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### **WORLD PREMIERE MAY 7 AT NYC'S QUAD CINEMA FOR AVANT-GARDE FILM, "USED AND BORROWED TIME"**

**Non-conformist psychological thriller, written and directed by Sophia Romma, is an  
apocalyptic parable on racial hatred.**

**Film has earned 45 festival awards and 27 festival film selections to-date.**

NEW YORK (April 25, 2021) -- With live audience events finally able to return to New York art houses, "Used and Borrowed Time," written and directed by Sophia Romma, will have its red carpet world premiere May 7 at 7:00 PM at Quad Cinema, 34 West 13th Street in Greenwich Village. The film is a psychological drama phantasma in which an interracial couple's idyllic love rises above the hatred of a vengeful white supremacist family in segregationist Alabama during the 1960s. It has been translated from its original English into Greek, Spanish and Italian and is available currently on Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Roku and the Vyre Network.

A full-length feature with an American cast of twelve, it is co-produced by Garden of the Avant-Garde Film and Theatrical Foundation (USA) and Reval Film Studio (Estonia). Its story is a surreal tale of a blind, elderly, Jewish New York actress who relives her past through brutal people she "stumbles upon" at a mystical present day Alabama autumn fair. She time-trips, recalling her ill-fated love affair with a Black civil rights activist in Birmingham during the civil rights upheaval of the Sixties. Principal photography was done in Long Island during the winter of 2019-2020 and post-production was completed in late 2020 in Estonia.

During the Covid shutdown, the film has amassed 45 festival awards and 27 festival film selections. A complete list of awards is available on the film's website ([www.usedandborrowedtime.com/festivals.html](http://www.usedandborrowedtime.com/festivals.html)). Most recently, the film was awarded Best Director (Sophia Romma) in the Free Speech Category of the Annual Tagore International Film Festival's Sun of the East Awards.

Ms. Romma is a playwright, poet and director of theater and films who emigrated with her mother from the former Soviet Union in the eighties. She has been a resident playwright of The Mayakovsky Academic Art Theatre of Moscow, where the name Quantum Verse was coined to describe her poetic literary style. The term derives from the question "How real is the universe?" and the notion that it may contain parallel dialogues, a simple one and a metaphysical one. Her other film credits include the screenplay of "Poor Liza," starring Ben Gazzara and Lee Grant, which was directed by Slava Tsukerman ("Liquid Sky"). Her theatrical plays are all written in a genre which she has labeled Drama Phantasma in Verse. They have been produced in New York by noted nonprofits including La MaMa Experimental Theatre and The Negro Ensemble Company, Inc.

"Used and Borrowed Time" is inspired by a tale that Romma and her grandmother heard from a chef on an Amtrak train about a tender ill-fated love between his cousin, a young, African American civil rights activist, and an innocent blind Jewish girl from Birmingham, Alabama in the mid-sixties. The film renders this story with many of the hallmarks of Romma's stage work: surrealism, outbursts of verse, a historical sense that "the past is still ahead," prophetic Romani fortune-tellers, and references to Holocaust trauma and the émigré experience.

On All-Saints Day in contemporary Birmingham, an elderly blind woman, Eva Gold arrives with her granddaughter, Sonia, at an autumn fair in Birmingham. There is an unusually bitter Alabama frost and spooky doings are underfoot. Large cats and rabbits with glowing eyes appear in the background. A gypsy mystic offers prophecies of past and future. A burly fascist peddles fake art, an ancient turtle, toads and salamanders. A sharp-tongued southern bigot sells magical pies in a carnival tent. The granddaughter, distracted by the fortune-tellers, leaves her grandmother to wander through the fair on her own. As the various vendors confront the old woman, there is an undercurrent of anti-semitic, venomous dialogue which prepares the audience for unpleasantness to come. Eva brushes off the reptile salesman when he identifies her as Jewish by her necklace and he makes uncomfortable references to Kristallnacht. She arrives at the pie tent and tastes one, but has no money to pay for it. It turns out that a lady vendor, Kitty O'Neil, has spiked her pies with magic that will allow people to uncover their past lives. Paying customers learn nice things about themselves, but Eva is in for a bad trip.

While strong and resilient, Eva is also abnormally perspicacious, so subtle emotional signs are thunderingly strong to her. Stemming from the "dog whistle" slurs she hears at the autumn fair, she is transported to her earlier life where she was, in fact, the innocent blind Jewish girl in the chef's story. Eva re-witnesses the tragic death of her African American soul mate at the hands of a clan of heartless white supremacists. It's not exactly a trip to the past, since in a Sophia Romma story, "the past is still ahead." Romma first explored this paradoxical theme in a 2007 play of that name about Marina Tsvetaeva, Soviet Russia's most famous exiled poet. (It premiered at Mayakovsky Academic Art Theater, Moscow and Cherry Lane Theatre, NYC, and subsequently was presented at Oxford University UK, JCC Manhattan, Millennium Theater Brooklyn, Montauk Public Library, Long Island and in Seoul, South Korea). As Eva remembers the 1960's, her mind's eye is that of a blind woman and all the events she sees are transpiring both yesterday and tomorrow. Hallucinatory recollections are spurred by the subtext she hears in the speech of contemporary people. This causes her to recall horrifying actions of a white supremacist clan who held her captive in her youth. As she narrates her past, her emotive images are flagged by use of rhyming verse that is imbued with immense pathos and lamenting.

Most of the film is this hallucination, in which Eva projects herself back into her youth on Christmas Eve of 1964. She watches as Young Eva and her fiancée, a handsome Black man named Steadroy Johnson, wander onto the property of the Woods family, a redneck clan ruled by its matriarch, Blanche. Blanche's ironclad power over her brother, Wade, and her son, Jed, is as strong as her mendacity and pious religious hypocrisy. Their Christmas table is laid for a homecoming visit from Blanche's cowardly but well-married daughter, Lorna. The family has a penchant for sexual abuse, lynchings and sadistic hunting games. Suffice it to say that nothing will go well when young Eva and Steadroy fall into their hands. They are captured; Eva will survive; Steadroy won't.

Near the end of the film, Eva admits, "The greatest atrocity is complicity. I was their captive. I did what I needed to survive." With that, we are rocketed to the realization that this is not only a racial story, it is also partly a tale of the atrocities of genocide. Romma is showing us how modern American racial violence reopens the scars of survivor guilt in second and third-generation Holocaust survivors.

Romma wrote the screenplay with ample use of expressionistic staccato verse and with a semi-linear structure and cites the influence of Jean-Luc Goddard, François Truffaut, and Agnes Varda (of the infamous Nouvelle Vague), who "have shaped my cinematic oeuvre at New York's Film Forum where I had spent my days and nights, lingering in a cinematic studies trance." The idea of the film is that the Woods family is as possessed with violence as the town in "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson, a story of scapegoating and the horrors of sticking to a brutal tradition. The evil Romma describes in this film aligns with her general motif that people can abandon reason to act cruelly if others in their family act the same way, and will blindly follow traditions without thinking of the consequences. The malice unleashed by the White Supremacist family is inflicted on whoever is regarded as "different," including refugees, Jews, Blacks and asylum seekers.

Romma is also a Human Rights Attorney, and her feelings are informed and sharpened by her three-year service on the New York City Bar Association's International Human Rights Committee, where she chairs the task forces on Racial Justice, Criminal Justice and Police Brutality as well as the Right to Health.

The unusually bitter Alabama frost was captured by filming on location in Long Island between November 2019 and January 2020. Post-production was done by co-producer Reval Film Studio in Estonia. Musical background and original songs for the Birmingham Autumn Fair were composed and performed by Queen Ilise and her four-piece band.

"Used and Borrowed Time" is a production of Garden of the Avant-Garde Film and Theatrical Foundation (<https://gardenoftheavantgarde.com>) in association with Reval Film Studio (Estonia) <https://revalfilm.info/en/filming-in-estonia/>. Executive Producer is Renee Lekach. Cinematographer is Uladzimir Taukachou (A.S.C.). Film Editor is Sergio Voronin. Visual Effects are by Serjio Samokhvalov. Music is by Kevin Macleod. Sound director is Alex Voronin. The actors (alphabetically) are Alice Kelly Bahlke in the dual roles of Lorna Woods and Kitty O'Neill, Marshall Bonny as Weldon Johnson, father of Steadroy Johnson; Clas Duncan as Steadroy Johnson, Manana Gitana as the Romani Sorceress, Seth Hendricksen as Fred Busch, Ox King as Chad McCord, Cam Kornman as Older Eva Gold, Grant Morenz as Wade Woods, Maureen O'Connor as Blanche Woods, Gavin Rohrer as Jed Woods and Emily Seibert as Younger Eva Gold.

TECH SPECS  
Color

Runtime 3:36

Stereo

Aspect 2:35.1

Camera - Sony A7RIII, 4K24p, All rest - digital.

**STILLS ARE AVAILABLE AT:** <https://photos.app.goo.gl/DQ8VGTLoX4tdJtgK7>

**FILM'S WEBSITE:** [www.usedandborrowedtime.com](http://www.usedandborrowedtime.com)

## **ABOUT SOPHIA ROMMA**

**Sophia Romma** and her mother came to the USA as refugees from the former Soviet Union when Romma was a child. Her mother is from Ukraine and her father was born in Bucharest, Romania. Her birth name, Murashkovsky, is Polish but she officially changed it "because nobody could pronounce it" and as an homage to her father's mother, who was of Romani ancestry. She is a resident playwright of The Mayakovsky Academic Art Theatre of Moscow, where the name Quantum Verse was coined to describe her literary style. The name derives from the question "How real is the universe?" and the notion that it may contain parallel dialogues, a simple one and a metaphysical one.

She received her BFA and MFA at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and her Ph.D. from the prestigious Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow. Her last major production, "Cabaret Émigré" (2012) interpreted the soul of the émigré with Quantum Verse. Her "With Aaron's Arms Around Me and The Mire" (2010), two one-acts on the theme of intolerance, were presented by the Negro Ensemble Company at the Cherry Lane and played to appreciative critics and audiences. The New York Times (Andy Webster) wrote, "Each takes a refreshing, almost sideways approach to the subject of ethnic tension." The review had particular praise for "The Mire," where a humorless lieutenant having served in Iraq, is skillfully undone by a young filmmaker named Svetlana, "who speaks in effervescent wordplay artfully derived from Chekhov, and [the Lieutenant] is ensnared in her enchantments. So is the audience."

Romma had three productions directed by Leslie Lee at La MaMa: "Love, in the Eyes of Hope, Dies Last," "Coyote, Take Me There!" and "Defenses of Prague." Her other plays include "Shoot them in the Cornfields," "The Past is Still Ahead" (about exiled Soviet poet Marina Tsvetaeva), "Absolute Clarity," "Carte Blanche," "The Blacklist," "By Virtue of Soul Arbitration," and most recently an Airplay Virtual Presentation of "The Virus Corazón."

She is author of the film "Poor Liza," directed by Slava Tsukerman ("Liquid Sky") starring Academy Award nominee, Ben Gazzara, Academy Award Winner Lee Grant, and Barbora Bobulova. It won the Grand Prix Garnet Bracelet for best screenplay at the Gatchena Literature and Film Festival in St. Petersburg in 2001. In 2005, her anthology of poetry, "God and My Good," was published by the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute. In 2006, her anthology, "Garden of the Avant-Garde," was published by Noble House, UK. (Poetry website: <https://gardenoftheavantgarde.com/sophia-romma-portfolio/>)

She wrote and directed three films for New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Dramatic Writing Program: "So Happy Together," "Pornography! Pornography! Pornography!" and "Commercial America in the 90's." She wrote the screenplay for the documentary "Call Girls for Hire: The Sex Slave Trade Epidemic in Eastern Europe," for which she was honored with Moscow's Social Awareness Documentary Film Award at the Moscow Women Make Documentaries Film Festival. Romma also wrote and directed a pair of cutting-edge short films for the New York Film Academy: "Underneath Her Make-Up" (unveiling the stigmatized and hounded LGBTQ community in India) and "The Frozen Zone" (shedding light on supernatural healing powers of ancient shamanism and its infinite wisdom).

She is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America and a member of the League of Professional Women in Theater (where she served as the Co-Chair of the International Committee and Co-Producer of the Oral History Project at the Lincoln Center Library). She was President and Vice-President of the International Centre for Women Playwrights and serves on the Board of the Women in the Arts and Media Coalition. Romma has served on the Board of Directors of the New York University Alumni Association, is a committee member of NYUAA's Alumni Day, Volunteer Outreach and is President of New York University's Alumni Club of Long Island. She has been Literary Manager of the Negro Ensemble Company. She is also a member of Pen America, SAG/AFTRA and The Players. Romma is a proud member of the New York City Bar Association, the New York State Bar Association and the American Bar Association. She currently serves as Producing Artistic Director of Garden of the Avant-Garde Film and Theatrical Foundation, which is geared towards aiding women playwrights in obtaining theater productions of their plays and women screenwriters in attaining motion picture productions of their screenplays. ([www.gardenoftheavantgarde.com](http://www.gardenoftheavantgarde.com))

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