

PRESS BOOK

Lesson Learned

Original title: Fekete pont
International title: Lesson Learned

Hungary, 119', 2024

Rating: 12 (Hungary)

Directed by Bálint Szimler
Screenplay by Bálint Szimler
Photography by Marcell Rév HCA, ASC
Editing by Zsófia Ördög
Music by Dorka Lajhó, Péter Sabák

Producer: Gábor Osváth, Zoltán Mártonffy
Executive producer: Gábor Kovács, Ági Pataki, Ilona Antal, Ildikó Kemény, Eleonóra Peták,
Péter Juhász, Dániel Blik, László Dreissiger
Co-producer: Júlia Berkes, Viktória Petrányi, Patrícia D'Intino, Ferenc Pusztai, Gábor Ferenczy
Associate producer: Miklós Kázmér, Ádám Felszeghy, Inez Mátis, Hermina Fátyol

Cast:

Anna Mészöly, Paul Mátis, Ákos 'Dadan' Kovács, Attila Papp, Józsi Balázs, Mihály Deák-Molnár,
Inez Mátis, Gábor Ferenczi, Ildikó Lökös, Eszter Márton, László Iván Nádas, Erika Marozsán

Synopsis

At a time of crisis in the Hungarian school system, two newcomers, Juci (33) and Palkó (10), arrive at a struggling school. Juci is unexpectedly made head teacher of a fifth-grade class due to a teacher shortage. Meanwhile, Palkó, recently relocated from Berlin, struggles to adapt to the demanding educational system. As Juci attempts to challenge the outdated methods and Palkó tries to fit in, a childish prank lands him in trouble, making life at school miserable for both of them. Their personal stories offer insight into an oppressive system, reflecting broader Hungarian society.

Short synopsis (under 300 characters):

Young teacher Juci attempts to challenge the outdated methods in her school, while new student Palkó, recently relocated from abroad, struggles to adapt to the demanding educational system. Their personal stories offer insight into an oppressive system, reflecting the broader Hungarian society.

Short synopsis (under 500 characters):

New teacher Juci (33) is unexpectedly made head teacher of a 5th-grade class due to teacher shortage. Meanwhile, Palkó (10), recently relocated from Berlin, struggles to adapt to the demanding educational system. As Juci attempts to challenge the outdated methods, Palkó tries to fit in, a childish prank lands him in trouble, making life at school miserable for both of them. Their personal stories offer insight into an oppressive system, reflecting broader Hungarian society.

Festival selections and awards:

77th Locarno Film Festival - 2024 / Switzerland - *Special Mention + Best Performance Award*

62nd Viennale Film Festival - 2024 / Austria

17th CinEast Central and Eastern European Film Festival - 2024 / Luxembourg - *Special Mention*

30th Belgrade Auteur's Film Festival - 2024 / Serbia

35th Ljubljana International Film Festival - 2024 / Slovenia - *Kingfisher Award for the Best Film*

55th Goa International Film Festival of India - 2024 / India - Asian premiere

69th Cork International Film Festival - 2024 / Ireland

36th Trieste Film Festival - 2025 / Italy

Director's statement

As a child returning to Hungary from America, I vividly felt the contrast between the two educational systems. Ever since, I became deeply interested in how education shapes society. Today, the Hungarian education system faces a dire crisis: teachers' salaries are dropping towards the minimum wage, leading to a severe shortage of educators. Furthermore, new government legislation prohibits teachers from striking, and those who voice their concern face termination. The educational framework lags decades behind European standards, stifling creativity and rewarding silence.

In these challenging times, the impact of learned behavior on society is crystal clear. Oppression breeds fear and inertia; if we're conditioned to remain silent, self-censorship becomes second nature, snuffing out the possibility of change. Since this phenomenon extends beyond education, and permeates other aspects of public life, I felt compelled to shine a light on the issue, confronting individuals with the psychology of self-censorship.

To convey this message, I chose to tell the story through two characters, both outsiders navigating a strange new world, offering viewers a fresh perspective on everyday life. Juci, an aspiring teacher, and Palkó, who recently moved back home from Germany with his family, have their stories intertwine when Palkó gets into trouble for a childish prank and Juci is the only one who attempts to help. The complications they encounter while simply trying to do the right thing provide insight into the mentality of this new environment, as well as the prevailing mindset of those around them, reflecting broader Hungarian society.

Embracing a hyper realistic approach was essential to authentically capture our characters' reality. Viewers are invited to observe the characters up close, akin to subjects in a nature documentary, experiencing their journey in a profoundly human manner. I employed a unique improvisational method with the characters to evoke genuine and realistic reactions.

Because of our chosen topic, we were well aware that politically-aligned state funding would reject our project. However, with the help of eight local production companies and a devoted crew, we were able to realize the project as a micro-budget feature. I crafted a script tailored for a one-location film and got to work with frequent collaborators, first and foremost cinematographer Marcell Rév, with whom I have collaborated on most of my projects since film school.

Director's biography:

Born in 1987 in Hungary, Bálint Szimler grew up in New York. He moved back to Budapest at 9 years old. At 19 Szimler got accepted to the University of Theatre and Film Arts, the country's leading film school. His head teacher was Ildikó Enyedi.

His 3rd year project 'Itt vagyok' (Here I Am), a 37-minute short film won the Hungarian Film Week and was selected into Cannes Cinefondation, and later got nominated for the European Short Film Award by the European Film Academy.

Since then, Szimler created the online music series 'Kodály Method', which in 2015 continued into 'Balaton Method', a feature music documentary with hundreds of musicians participating. He directed many commercials and music videos throughout the years.

2024's 'Fekete pont' (Lesson Learned), his feature fiction debut – premiered in Locarno Film Festival and won a special mention and Best Performance Award for actress Anna Mészöly. Bálint has been also awarded the Boccacino d'Oro for 'Best Director'. The film also won the main prize, the Kingfisher Award at the 35th Ljubljana International Film Festival and the Special Mention at the CinEast Film Festival in Luxembourg.

Bálint is currently developing his new feature film.

Director's filmography:

2010: Itt vagyok (Here I Am) - short film (Cannes Cinéfondation)

2015: Balaton Method - documentary feature

2024: Fekete pont - feature fiction « first film »

Social media links:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fekete.pont.mozifilm>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/fekete_pont_film/

Imdb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt30807200>

Letterboxd: <https://letterboxd.com/film/lesson-learned-2024/>

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