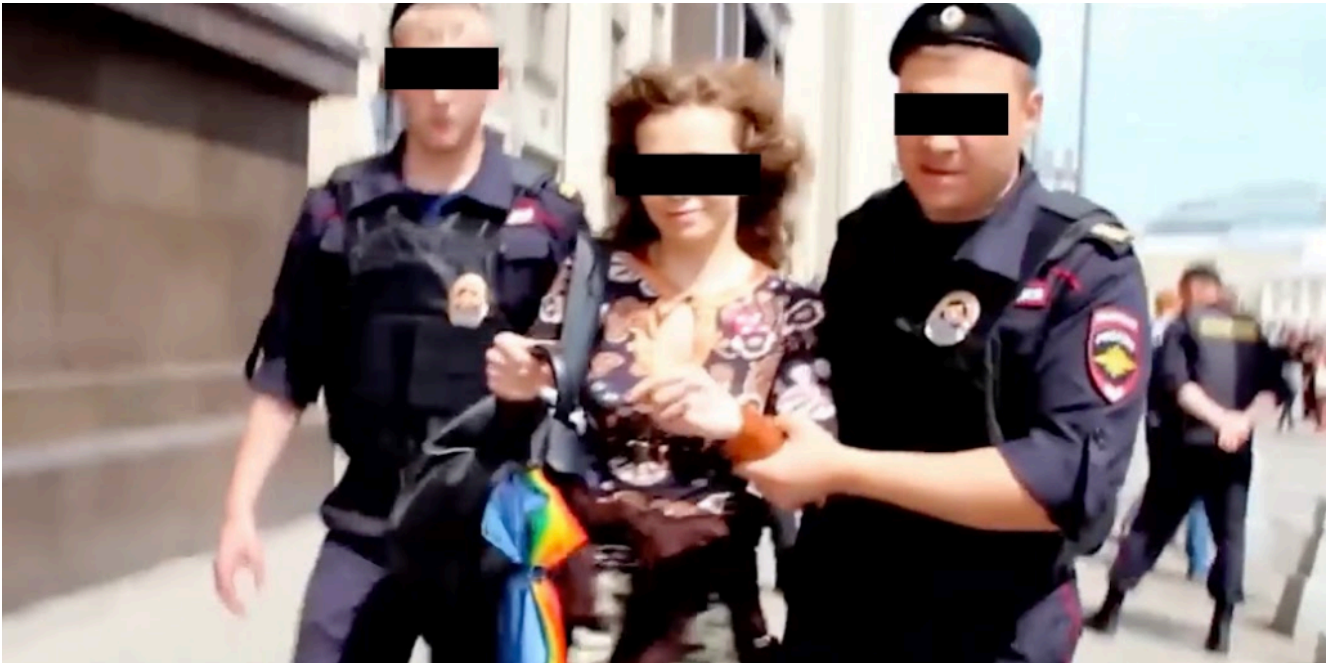


A WORM IN THE HEART

A Film by Paul Rice



**USA, Ireland, Russia / 2020 / 85 min / Color
English and Russian with English Subtitles**

<https://www.awormintheheart.com>

"The people I met with along this journey have profoundly impacted mine and my partner Liam's life, and I hope that this documentary will spread their stories and messages further afield. The LGBTQ+ community is not confined to national borders, and I believe it is entirely our global responsibility to use our voices and talents to support the rights of LGBTQ+ communities in Russia."

- Filmmaker Paul Rice

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LOGLINE

A young queer couple from Ireland and Wales go under-cover and travel on the Trans-Siberian railway through Russia, stopping off in multiple cities to meet with members of the LGBTQ+ community living under oppressive laws and harsh societal attitudes.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A WORM IN THE HEART details the extraordinary lives and brave stories of the diverse LGBT+ communities across Russia. Shot in six cities along the Trans-Siberian railway and utilizing intimate interviews about current Russian life, this documentary features deeply personal and moving accounts from activists and non-activists alike. The film follows queer Irish filmmaker Paul Rice and his boyfriend Liam, as they go under-cover armed only with two cameras, to meet with the many heroic members of the LGBTQ+ community who risk their lives living authentically under oppressive laws and prejudices - from Nobel Peace prize nominees and international activists to drag queen performers thriving in remote Siberia.

A WORM IN THE HEART is a never before seen collection of emotionally driven stories captured on their journey that poignantly document the current state of the Russian LGBTQ+ community.

KEY CREDITS

Paul Rice	Director, Writer, Cinematographer, Producer
Liam Jackson Montgomery	Executive Producer, Interviewer
Leah Turner	Editor
Hilary Coate	Executive Producer
Sasha White	Producer
Jack Colleran	Original Soundtrack Composer

Cast (Select List)

Igor Kochetkov	Russian LGBT+ Rights Campaigner
Peter Tatchell	British Based Human Rights Campaigner
Yael Demedetskaya	Prominent Russian Transgender Activist
Polina Andrianova	Russian LGBT+ Rights Campaigner
Maia	Transgender Interviewee (Moscow)
Dima	Gay Man Interviewee (Nizhny Novgorod)
Pasha	Transgender Interviewee (Moscow)

FILMMAKER STATEMENT

I'm a gay man who is lucky enough to have the freedom to live in socially liberal nations with laws protecting me from discrimination based on my sexual orientation. Although I often do an instinctual glance around me to ensure holding my partner's hand in public won't result in harassment, I'm lucky to have never lived in a nation where holding my partner's hand in public could result in my arrest which is the case in Russia. While western nations were debating marriage equality and workplace protections for LGBTQ+ people, laws like the 'gay propaganda law' were being enacted in Russia making any public display of queerness an arrestable offense.

Growing up queer in Ireland, I witnessed and participated in the dramatic transformation of national attitudes and laws regarding the Irish LGBT+ community. Like many other LGBT+ people, I followed other nations' stories of transformation, while watching in horror as the situation in Russia violently deteriorated. News reports and books importantly detail the grim facts and highlight the bravery of queer Russian activists, but can lack emotion and dimension. The LGBT+ community has a terrible history of losing its heroes; so many of those who have fought for greater freedoms and stood against social injustices have been lost to assassinations, violence or AIDS. I wanted to meet with and document queer activists in Russia who are currently fighting for their very right to exist. Far too often stories of people who fight for queer rights are lost in surges of violence.

The intended purpose of this documentary is threefold. The first aim of the film is to provide detailed and deeply personal accounts of the current state of the LGBTQ+ communities in Russia— and how they all differ from each other yet have many things unexpectedly in common. Secondly, this documentary depicts the many unsettling parallels from these repressed societies to that of western nations and projects a cautionary message to the western world to remain vigilant against the rise of homophobia and transphobia. Lastly the over-arching message of the film is universal and one of hope, that people should not remain hostage to politicians or governments.

The people I met with along this journey have profoundly impacted mine and my partner Liam's life, and I hope that this documentary will spread their stories and messages further afield. The LGBT+ community is not confined to national borders, and I believe it is entirely our global responsibility to use our voices to support the LBGT+ people of Russia and beyond. *"Social problems surpass frontiers. The sores of the human race, those great sores which cover the globe, do not halt at the red or blue lines traced upon the map."* — Victor Hugo.

- Paul Rice (Director, Writer, Cinematographer, Producer)

ADDITIONAL FILMMAKER NOTES

The subject and contents of this documentary are incredibly timely and important due largely to the current state of human rights in global affairs. LGBTQ+ rights are being almost entirely ignored or quashed in Russia. State owned media sources in Russia often dismiss or play down the plight of LGBTQ+ people in Russia, and the fact that politicians and those in leadership positions even refuse to acknowledge the brutal atrocities happening in the state of Chechnya against gay men is a glaring example.

Every LGBTQ+ rights organization we met in Russia spoke of the value this documentary will have as it can act as a consolidated record and snapshot of the community in Russia during this trying time. The situation for the LGBTQ+ communities in Russia is actively deteriorating, meaning that this documentary is incredibly timely and it is of importance for the global LGBTQ+ community that an accurate portrayal of these communities is released.

In a broader sense, many nations in the western world are suffering from a rise of the far-right which often includes a direct rise in homophobic and transphobic attacks. The once seemingly unshakable strength of the socially liberal west is undergoing a trying time, and the unthinkable slide into fascism now appears to be a credible threat. Aside from detailing the LGBTQ+ narrative in Russia, this documentary acts as a warning to the people of the west. It is important for people in the west to know that at one stage — Russia had more liberal laws and attitudes to its LGBTQ+ populations, and that successive governments have eroded that. Eerie parallels to occurrences in the west were uncovered in the making of this documentary; such as the unlikely rise of Vladimir Putin as president, seemingly far-fetched proposals for laws that somehow become enacted and limit the progress of human rights and a growing lack of empathy and desire for a return to traditional national values.

Due to domestic and internal stresses, the western world's attention is turning inward and away from countries like Russia — something that can only spell trouble for their fragile LGBTQ+ communities there. It is important to remember the global community and provide insights and reminders of struggle.

Many people we met with on our journey through these three countries spoke of the value of seeing westerners' support for their plight. For example, any protests held in foreign countries in support of LGBTQ+ rights for Russia often galvanizes the Russian LGBTQ+ population to continue to fight for greater visibility and rights on their home soil. Queer people in these nations struggle immensely for visibility, and documentation of their struggles is stifled and strictly kept off national broadcast media. As a gay man observing this situation from abroad, I believe it is imperative to assist the queer communities in Russia as the LGBTQ+ community should have no national boundaries. I created this documentary not just as an accurate snapshot of LGBTQ+ life in these countries, but as an artistic act of solidarity with these communities.

- Paul Rice (Director, Writer, Cinematographer, Producer)

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Paul Rice (Director, Writer, Cinematographer, Producer)

Paul Rice is an art director and filmmaker originally from Ireland, currently based in California. He has worked extensively in Dublin, London and San Francisco for agencies and creative studios as an art director or lead creative on award-winning commercial projects for culture, fashion, and music brands. Paul is a 2012 graduate from the Limerick School of Art & Design in Ireland. **A WORM IN THE HEART** is his feature film directorial debut.

Liam Jackson Montgomery (Executive Producer, Interviewer)

Liam Montgomery is a writer and filmmaker originally from Wales (UK), currently based in California. As of 2018 Liam has begun creating queer short films that he writes and co-directs with his partner Paul Rice. His short film, 'Snout' has been part of official selections for various film festivals such as Another Hole in the Head, SF Indie Fest and received an honorable mention at the London International Comedy Festival. The film also won 'Best Original Concept' at the 2019 Videoscream Festival in Portland, Oregon.

Leah Turner (Editor)

Leah Turner is an alumna of the University of Southern California and graduated with a BA from the school of Cinema-Television Production. Upon graduation, Leah began working as an assistant editor on a documentary series for National Geographic Wild. She went on to work for BBC Productions (Lonely Planet Television), assisting on several projects for Lonely Planet and cutting behind the scenes content and featurettes for each show. Following her time there, she transitioned into advertising. Leah spent four years working at Butcher Editorial assisting on projects for Mercedes, Ford, Porsche, Honda, Kia, Dodge, Toyota, LionsGate/Hunger Games, T-Mobile, Taco Bell, as well as cutting documentary projects for Teen Cancer America, Ford Google Works, Google Impact Challenge, and Harley-Davidson "Bike + Builder". After her time at Butcher, she worked as a freelance editor and cut a documentary film "Second Assault", which tells the story of a sexual assault victim and is currently in the festival circuit. She also edited for advertising agencies, working for them directly on brands such as Gatorade, Buffalo Wild Wings, Persil and Pacific Standard time, in addition to simultaneously cutting female-focused and non-profit passion projects.

Hilary Coate (Executive Producer)

Hilary's career spans 27 years in the creative industry, working as a producer at some of the most notable creative agencies such as TBWA\Chiat\Day, DDB and, for 17 years, Goodby, Silverstein & Partners. While at GSP, she executive-produced for some of the largest accounts in the agency's history and has produced award-winning campaigns all over the world, with her work been honored at Cannes, The One Show, D&AD, AICP and the Effies, among others. Career highlights include when Hilary produced the 'Daughters of the Evolution' panel at Cannes in 2017 for which she gathered female creative leaders' daughters on stage to discuss what it is like to have successful mothers who use influence for good. Moderated by award-winning documentary filmmaker Lauren Greenfield, the panel was so successful that it went on to the 3% Conference. In addition to producing the actual Festival event, Hilary produced all the supporting media, which included interviews by Greenfield.

Hilary also personally brought the "Unacceptable Acceptance Letters" initiative, a partnership with Pretty Bird Films, to the forefront. Its purpose was to create a social marketing campaign to support the feature documentary "The Hunting Ground." The grassroots campaign created awareness around sexual assault on college campuses.

Hilary has always had a passion for independent films and in 2008, she produced a Documentary short called "Dunkumentary," which was featured in the Short Film Corner at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009, and won the Audience Choice Award at the San Luis Obispo Film Festival.

Jack Colleran (Original Soundtrack Composer)

Better known by his musical pseudonym, MMOTHS, Irish electronic musician Jack Colleran has released two albums and two EPs. Colleran has performed globally at festivals from South by Southwest in the US to the O2 Brixton Academy in London, has accompanied musicians such as the XX and Aphex Twin on global tours, and has garnered millions of followers and listeners on Spotify and similar music streaming platforms. Currently signed to London / Paris based label, *Because Music*, his latest album 'Gardenia' was reviewed by the Irish Times as having "an utterly beautiful blend of electronics that are somehow crafted to evolve with an aching sense of soulful intimacy." Colleran's high level of craft and melodic nuances will be a beautiful complement to the documentary.

KEY CAST

Igor Kochetkov (Russian LGBT+ Rights Campaigner)

Igor is a Russian LGBTQ rights activist who heads the Russian LGBT Network. Kochetkov is an immensely prominent human rights campaigner and has been at the forefront of advocating for LGBTQ rights in Russia for over a decade. In September 2013, Kochetkov met with President Barack Obama in Saint Petersburg to discuss the plight of the lives of Russia's LGBTQ citizens (a topic covered during our interview). He was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, and has been named 'One of the World's Top Thinkers' by Foreign Policy magazine "for fighting Russia's state-sponsored homophobia."

Peter Tatchell (British Based Human Rights Campaigner)

Originally from Australia, Peter Tatchell has been campaigning since 1967 on issues of human rights, global justice and LGBTQ rights making him one of the world's most important living LGBTQ rights activists. Among his many involvements, he was a leading activist in the UK's Gay Liberation Front 1971-74 and in the queer human rights group OutRage! 1990-2011. Through the Peter Tatchell Foundation, he currently campaigns for human rights in Britain and internationally. From the late 1970s onwards, he proposed a single, comprehensive Equal Rights Act to harmonize the uneven patchwork of equality legislation, to ensure equal treatment and non-discrimination for everyone. This proposal was eventually secured with the passage of the Equality Act 2010 in the UK. Tatchell has campaigned in numerous countries for human and LGBTQ rights often making huge media headlines for his actions. He has been particularly active in Russia, Tatchell was arrested at the Moscow Pride parade in 2011 amid a spate of anti-gay violence by Neo-Nazis (which he argued involved collusion between Russian authorities and Neo-Nazi groups), and also protesting the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. Tatchell has received numerous accolades such as topping the list of Total Politics Top 50 Political influencers in 2010, being awarded Secularist of the Year in 2012 by the National Secular Society and later that year being awarded a Lifetime Achievement award at the UK's National Diversity Awards.

Yael Demedetskaya (Prominent Russian Transgender Activist)

Yael is one of the most prominent Russian trans-gender activists, currently living in New York after recently needing to seek asylum. She is the founder of Gender Dynamics Research, and is also a mathematician, economist, and gender researcher. Born in Moscow in 1975, the only child in the family. She studied at the physical and mathematical school, in 1999 she graduated from the Department of Applied Mathematics of the Moscow Aviation Institute. She continued her education at Moscow State University, where in 2001 she received a master's degree in economic theory, specializing in macroeconomic analysis, and in 2002 she became a candidate in physical and mathematical sciences, wrote a paper on the use of neural networkslink. From 1992 to 2009, she

was engaged in financial and investment analysis at Moscow International Bank (now Unicredit), National Bank TRUST, INTERROS Open Investments Hansabank. ” In 2015, she organized the Gender Dynamic Research group to bring together gender and gender transition researchers. She spoke at the presentations of the Science for Life Extension Foundation jointly with Mikhail Batin. She also wrote a paper with him on the impact of longer life on macroeconomics.

FILM INFORMATION

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Country:	USA, Ireland, Russia
Running Time:	85 minutes
Format:	Digital 4K
Shooting Locations:	Russia - Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Tyumen, Irkutsk USA - San Francisco, New York City UK - London Ireland - Dublin

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Film Site

<https://www.awormintheheart.com>