republic,
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PARTNERS

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UPP,
Amerikas Latviešu Apvienība,
Delfi,
LMT Straume,
Latvijas Radio,
Deep White,
Pelican Self Storage,
Jumava,
Ieva,
Latvijas Avīze,
IR

CONTACTS

Information about the film at

www.chroniclesofmelanie.com

IMDB: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt5541426/>

and

www.facebook.com/MelanijasHronika

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