

Concert in 1936 (Koncert në Vitin 1936)

Albania | 1978 | 87 minutes

Credits

Director	Saimir Kumbaro
Screenplay	Kiço Blushi, Dhimitër Shuteriqi
Photography	Saim Kokona
Music	Limoz Dizdari

Cast

Donika Prokopi	Manushaqe Qenani
Eleni Jankollari	Margarita Xhepa
Deputy Prefect	Robert Ndrenika
Mayor of Lushnja	Gjon Karma
Gendarme Veseli	Bep Shiroka
Nesti Benja	Roland Trebicka
Lieutenant Shazivari	Mirush Kabashi

In Brief

Concert in 1936 (Koncert në vitin 1936) is set in the time of King Zog (ruled 1928-1939). Donika, a young singer, and her pianist, Eleni, embark on a tour - complete with piano - of provincial towns and villages. They are welcomed by the ordinary people but cause consternation among the local dignitaries, who are desperate to look cultured and Western but who are in fact engaged in a bitter power-struggle with each other.



Concert in 1936 has a stellar cast of actors who went on to become very well-known on Albanian stage and screen. Apart from Robert Ndrenika (b. 1942 and seen in several other films in this mini-season), Margarita Xhepa, who was born (in 1932) in Lushnja where the film is set, Roland Trebicka (1947-2013) and Mirush Kabashi (b. 1948) all starred in many films and plays and were awarded honours and prizes in Albania and abroad. The film's director, Saimir Kumbaro (b. 1945), also began his career as an actor, including in the 1972 comedy *The Captain* (Kapedani).

KING ZOG

One of the leaders who emerged from the chaotic period of the First World War and its aftermath was Ahmet Zogu, a clan chief from the Mati district in northern central Albania. He participated in the Congress of Lushnja in January

1920, which appointed a senate and a cabinet to restore political order, and a High Council of State to oversee them. Zogu was made Interior Minister in the new government. Over the next few years he went on to consolidate his power base, and in December 1924 – after a brief period out of power – he marched on Tirana and overthrew the Democratic Party government of Fan Noli. He quickly abolished the High Council of State, became president, and set about rewriting the constitution and eliminating his opponents.

By the mid 1920s, Italian influence over Albania was increasing. Italian companies were building roads and improving harbours, Italian colonists were settling in parts of the south and, in November 1927, a large Italian military mission was installed in the country, with Italian officers attached to Albanian military units. In 1928, Zogu crowned himself Zog I, King of the Albanians, and promulgated a new constitution which gave him practically unrestricted powers.

Meanwhile, Italian ‘advisors’ were installing themselves in the ministries, Italian architects were redesigning Tirana and Italian businessmen were taking over the country’s economy. By 1938, Italy accounted for 68.4% of Albania’s exports and 36.3% of its imports. Eventually, on 7 April 1939, Mussolini annexed Albania and Italian troops invaded and occupied it. The king sent his wife, Queen Geraldine, and two-day-old son, Leka, to safety across the Greek border, following them himself later in the day. Zog would never return to Albania; he died in Paris in 1961, from where his remains were repatriated in 2012, as part of the commemoration of Albanian independence. His widow and son both died in Tirana: Geraldine, who by then styled herself the Queen Mother, in October 2002; Leka, in 2011.

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Albanian Cinema

Face to Face (Ballë për Ballë)

Albania | 1979 | 106 minutes

Credits

Director	Kujtim Çashku, Piro Milkani
Screenplay	Ismail Kadare
Photography	Ilia Terpini
Music	Fehim Ibrahim

Cast

Mujo Bermema	Bujar Lako
Zheleznov	Sulejman Pitarka
Jelena Mihailovna	Katerina Biga
Belul Gjenomadhi	Kadri Roshi
Xhemal Struga	Thimi Filipi

In Brief

A novel by the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare, *The Great Winter*, served as the basis for the screenplay for *Face to Face (Ballë për Ballë)*. The events in the novel and the film take place in 1961, when Albania broke with the USSR. A point of conflict was the naval base at Pashalimani, on Albania's southern coast, which was home to eight Soviet submarines.

For the co-directors, the David and Goliath showdown over the submarines was a subversive way to deal with the emotional trauma of their country's split from the Eastern Bloc. *Face to Face* was released shortly after the country had also broken with communist China, a move that signalled Albania's virtual isolation from the rest of the world.

Face to Face won first prize in the 4th Albanian Film Festival (1981).

The 1979 Albanian feature *Ballë për Ballë (Face to Face)* is a pivotal work in the country's cinematic history. The film is a semi-fictional account of Albania's 1961 break with the Soviet Union, which culminated in a tense stand-off between the opposing armies at a submarine base in the southern port city of Vlora. An almost existential drama, *Face to Face* was markedly different from most of the propaganda films of the time. It was the most expensive feature film made in Albania up to then.

But during the laboratory process, the negative was inadvertently put through the wrong chemical bath. The result was a washed-out mish-mash of colour that bore little resemblance to the intention of Çashku and Milkani.

The Albanian Cinema Project's partners at Colorlab Corp. have begun researching and working on a solution to this delicate problem. If Colorlab can solve this preservation riddle, they and ACP will have found a digital and cost-effective solution to restoring over 600 affected reels of negative in the Albanian Film Archive.

Face to Face will be the third film to be restored in ACP's ongoing restoration project, following the success of *The Second November* and now *Tomka and his Friends*, which will be premiered in Tirana in November 2014.

You can support this restoration work through www.thealbaniancinemaproject.org



The Albanian writer who is best known outside the Albanian-speaking world is Ismail Kadare (the stress is on the last vowel of both his names), who was born in Gjirokastra in 1936. He studied literature at the University of Tirana and went on to study at the Gorky Institute in Moscow. He returned to Albania after the break with the Soviet Union in 1961, and worked as a journalist, as well as publishing a volume of poetry. His first novel, *The General of the Dead Army*, was written between 1962 and 1966, and brought him immediate renown. It was later made into a film, in which Marcello Mastroianni played the eponymous general, seeking the remains of Italian soldiers fallen during the fascist occupation of Albania.

Following the success of his first novel, Kadare became the editor of the Albanian literary review *Les Lettres Albanaises*, and went on to write over a dozen novels, as well as short stories and essays. Many of his works are heavily allegorical and it is difficult for non-Albanians to grasp the layers of meaning in them. Some of his