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***Chuck Norris vs. Communism* Premieres on *Independent Lens*
Monday, January 4, 2016 on PBS**

How American Action Movies Helped Spark a Revolution in Romania



Credit: Kevin Williams

(San Francisco, CA) — In 1980s Romania, thousands of Western films — mostly Hollywood action movies — smashed through the Iron Curtain, opening a window into the free world. A black market VHS racketeer and a courageous female translator brought the magic of film to the people — and fueled a revolution. Combining drama with first-person accounts, *Chuck Norris vs. Communism*, directed by Ilinca Calugareanu, premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, January 4, 2016, 10:00-11:00 PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

1980s Romania was culturally isolated and ideologically censored; all images of life outside the Iron Curtain were cut off and TV was reduced to a couple of hours of propaganda bulletins each day. From the drab concrete housing blocks to the food ration lines, an overwhelming fear of state surveillance prevented people from stepping out of line. But there was one window into the free world available to anyone who dared to look.

In the mid-1980s, under the noses of Nicolae Ceausescu’s secret police, thousands of Hollywood films were smuggled into the country by a shadowy operative named Zamfir. They were dubbed by Irina Nistor, a courageous female translator whose distinct voice captivated the nation and became a symbol of freedom. A network of underground screening rooms sprung up across the country. The atmosphere was filled with danger and suspicion, especially when the regime began clamping down on the clandestine screenings. VCRs were confiscated, and screening organizers were called in for questioning.

While the fearless stories of action heroes like Chuck Norris and Sylvester Stallone captured the imagination, it was the lavish settings and backdrops that mesmerized the audience. For the first time, Romanians saw what they had been denied: supermarkets full of food, the latest fashions, fast cars, and most of all, freedom. “These Hollywood action movies seeped through the cracks of a repressive regime, just as the Internet now offers a vision of a wider world to people living in closed societies,” says *Independent Lens* executive producer Lois Vossen. “*Chuck Norris vs.*



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Communism is a reminder of the extraordinary power that pop culture plays in creating common ground between diverse people and shattering the walls that separate us.”

Visit the *Chuck Norris vs. Communism* companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/>) which features information about the film.

About the Filmmakers

Ilinca Calugareanu (Director), a London-based Romanian filmmaker, studied documentary filmmaking at Manchester’s Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology. Her short films have been screened in festivals around the world. Calugareanu’s credits include *The Writing on the Wall* (2006, Romania) and *Endgames* (2008, UK). She has also worked as an editor on fiction and documentary shorts and features for the past five years. She has a background in anthropology with a focus on communist and post-communist Romania, which gives her a unique perspective on the story of the VHS phenomenon.

Mara Adina (Producer, Vernon Films) started her career as a production manager and then line producer at Kuwait National Television (KTV), while also producing with several Middle Eastern production companies during her stay there. On her return to London, she established Vernon Films, an independent production company. In 2014 she released *Counterpart*, the first English-language film directed by two-time BAFTA-winning director Adrian Sitaru.

Brett Ratner (Producer, RatPac Documentary Films): RatPac Documentary Films is a division of RatPac Entertainment, the film finance and production partnership of filmmaker Brett Ratner and Australian mogul James Packer. RatPac Documentary Films most recently premiered *Electric Boogaloo* to great acclaim at the Toronto Film Festival, as well as Roman Polanski’s *Weekend of a Champion*, and the award-winning *Night Will Fall* on HBO. Brett Ratner previously produced the controversial Sundance documentary *Catfish*; the acclaimed HBO documentaries *Helmut by June*, about the legendary photographer Helmut Newton, and *I Knew It Was You: Rediscovering John Cazale*; and, for PBS, the Emmy-nominated *American Masters: Woody Allen – A Documentary*.

CREDITS

Director	Ilinca Calugareanu
Producer	Mara Adina, Vernon Films
Producer	Brett Ratner, RatPac Documentary Films
Executive producers	John Battsek & Nicole Stott, Passion Pictures
Executive producers	Dan Cogan & Jenny Raskin, Impact Partners
Executive Producer	Hanka Kastelicová, HBO Europe
Co-producer	Abbas Nokhasteh





Editor
Cinematographer
Composer
Composer

Per K. Kirkegaard
Joze Ruiz
Anne Nikitin
Rob Manning

Chuck Norris vs. Communism is a Vernon Films Production produced in association with Passion Pictures, presented by RatPac Documentary films and Impact Partners and coproduced with Openvizor, HBO Europe and WDR in collaboration with ARTE.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](https://www.facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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