

Introduction: Hi, it's Brian, and this is the Stream Close Up Podcast. We're back, and we're doing something a little special. Over the next several weeks, we'll be focusing on the 59th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.

It's one of the oldest in the world, and the most prestigious in Central and Eastern Europe. Every year, this remarkable festival presents almost 200 films, hosting some of cinema's most celebrated and important filmmakers. This year, things kicked off with Michael Douglas, who presented a restored version of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which he of course produced, and this was to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the film's original release.

In this upcoming arc of episodes, we'll be talking with the filmmakers who are competing in the festival's main competition, The Crystal Globe. It's an intriguing mix of storytellers working across a wide range of styles and genres. We're also reaching out to people working behind the scenes at the festival and hope to get the chance to speak with curators and maybe even some judges before we're done.

The Crystal Globe competition is reserved for feature-length films shot during the previous season that have not been shown in international competition at any other festival. This year's Crystal Globe competition featured a dozen films, including ten world premieres. And that's a testament to the festival's commitment to showcasing fresh undiscovered talent.

These films represent diverse voices that define contemporary world cinema. It is truly my great pleasure to be able to speak with these creators and I am particularly humbled to be among the first to see some of these amazing works. Today, kicking off our look at the 59th Carlo Vary International Film Festival, we welcome Dmytro Hreshko.

Oh man, I've been waiting to say this again. Hit it, Jose!

Our guest today is Dmytro Hreshko.

He's an accomplished documentary filmmaker, building a healthy catalog of work that I have very much enjoyed exploring. Dmytro is currently serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces and we were lucky that he was kind enough to spare some of his limited free time to talk with us. The importance of his mission is a through line for the entire discussion.

When we met, he was just about to premiere his latest project, *Divia*, at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. It's a beautiful and powerful film chronicling the impact that the war is having on nature in Ukraine. Dmytro will share some of the keys to his approach to documentary filmmaking with a heavy emphasis on keeping calm and trying to be invisible.

We'll get into *Divia*, touch on some of Dmytro's earlier work, and get a sense of what a filmmaker does when he gets drafted by the military. Spoiler, they actually utilize his skills. We'll also get into how creators can help Ukraine in cooperation with the Ukrainian cultural forces.

In for his Stream Close Up, Dmytro Hreshko.

Brian: First, is it Dmytry Hreshko?

Dmytro: Dmytro.

Brian: Dmytro Hreshko.

Dmytro: Dmytro Hreshko.

Brian: Okay. Dmytro Hreshko.

I'm going to mess it up. I'm going to slide off over time. Please draw me back in when I start doing that.

Just so you know, it's not my...

Dmytro: And you, how can I say?

Brian: It's Brian.

Dmytro: And where is you in New York?

Brian: I'm from New York originally, but I'm in Sweden, so based in Stockholm.

Dmytro: Oh, cool. Nice city.

Brian: It's nice. Have you been here?

Dmytro: Yeah, yeah. I have been for pitching for Stockholm Film Festival, I guess, two years ago.

Brian: For this film, for Divia or for something else?

Dmytro: Yeah, yeah, for Divia.

Brian: Ah, nice, nice. Oh, very cool then. So you have a little connection to Sweden.

Dmytro: Yeah, it was an interesting experience.

Yeah.

I visited some modern museum and this one with a big ship.

Brian: Yeah, the Vasa with this museum to failure, this big museum they have to a ship that sank as soon as they put it in the water. It's a very weird thing to me. I mean, I understand preserving it, but I don't understand sort of this monument to it, to failure.

It's a little lost, I don't know. I don't know if you reflected on that when you saw it. I'd like to first thank you very much for taking the time to do this.

You say you're doing your service right now. You have a couple hours every evening. So when you can do this, I definitely really appreciate that.

Can we start by asking a little bit, what does it mean to be in the service in Ukraine right now?

Dmytro: It's really different. It depends on which structure you are in, in which brigade you are in, depending on the work you are doing. So it depends.

Like from hard one, like going to frontline and keep fighting with Russians is the hardest. And something could be in Kiev like me and working in cultural forces and working with culture and supporting the psychology of soldiers and doing this old stuff. And it's more and more easier.

And you see, I live at home and back to home all day. So for me, it's really, really soft entering to the service at all.

Brian: But I guess it takes everyone to make it work. So is the service then using some of your skills as a filmmaker? Are they...

So, okay. How does that work?

Dmytro: It's a fortune, I guess, for me, because this organization, Cultural Forces, looking for some director to make film, it's mostly done. It's called In Thanks We Trust, about some tour of Ukrainian veterans, musicians, to USA, and to say thanks. And to say, going through a lot of cities and states, and going to different places, Congress, churches, Ukrainians who live here in USA, regular Americans, so trying to say thanks to different societies.

Brian: So have you been on tour shooting all of this or?

Dmytro: No, no, I just already, I, so I joined in post-production stage and joined in editing stage. So yeah, it's also interesting experience because like my last filmmaking years, I doing my ideas and focusing totally in like my, how to do ideas live. And this is like outer documentary and it was really interesting.

But for now, I doing some filmings like for client, like for now client is like organization. And it's also it's challenging. And it's also I go continue to learning something new for me, like doing some not realizing my ideas, but realizing some ideas, what important for like some big organization idea.

Brian: It's interesting on so many levels. First, that at least the sort of army is taking advantage of your skills, that they're not just throwing you into something general. That's really nice to see.

And then that you're sort of, okay, from having a world where I'm telling my stories to, wait a minute, this is someone else's message. And it's very important that we get this message right. That must be an interesting sort of change of your world

Dmytro: Yeah, it's interesting. Like, it's how for also, I like philosophy and understanding the world and different societies. And like, this word serving, it's directly means these words, like you serving for something, and you put your own strengths or your experience to doing some, not your stuff, but important stuff for something.

Brian: And the service of something greater. I want to say thank you on behalf of all of us further west who are not doing the heavy lifting. I mean, I know you described your service as a little bit easier than other people's, but still full respect, you know, that you're going through this.

Dmytro: Yeah, and it's all possible because some people keep fighting and doing this all hard work. And yeah, it's really challenging for now. So I'm also thankful for these people, because without them, my work also is not important.

You know, like my side, I would say, let me translate it.

Brian: I love the modern world. Dmytro is now translating as we speak.

Dmytro: Yeah, like a real work.

Brian: So I reached out to you because I'm doing this sort of focus on the Karlova Vary Film Festival, and I came across your film. And I want to say first, Divia, what does it mean, Divia? Does it have a special meaning at all?

Dmytro: Yeah, yeah. When I'm researching the idea and developing a project, I'm trying to find some naming, and I'm researching something like Minerva in the mythology of Roman mythology. And I'm trying to find some analog in ancient Slavic goddesses, and I find this Divia, they have also different variation.

And as we have known in Slavic mythology, we have noted something like in Roman mythology. We have a lot of interpretation, but Divia is really connected to Minerva, something about like mother of all living things, like mother of moon, of sun, something like that. And I realized like, yes, it's like directly what I meaning like when I shooting all this territory, it's meaning like something alive, something conceptual.

Brian: Mother Earth, the concept we have in the West. So first I want to ask, I came across the film because it's part of the festival. Are you surprised

I've seen, I've had the chance now to talk to a bunch of directors and see a handful of the films that are in the same category as yours. Yours is the first documentary that I've looked at. Are you surprised that you're in the mix of these films or do you think about that at all?

Dmytro: It's only, I have no time to research as a competition, but it's only one documentary.

Brian: Well, yours is the first so far that I've come across. Everything else has been scripted so far. And I don't, I mean, I want to get into your film in a lot of detail and it feels odd to call it beautiful given the subject matter, but it really is.

I want to ask you about sort of technique and how this came together. There's all this beautiful footage that you have and I imagine you have hours and hours of beautiful footage. When you start, do you have this concept in mind, or are you just shooting beautiful nature with an idea to start building up an archive, or how does it come together?

What's your flow and how does it work?

Dmytro: Yeah, it's, it's, it's not, this idea not come like full in its start. Like for me, it's usual process of documentary. You starting to digging some idea, and we started develop it.

I started in 22, I started in autumn 22 when Ukrainians forces, they occupied territory of East, a lot of territory, and Kherson, Mikulayev district, Kharkiv district, some Donetsk district. So it's opened a lot of territory with a damaged nature and it was perfect time to starting to digging and I just going here with Dminers and they show me some places. It was safe, a few steps for me and because before the war, I'd never been in east of Ukraine and I'd never been in some war areas.

Strange because we have like this war with Russia from 14. And but I never interested in this subject, like war action, et cetera. And it was my first steps to go in this area, in dangerous area.

And like you have to, so with De-miners, it was like more safely because they said me like, this is safe, this is not, doing this.

Brian: I just want to say de-miners by definition, it's not safe because whatever they're working with, it's not safe wherever they are. Just so we have real context, you're talking about it like it's casual. And you say it like, okay, I'm hooked up with these de-miners.

How do you get connected with them, you're able to travel with them and sort of start to document their story?

It's some bureaucracy like you sending some requests to the head of de-miners?

So you have it in mind specifically, that I want to go out and see these guys who are actually cleaning up the fields. You have that? Okay.

Dmytro: Yeah. And they show me some burned forest with a lot of shells on ground, unexploded and it's blow my mind. Not literally, but it was really like first.

It's my first connecting to the war and how they looks like.

Brian: I would say it also blew my mind. The shots you have of sort of all the armaments that they've plucked up, the remains of the missiles, the remains of the bombs and just the piles and piles of those. That was mind-numbing to me and also, again, oddly beautiful the way you had those shots against the geometry of the damage that had been done to the forest.

It's really sort of incredible work. I was quite touched by it all. I want to get back to sort of how it comes together.

Can you talk about drones? How important are drones in the way you work? I mean, have they been part of all your work or is it something new that you've introduced or?

Dmytro: Yeah, so if we back to talking about structure. So I started researching what material we have. Like we have some damaged nature.

We have some characters who are trying to recover nature, like de-miners, volunteers who are trying to save animals, ecologists who are trying to measure all this stuff. And it's going to structure. And I imagine it can be like we show this area and we show these abstract characters who are trying to clean this all stuff, like clean this shit, but they can't, you know?

Like I try to show like big scale and how these small characters trying, but it's not enough to clean up all this stuff.

Brian: You feel sort of the how the poison is spread and how sort of, you know, you have a guy taking a sample in a little bag, and I think that sort of shows you sort of the challenge of it all.

Dmytro: Yeah, and you know, like it's in real, it's need like 300 years to clean up all the stuff with the same efforts what we have for now, but war action going more and more, so we get every day we get we get more like polluted areas with mine and all the stuff. So the idea become like some structure, like we have some de-mined area, and after nature trying heal by herself, and these characters trying to clean up. But during this developing of script, I find like a lot of foreigners maybe don't know Ukrainian stature, you know, like even like Ukrainians, for me it was really unexpected to see a lot of beauty in east of Ukraine.

I tried like all it. I guess a lot of people thinking like, okay, east of Ukraine, a lot of manufacturers, war is going, all is gray and the mines everywhere. But when I come to this area, I find a lot of beautiful natures, landscapes, hills, rivers, forests.

And I realized like I have to show this beauty at start. But the idea is going bigger because I decided with producer Polina German, she is from Crimea and she also asking like we have to show all territory of Ukraine, like potentially territory which can be ruined by war. So we show like all territory of Ukraine, like beauty of nature, like Crimea, Ukraine, occupied already resorts.

Brian: The coast, the forest, all of the mountains. Yeah, it's breathtakingly beautiful. And it's also amazing to sort of see the regeneration in that part of the story.

But it's also heartbreaking. I mean, you have, you have a sort of a vignette where you show a village that has just been, you know, bombed and every home has just been targeted and been taken out. And yes, nature has started to come back, but the people haven't started to come back yet.

So there's so much going on in so many different levels here. When you're shooting it, when you're curating it, when you're sort of editing it, do you have a visual palette in mind? Are you thinking of artists?

Because I mean, I'm thinking of, you know, I'm seeing stills all the time in the shots, particularly the drone shots. Do you have like a starting point or is it just organic how that sort of unfolds?

Dmytro: I'm thinking more about editing, like it's like my third documentary and having my experience, I at first, when I started shooting, I'm thinking about editing and I'm trying to make different movement of drones. Like I know I need like top shots, I need like some following movement, I need some static. So I'm trying to keep from some area what I'm interested in.

It's more different angle of view.

Brian: I think there's some very interesting shots. There's one where the geese are landing. It looks like you're trying to come in with them, like on to the water early on.

There's a lot of beautiful shots in the whole thing. I want to ask you, say this is your third documentary. I had a chance to look at like a piece of one of your earlier works about these guys who are doing the snow leopards of the Carpathianians. I just saw like, I think there's like a nine-minute short where they're looking for people who have been trapped in the snow, and it's heartbreaking and heart-pounding. I know you've done something also called Save Me Doctor where you follow ambulance crews. It seems similar to me, like how do you get the trust of these teams to be able to go with them and not be a weight?

My first thought would be, no, we don't need you, you're just going to slow us down. You know, if I'm part of one of those, how do you earn that trust to be part of that?

Dmytro: Yeah, it's, I really, I don't know, like it's organically, like I just following my interest on subject and I try to be more, really not pushing some, like if something is saying me like, don't

go with me, I'm not going. And if something is saying like, not shoot, I'm not shooting and I all time. So for example, if it goes to some area and where I interesting to shoot, at first I go in without camera and think like, I am a director and I filming some idea.

I need shooting this situation and are you okay with it? It's not work all time. For example, with ambulance.

Brian: You can't know where you're headed every time.

Dmytro: Yeah, in ambulance, a lot of times they say no. And I was really upset because I need material to work with. And at the end, I just starting to say like, I filming something, but it's my work.

Like, this guy, say thank you. I am doing my job, so keep calm. All will be okay.

And in this perspective, maybe in Ukraine, it's working. I don't know in maybe in other countries how it's works, but so people just keep calm, like, okay, he just doing their job and nothing special happening.

Brian: When you get into these situations, when you're with these teams, I mean, I can't imagine that they're like waiting for you to reset a shot or, you know, hey, can you just do that again ever? Are you alone? Do you have a team with you?

Are there sound people? Is it just you with the camera? I mean, how minimal is it?

Dmytro: Yeah, it's totally minimal. Like, it's shooting by myself. So it's like one crew, cameraman.

And I guess it's also this aspect. I am just myself with camera. And all the time I'm trying to be invisible.

I am not a person who is talking a lot, like all the time. Mostly I am silent and observing. And just trying to be invisible, I guess, is the main key.

Brian: And so how does that differ from Divia now? This is sort of a not camera in hand. It's drones.

It's a sort of a different approach. How does that, how does it change how you work?

Dmytro: Yeah, the same like mostly I just say, like I doing my job, like I am documenting something. It's important. And keep calm.

But some person, for example, in the Institute of Ukraine, people is really traumatized by all this war action. And they afraid like when I shooting something, publish it and Russian see it. And after come bombing some object, it's pretty irrational something.

It's not working like this, but they know a lot of like military and locals, they know a lot of episode where some... Maybe it's just like statistic. Some media comes to object, shooting something and next day, some shelling come to this area.

But I guess it's mostly random things. It's not connected to this.

Brian: I don't want to speculate on the possibility of the absolute cruelty of that kind of targeting, which could be part of it. And I mean, I understand if you've been targeted, you can be afraid, you know. That's fine.

You've earned that fear. That's okay.

Dmytro: And some locals say to me like, don't run drone here. Like we are afraid. And I just like landing drone and going away.

It's like a danger area. I don't want to argue with any person exactly with military because we also have some dangerous situation where we come to an area with this was in Cahouka and we go to the directly to the front line by car. And I realized like it was not so safe.

And we have some problems with military. Like it was not allowed to go civilians to this area.

Brian: You had problems with military. I mean, they had problems with you. What the hell are you doing here?

So I want to ask. I mean, it's it's brutal and beautiful, Divia. It really is. And it's sort of it's thought provoking. And I really beyond my expectations, I saw a synopsis. I said, I should check this out.

And I was like, oh, my, this is this is sort of overwhelming. There's a lot of drama in it. You know, there's you have, you know, it's not about it's not a it's not a war movie, but the war is there.

You have sort of even the the radio calls of guys during an attack. And then you have this music, you know, and I mean, I thought Trent Reznor and Nine Inch Nails, but I see it's this guy, Sam Salter, who's worked on The Joker and Chernobyl. How did you get hooked up with him?

Dmytro: It was also some way to come to Sam Slater. And I really led to producers agreed like this cooperation.

Brian: So he's someone you had in mind that you wanted to work with or?

Dmytro: I have in mind a few of composers and we're starting to knock knocking to all of them. And after some agent offer us like Sam Slater, you know, like say agent know a lot of artists and she got the idea what they're looking for. And think like, hey, we have Sam Slater, can you check it?

And when I listen to the last album of Sam Slater, it's close something about vandals. I don't know if it's...

Brian: Get it right. Look it up.

Dmytro: Yes. It's really... So I was shocked at like how directly...

Okay, so I was shocked how music of Sam really about Divia. And we started communicating, and I described also idea of Divia, and I wanna something music, but sounds not like music, you know?

Brian: It's industrial, it's dark, it's atmospheric. It is musical too, but there's something else going on.

Dmytro: Yeah. Yeah.

Brian: And it's really overwhelming, and then it's not there all the time, so it's okay. I mean, it really has an important part in all of it for me, you know? I'm on the edge of my seat, and it's like, I don't know how to describe this.

It's a nature documentary, yes, but there's a war dimension, and I'm waiting for a deer to step on a mine at any moment. I mean, I'm like, it's crazy, beautiful and scary through the whole thing. I just want to again commend you.

I was totally impressed by this. I don't know why you choose to be a documentary filmmaker, but thank you for doing this. I'm going to try to dig up those other two.

I want to see Call Me Doctor or Save Me Doctor. That looks like it will be interesting. You're going to be able to go to Czech Republic now and be part of the festival or no?

Dmytro: Yeah, I always agreed with the commander of my vocation and already got some paper for it, so just packing my baggage.

Brian: So what do you expect now when you get to Karlovy Vary? Are you going to hang out with other directors, other filmmakers? Are you going to watch films?

Are you going to drink? What's the plan?

Dmytro: It's hard to say. Maybe before the mobilization, it was another interest, but for now, I'm thinking more about my role in organization, and I also understanding we need to involve some artists' talents to Ukraine, to shoot in other documentaries. And I guess my main idea is to find some cooperation with our organization Cultural Forces.

Brian: Full respect. What can we do to support you guys? Anything that comes top of mind?

I mean, what do people need at the front lines? What can we send? What's the best sort of support group?

Do you have anything top of mind that you could share?

Dmytro: Yeah, yeah, we have, like, the main... So we have... we do a lot of stuff, but the main is supporting the psychology state of soldiers on the front line.

And we have some group of musicians, artists, shows who make some shows, musicians' shows on the front line.

Brian: How can we support them? Is there a way?

Dmytro: Yes. So the organization can help some directors on productions to make some movie in Ukraine. We have a lot of connection with military structures, and we can help to find a character or maybe find a location or...

So we totally free and open to cooperate to make some content about Ukraine. It can be a book, it can be some musicians who want to cooperate with Ukrainian soldiers, or it can be director who want to shoot some documentary about Ukraine, about war, about soldiers. So...

Brian: And they reach out to the Ukrainian cultural department or who do they reach out to for this?

We're gonna call you? Are we gonna call you? How are we gonna make this work?

Dmytro: Yeah, it can call me and I will connect with the organization or you can Google it, like cultural forces. We have social media also, can write directly in direct and direct messages. And our community department will answer quickly.

So, different way.

Brian: So, you have this film out now, you're on the circuit promoting it. What's next for you? Are you working on anything specific?

Or are you focusing on your day job in the military or?

Dmytro: Yeah, yeah, I am focusing on my day job in military. And I have a few ideas. One idea is after the war.

I don't know.

When is that?

About Transcarpathia, I want to keep, continue to shooting some content and documentary from West of Ukraine. And the answer is about military. But for now.

Brian: Is that first story something that's sort of a pre-war idea that you're continuing or?

Dmytro: Yeah, yeah. Well, something, wedding service.

Brian: So how is, I mean, this is a hard question, but sort of the war, how has it sort of changed your approach to filmmaking?

Dmytro: I mean, it's, you know, like, it's not totally changed my, like, view of documenting. War is totally changing, but my mobilization not because we are in war all this time. And for me, just changing my duties, my, like, my obligation and changing my perspective of working.

Brian: But also the palette of what you might shoot. I mean, the destruction is not there without the war. You know, so somehow that must inform things.

Dmytro: And for now in the organization, I meet some new person. I made some new connection with people. And we will see, it's totally challenging to make some of my own ideas in service.

And maybe I find way something combine like some of my ideas and some needs of organization. It's combining with my own project. But for now, it's really hard to have like, I have just a few hours per day for free.

And I spend it for my family. I also waiting for a kid in autumn. So yeah, I focusing in family in my free time.

Brian: On that note, let's let's get you out of here. Because again, I appreciate that you took the time to be with us to talk about Divia. Best of luck at the festival next week.

I can't imagine that you're going to get any bad reviews or any negative response. It's so beautiful. And again, it seems weird to call it beautiful given the subject matter, but it really is a powerful and beautiful film.

And I congratulate you and thank you for sharing it. It was really an honor to be able to look at it.

Dmytro: I thank you about your interest. I really appreciated it. And it's my, like, gold time.

I just show my work. We spent for it, like, three years. And for now, this moment of glory, and to show it for public and discuss it with the audience.

I really love it. This and I'm waiting premiere in Ukraine also in autumn. So, yeah, it's really glad, like it's finished, finished.

So, so waiting to discuss it with audience.

Brian: I was going to say, how has the response been? How long ago did you finish the film? How long have you been waiting for this?

Dmytro: Yeah, like all three years for this film. For me, it's like, it's the most longest production ever.

Brian: Wow. Okay. Well, I hope you enjoy the next few weeks.

Thanks again for taking the time. Really do appreciate this and also appreciate what you guys are doing there for the rest of us who are a little further west. I'm sorry I won't be able to see you in Karlovari.

I'll be coming a couple of days after you, but I hope you have a great time and I hope that you make a lot of great connections there and that people love the film as much as I did.

Dmytro: Thank you.

Brian: I have to say, I'm very impressed with Dmytro. He is an accomplished storyteller who really knows how to capture drama in a documentary. And he also seems to be taking his new day job very seriously.

As I said many times during our chat, Divia is a beautiful film covering a very sad subject. I would encourage you to find it and to check out the rest of Dmytro's work as well. We'll be back with more from the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival and another episode of Stream Close Up next week.

In the meantime, please spread the word. Tell your friends that we're back. And you know the drill.

Rate, like, subscribe, share, all that good stuff. I'm Brian. Thanks again for listening to Stream Close Up.