

HUNGARIAN CULTURE COURSE

Hungarian Film & Television

From Curtiz and Korda to Tarr and Nemes Jeles: a small nation on the global screen.

10 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

HUNGARIAN FILM & TELEVISION

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Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Why Hungarian Film & Television? Scope & Sources

Hungary has about ten million people (check), and yet its screen history reaches far beyond its borders. Hungarians helped to build Hollywood, Hungarian directors won prizes at Cannes, Berlin and the Oscars, and Budapest has long been used as a stand-in for other cities. At home, television created shared memories for several generations of viewers. This first chapter sets out the scope of the course, why a small-language cinema is hard to see from outside, how names and titles are handled, and which sources to use. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

A Small Country, a Large Screen History

Hungarians abroad

In the 1920s and 1930s a number of Hungarian filmmakers moved to Berlin, Vienna, London and Hollywood. Names often cited include Michael Curtiz, who directed *Casablanca* (1942), and Alexander Korda, who built a British film empire (check). Chapter 2 tells that story.

Hungarians at home

After 1948 the film industry was run by the state, which funded work and also restricted it. Directors such as Miklós Jancsó and István Szabó made internationally admired films in those conditions (Chapters 3 to 5; check).

A studio city

Budapest's studios and streets have stood in for other cities, and the arrival of tax incentives has made it a busy filming location in recent decades (Chapter 9; check).

Seeing Hungarian Screens from Outside

- **The language barrier.** Hungarian is spoken by few people outside Hungary, so films reach foreign viewers through subtitles at festivals, in art-house cinemas and on streaming services (check the current availability).
- **Festival cinema.** Many Hungarian films are known abroad mainly because they won festival prizes, which means the international picture can favour a certain kind of serious auteur film over popular comedies and television that Hungarians themselves remember.
- **Dubbing at home.** Foreign films and programmes are widely dubbed into Hungarian on television, and Hungarian dubbing has its own tradition and star voices (check the details).
- **Television memory.** Series and children's programmes from the one-channel years are a shared reference for older viewers, but little of it is known abroad (Chapters 6 and 7).

Scope of the Course

Period (check)	Chapters	Examples
Early cinema and the exodus	2	The first screenings of 1896, Curtiz, Korda, Lugosi
State cinema, 1948 to 1989	3, 4, 5	Fábri, Jancsó, Szabó, Mészáros, Bacsó
Animation and television	6, 7	The Pannónia studio, *Vuk*, the Mézga Family, *Szomszédok*
After 1989	8, 9	Tarr, Enyedi, Nemes Jeles, the Film Fund, filming in Budapest
Capstone	10	A small nation on the global screen

The course is Hungary-centred. Hungarian-language film from neighbouring countries appears only where it is inseparable from the story. Animation is covered in more depth in *Hungarian Animation & Children's Television*, and the course covers key films and the arguments about them, not a complete filmography.

Names and Titles

Two things to settle at the start

Name order. Hungarians write the family name first, so the director is *Jancsó Miklós* in Hungary. This course uses the English order, Miklós Jancsó, as English-language sources do (check). **Titles.** Films are given with the Hungarian title and the usual English release title, which often differs, for example *Sátántangó* and *Satantango* (check each). The course

explains plots only as far as needed, and you do not have to have watched any film to follow it.

Myths to Test

Common claim	The question a careful reader asks (check each)
Hungarian cinema is all slow, black-and-white art films.	What comedies, popular films and television were made, and who watched them?
Hollywood was built by Hungarians.	Which Hungarians, in which roles, and how does that compare with other émigré groups?
Communist-era film was all propaganda.	What was funded, what was banned, and what was made in between?
Hungarian cinema only began to matter after 1989.	What was recognised abroad in the 1960s and 1970s?
Budapest is just a cheap backlot.	What productions were filmed there, and what do the incentives and studios actually provide?
Television was only a state tool.	What did viewers actually watch and remember?

Sources to Use

- **The films themselves,** where available with subtitles, preferably from official restorations and archive releases.
- **Film histories** in English by scholars of Hungarian and Central European cinema (check which exist and how recent they are).
- **Archives and institutions,** such as the national film archive and the national film institute in Budapest (check names and what is available online).
- **Festival catalogues and interviews,** which record how films were received when they appeared.

A British comparison

Compare British film's relationship with Hollywood, where British directors and actors have moved back and forth for a century, and the BBC's long hold on British television memory, with series that a whole generation remembers. The Hungarian pattern of talent leaving

for the larger industry while a state-supported home industry continues has parallels, though on a smaller scale (check).

Check the details

Every name, date and title in this course comes from general knowledge and is marked "check" where it is uncertain. Film histories are revised, release dates differ by source and festival results change the picture, so verify against archives and current sources before quoting anything.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List five Hungarian films, directors or television programmes you already know of, and for each say one thing you believe about it, marking it as documented, claimed or unknown.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose one of the myths in the table and write a short plan for testing it: what evidence you would look for and where.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain how reliance on festival prizes and subtitles can distort a foreign viewer's picture of a national cinema, using Hungary as your example.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The scale:** about ten million people, a large screen history (check)
- **The course:** early cinema and exodus, state cinema, animation and television, after 1989
- **Names:** the course uses the English order (Miklós Jancsó)
- **The barrier:** subtitles, festivals and dubbing shape what outsiders see
- **The caution:** prize-winners are not the whole of the cinema

Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Early Cinema & the Hollywood Exodus

Cinema reached Budapest within months of its invention, and within a generation Hungarian directors, producers and actors were working in Berlin, Vienna, London and Hollywood. This chapter follows the first screenings of 1896, the small silent industry at home, the political upheaval of 1919 that sent many filmmakers abroad, and the careers of the best-known émigrés. It also separates what is documented from the anecdotes that cluster around "the Hungarians in Hollywood". Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The First Screenings and the Silent Years

1896

Moving pictures were shown in Budapest in 1896, the year of the Millennium celebrations, soon after the first public screenings in Paris (check the date and the venue). Cinemas spread through the city in the following years.

A small industry

Hungarian-made films appeared from the early 1900s, and the number of productions grew during the First World War (check). Producers copied successful foreign genres and used stage actors and writers.

The talent pool

Budapest had a rich café, theatre and press culture, and many film people came from it: journalists, dramatists, actors and designers. This background is often cited to explain why so many Hungarians later succeeded in film abroad (check; the explanation is plausible but not proven).

1919 and the Departures

- **Nationalisation.** The short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 nationalised the film industry, and the regime lasted only a few months before it fell in the summer of 1919

(check).

- **Reprisals and emigration.** After the fall, the conservative government under Admiral Horthy took power. Many people connected to the earlier regime or to the left, and many Jewish professionals facing growing antisemitism, left the country (check; the causes differed from person to person).
- **Where they went.** Vienna and Berlin first, with their large film industries, and later London and Hollywood (check).
- **At home.** A reduced Hungarian film industry continued, and film production grew again in the 1930s (check).

Five Careers

Name and career (check each)	Note
Michael Curtiz (born Kertész Mihály, 1886 to 1962)	Directed in Budapest and Vienna, then at Warner Brothers in Hollywood from the mid-1920s. Credits include *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *Casablanca* (1942), for which he won the Academy Award for Best Director.
Alexander Korda (born Kellner Sándor, 1893 to 1956)	Worked in Budapest, Vienna, Berlin and Hollywood, then founded London Films in 1932. *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) was a major British success, and he was knighted in 1942.
Bela Lugosi (1882 to 1956)	A stage actor in Hungary who left after 1919, and became famous as the star of *Dracula* (1931).
William Fox (born Fried Vilmos, 1879 to 1952)	Born in Hungary and taken to the United States as a baby, he founded the Fox Film Corporation (check the details).
Adolph Zukor (1873 to 1976)	Born in Hungary, he emigrated as a teenager and built Paramount Pictures (check the details).

Others often named include the actor Peter Lorre (born in what is now Slovakia, check), the producer Joe Pasternak and the animator George Pal. Lists differ, and who counts as "Hungarian" depends on birthplace, language and citizenship.

Who counts as Hungarian?

Fox and Zukor emigrated as children or teenagers and built their careers in the United States, long before the 1919 departures. Curtiz and Korda left as adults after working in Hungary. Others were born in lands that were part of the Kingdom of Hungary but are now in other countries. A claim such as "Hungarians built Hollywood" is true in outline, but it mixes different groups, periods and motives (check the individual cases).

A Famous Joke

- **The line.** A saying often attributed to Korda or his circle runs, in various versions, that it is not enough to be Hungarian: you must also have talent (check; no reliable source is known to me).
- **Why it lasts.** It captures the mix of pride and humour around the émigré networks, who helped one another to find work.
- **How to treat it.** As an anecdote and not as evidence. The helping networks are documented in memoirs, but the quotation itself should be marked "attributed".

A British comparison

Korda's London Films is the closest parallel, since a Hungarian producer shaped a chapter of British cinema (check). British actors and directors who moved to Hollywood in the same decades, such as Alfred Hitchcock and Charlie Chaplin, give a similar picture of a smaller industry exporting talent to a larger one.

Check the details

Names, birth dates, spellings and film credits are from general knowledge and differ in sources, and the English and Hungarian forms of names vary. Verify against biographies and film databases, and be careful with anecdotes and with the label "Hungarian".

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain why 1919 is seen as a turning point for Hungarian film, and say why the reasons for leaving varied from person to person.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose two of the five careers and compare how and where each built their success.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Assess the claim "Hungarians built Hollywood" using the six-question habit of marking evidence: what is documented, what is claimed and what is unknown.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **1896:** first Budapest screenings (check)
- **1919:** nationalisation, fall of the regime, departures (check)
- **Émigrés:** Curtiz, Korda, Lugosi, Fox, Zukor (check)
- **The question:** who counts as Hungarian?
- **The caution:** anecdotes are not evidence

Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Nationalisation & the 1950s

In 1948 the Hungarian film industry was nationalised, and for four decades the state paid for films, ran the studios, set the themes and decided what could be shown. The 1950s were the hardest years, with strict ideological demands, but they also produced the first postwar films that audiences and critics still discuss. This chapter describes the system, the pressure of socialist realism and the newsreels, and the films of Zoltán Fábri and others, treating the period factually and with attention to how filmmakers worked within it. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The System

Nationalisation

Film production, distribution and cinemas were taken into state ownership in 1948, as the communist party consolidated power (check the date and the steps). There was now one employer, and decisions on scripts and releases rested with state and party bodies.

The studios

Production was centred on the Budapest studios, later grouped under the Mafilm name (check the details). Filmmakers worked in teams, known as studio groups, with some room for debate within them from the later 1950s (check).

Before the clampdown

The immediate postwar years had produced films such as Géza Radványi's *Valahol Európában* (*Somewhere in Europe*, 1947), about homeless children in the aftermath of war, often cited as a high point of that period (check).

Socialist Realism and the Screen

- **The doctrine.** Socialist realism asked that art show the building of socialism, with positive heroes and clear messages (check how strictly it was applied in film).
- **Typical subjects.** Workers, collective farms, the class struggle and the defeat of "enemies" appeared in many early 1950s films, which are now mostly forgotten (check).
- **Newsreels and documentaries.** The state newsreel and documentary system was an important instrument of publicity and reached audiences in cinemas before the main feature (check).
- **Small gaps.** Even in these years directors found ways to bring humour, human stories and craft into approved subjects, and audiences went to the cinema in large numbers (check the attendance figures).
- **Foreign films.** Imports were limited and dominated by films from the Soviet Union and other socialist states, though some Western films appeared (check).

Fábri and His Contemporaries

Director and film (check each)	Note
Zoltán Fábri (1917 to 1994), *Körhinta* (*Merry-Go-Round*, 1955)	A love story set in a village at the time of collectivisation, in which a girl in love with a man her father opposes is caught between the old life and the new farm cooperative. It was a huge success with Hungarian audiences and was shown abroad, including at Cannes (check).
Zoltán Fábri, *Hannibál tanár úr* (*Professor Hannibal*, 1956)	A film set in the 1930s about a teacher who confronts a bullying right-wing group at a school; it is read as an allegory about intimidation, and was released around the time of the 1956 uprising (check).
Károly Makk (1925 to 2017)	His comedy *Liliomfi* (1955) was a hit, and he went on to make serious films in the 1960s and 1970s (Chapter 4; check).
Félix Máriássy (1919 to 1975)	Made socially observant dramas of ordinary life, such as *Budapesti tavasz* (*Spring in Budapest*, 1955; check).

Reading a state-funded film

A film from a state system can be read in at least two ways: as propaganda that shows what the state wanted said, and as a record of ordinary life, performance and craft made by people who worked in the system. *Körhinta* is a good test case, since it has a political

setting but is remembered for its romance, its village scenes and its cinematography. The careful position is that both readings are possible and that evidence about intent (scripts, censors' notes, the director's later statements) is needed to say more (check what survives).

1956

- **The uprising.** The revolution of October 1956 was crushed by Soviet forces, and many Hungarians left the country (check). Film people were among those who emigrated or were punished.
- **Afterwards.** A period of reprisals gave way, from the early 1960s, to a more relaxed cultural policy under János Kádár (see Chapter 5 and *Hungarian Literature* 7; check).
- **Audiences.** Cinema attendance was very high in the 1950s and fell as television spread (check the numbers; see Chapter 7).

A British comparison

The nearest British parallels are the wartime Ministry of Information films, and the documentary movement of the 1930s, which were also state-sponsored and aimed at shaping public feeling. The difference is that Britain had a commercial industry beside them, while Hungary after 1948 had no independent film business at all (check).

Check the details

Dates, titles and attendance figures are from general knowledge, and accounts of the period have been revised since 1989 as archives opened. Verify with film histories and archive catalogues, and avoid reading every film of the period as either pure propaganda or hidden protest.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe how the film industry was organised after 1948 and what that meant for a director who wanted to make a film.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain why *Körhinta* can be read both as an official film and as a popular romance, and say what evidence would help to decide.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare a socialist-realist film of the early 1950s with a later film from the decade, and note what changed in subject and tone.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **1948:** nationalisation of production, distribution and cinemas (check)
- **Doctrine:** socialist realism, newsreels, controlled imports
- **Films:** *Körhinta* 1955, *Hannibál tanár úr* 1956 (check)
- **Directors:** Fábri, Makk, Máriássy
- **The caution:** propaganda and craft can both be present

Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · The Hungarian New Wave

In the 1960s a new generation of Hungarian directors made films that were admired at festivals across Europe. They worked in the state system, with state money, in a time of gradual relaxation, and they used allegory, long takes and personal stories to say things that could not be said directly. This chapter looks at Miklós Jancsó, István Szabó, Márta Mészáros and Károly Makk, and at what "New Wave" does and does not mean for them. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

A New Generation

The setting

After the reprisals that followed 1956, cultural policy relaxed from the early 1960s under János Kádár (Chapter 3; check). Younger directors trained at the film academy in Budapest and gained their first chances through the studio system and the Béla Balázs Studio, founded in 1959 for young filmmakers (check).

The influences

They knew the French New Wave, Italian neorealism and Soviet and Polish cinema, and were part of a wider Central European movement (check). Their films mixed personal memory, history and political allegory.

The label

"Hungarian New Wave" is a critics' label for the 1960s and early 1970s (check the span), and not a manifesto of one group. The directors differed widely in style and outlook.

Four Directors

Director and films (check each)	Note
Miklós Jancsó (1921 to 2014)	*Szegénylegények* (*The Round-Up*, 1966) is set in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution and shows the psychology of an oppressive system through wide landscapes and very long takes. *Még kér a nép* (*Red Psalm*, 1972) won him the Best Director prize at Cannes (check).
István Szabó (born 1938)	Began with personal films such as *Apa* (*Father*, 1966), about a boy who invents a heroic story about his dead father. *Mephisto* (1981), about an actor who compromises with the Nazis, won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.
Márta Mészáros (born 1931)	One of the few women directing features in the region. *Örökbefogadás* (*Adoption*, 1975) won the Golden Bear at Berlin and shows an older woman's wish for a child (check).
Károly Makk (1925 to 2017)	*Szerelem* (*Love*, 1971), about a woman waiting for her imprisoned son while her family hides the truth from the bedridden mother-in-law, is among the best-known Hungarian films of the period (check).

- **Others.** Names often added include András Kovács, Judit Elek, Pál Gábor and Sándor Sára (check).
- **Women directors.** Mészáros and Elek are often cited as part of a Central European tradition of women's cinema, though they worked in a male-dominated system (check).

Jancsó's Style

The long take as method

Jancsó's films of the 1960s and 1970s are built from very long takes in which the camera moves among groups of people on open plains, with figures walking in patterns across the frame and power shifting between them. The method gives the films a ritual quality and avoids the editing patterns of conventional storytelling (check how many takes are in individual films). Critics read them as studies of how power works, and as comments on the period of the 1950s without naming it. Reading them as pure allegory risks flattening them, and the directors themselves were cautious about explaining their meaning (check).

Working With the Censors

- **The system.** Scripts were approved and finished films reviewed by officials, who could demand changes, delay releases or limit distribution (check the process).
- **Strategies.** Historical settings, parable and ambiguity let directors address contemporary themes without direct statement, and audiences learned to read between the lines (compare *Hungarian Literature* 7).
- **Co-productions.** Jancsó's *The Red and the White* (1967) was a Hungarian-Soviet co-production, which shows that the same system supported as well as limited his work (check).
- **Individual records.** It later emerged that some prominent figures had reported to the state security service in earlier years. In 2006 Szabó acknowledged informing in his youth after 1956 (check the details), which shows why each person's record must be judged on evidence and not on legend.

A British comparison

The British "New Wave" of the late 1950s and early 1960s, with films like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, was also a movement of younger directors using real settings. It was driven by social realism and the market, while its Hungarian counterpart used allegory and worked under state control (check).

Check the details

Titles, dates and awards are from general knowledge and vary between sources, and the English titles differ from the Hungarian ones. Verify against film databases, festival records and archive material, and handle questions about individuals' conduct under the old system with documentary evidence.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the conditions that made the Hungarian New Wave possible and explain why "New Wave" is a loose label.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain how Jancsó's long takes help his films to study power, using *The Round-Up* as your example.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare two of the four directors in terms of style and subject, and say how each dealt with the limits of the system.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Period:** 1960s to early 1970s (check)
- **Directors:** Jancsó, Szabó, Mészáros, Makk
- **Method:** allegory, history, personal memory, long takes
- **Awards:** Cannes, Berlin, the Oscar for *Mephisto* (check)
- **The caution:** judge individuals on documents, not legend

Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Kádár-Era Cinema & Satire

From the 1960s to 1989 Hungary was run by János Kádár's government, with a policy that gave citizens more material comfort and cultural room than most of the Eastern bloc, summed up in the phrase "goulash communism" (check). Film in these years was not only the New Wave of Chapter 4. It included popular comedies, historical epics, young directors' experiments and one of the most famous banned films in Hungarian history, Péter Bacsó's The Witness. This chapter looks at how comedy and allegory worked, and how the system limited and supported them. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Kádár Compromise

The bargain

After 1956 the government offered stability and rising living standards in return for political quiet, and it summed up its attitude in the saying "whoever is not against us is with us" (check the attribution). Culture was supported, and limits were applied selectively.

The "three Ts"

Works were informally sorted into those supported, tolerated or banned, a scheme discussed in *Hungarian Music* 7 and *Hungarian Literature* 7 (check the term and how it applied to film).

The audience

Cinema attendance remained large through the 1960s and fell with the spread of television and, later, video (check the figures; see Chapter 7).

A Banned Satire: *A tanú*

Point (check each)	Note
Director	Péter Bacsó (1928 to 2009).
The film	*A tanú* (*The Witness*), a comedy about a humble dyke-keeper, József Pelikán, who is repeatedly pulled into absurd schemes by officials in the Stalinist early 1950s.
History	Made in 1969 and held back; it was shown in 1979 and became a cult film (check the dates and who decided).
Why it worked	It satirised the Rákosi era (the Stalinist early 1950s) while the Kádár government was distancing itself from that period, which helps to explain how it could be made at all and why it was nonetheless shelved (check).
Afterlife	Lines from the film passed into everyday speech and it is still widely quoted (check).

Satire of the past, or of the present?

Because the film's target was the early 1950s, officials could allow it to be made and still find its tone dangerous when it was ready, since viewers could apply its jokes to their own day. Later accounts differ about how far the delay was a ban, a decision to wait, or an accident of timing (check the sources). A careful summary is that it was made in 1969, shown with delay in 1979, and became popular after that.

Other Strands

- **Popular comedies and adaptations.** The historical adventure *Egri csillagok* (*Stars of Eger*, 1968), based on Géza Gárdonyi's novel, was a great popular success, and Zoltán Fábri's *A Pál utcai fiúk* (*The Boys of Paul Street*, 1969) was nominated for an Academy Award (check both).
- **Young documentary and fiction filmmakers.** The Béla Balázs Studio and its documentary tradition produced directors such as Gyula Gazdag, whose *A határozat* (*The Resolution*, 1972) examined a local political meeting in a pseudo-documentary manner (check).
- **The 1980s.** Younger directors such as Péter Gothár (*Idő van*, *Time Stands Still*, 1982; check) and Gábor Bódy experimented in style and subject, and showed a generation's view of the

Kádár years.

- **Comedy as release.** Comedies about work, housing and officials gave audiences a way to laugh at daily frustrations without direct political statement (check examples).
- **Co-productions and exports.** Hungarian studios also made co-productions and foreign service work, which brought in income and contacts (check; see Chapter 9).

A British comparison

The British satire boom of the early 1960s, with *That Was The Week That Was*, was a similar flowering of political comedy, but it ran in a free press. A closer parallel is the long British life of Ealing comedies, which poked gentle fun at officialdom, whereas the Hungarian examples had to be made with state funding and under review (check).

Check the details

Titles, dates and the circumstances of banned or delayed films are from general knowledge, and accounts differ. Verify with film histories, archive records and interviews, and take care before claiming that a film "was banned" when the sources describe a delay.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain the Kádár compromise and how it shaped what films could be made, using the idea of supported, tolerated and banned.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Tell the history of *A tanú* in three or four sentences, marking what is documented and what is disputed.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Discuss how comedy can act as both release and criticism, giving one example from this chapter.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The system:** "goulash communism", supported, tolerated, banned (check)
- **The satire:** *A tanú*, made 1969, shown 1979 (check)
- **Other strands:** popular adaptations, Béla Balázs Studio, 1980s experiments
- **Method:** comedy, allegory and the past as cover
- **The caution:** "banned" and "delayed" are different claims

Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Animation & Children's Television

For many Hungarians the screen memory that matters most is a cartoon. The state-run Pannónia Film Studio made animation for cinema, television and export from the 1950s, and a small number of characters and series, including a fox cub, a space-travelling family and a village dog, became part of national childhood. This chapter is an overview; the full story is in Hungarian Animation & Children's Television, and it points there for detail. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Studio

Pannónia

Pannónia Film Studio was founded in the early 1950s as the centre of state animation (check the date), and worked for decades in Budapest on cinema shorts, television series and commissions from abroad (check). Its history is told in *Hungarian Animation & Children's Television* 2 and 3.

A craft tradition

Animators, designers and writers worked as teams in the studio, and the work drew on graphic arts, folk art and satirical humour. Hungarian animation also attracted festival attention abroad (check).

Cinema and television

Animation sits between the two halves of this course: it was made like a film but reached most viewers through television, in the evening slots that became a national habit (Chapter 7).

The Classics

Title (check each)	Note
Vuk (1981)	The story of a fox cub who survives alone in the wild, based on a novel by István Fekete and directed by Attila Dargay. A feature film that was also shown as a television series, and one of the best-loved Hungarian animated works (*Hungarian Animation & Children's Television* 4).
A Mézga család különös kalandjai (*The Strange Adventures of the Mézga Family*)	A science-fiction family comedy about a suburban family and visitors from the future, which combined humour for children with satire for adults (*Hungarian Animation & Children's Television* 5).
Frakk, a macskák réme (*Frakk, the Terror of Cats*)	A series of short cartoons about a dog and his cat-chasing adventures, shown as a children's evening cartoon (*Hungarian Animation & Children's Television* 6).
Magyar népmesék (*Hungarian Folk Tales*)	A long-running series from 1977 that retells folk tales in a style drawn from folk art motifs (*Hungarian Animation & Children's Television* 7; see also *Hungarian Folk Art & Traditions*).

Why these shows last

Several factors recur in accounts: the existence of only one or two television channels, which meant that whole cohorts watched the same programmes at the same time; repeated reruns; strong design and music; and a mix of child-friendly stories with jokes that adults could enjoy. These are plausible explanations and should be treated as explanations offered by commentators, not as proven causes (check the sources).

The Bedtime Cartoon

- **The slot.** A short cartoon shown before the evening news became a national bedtime ritual for children (check the details and the programme's name, covered in *Hungarian Animation & Children's Television* 6).
- **The habit.** Families organised the evening around it, which helps to explain the strength of the nostalgia for it today.
- **Export.** Pannónia sold series abroad, so some Hungarian cartoons were dubbed and shown in other countries (check which, and where).

A British comparison

The closest British parallels are the bedtime children's programmes of the BBC, such as *Bagpuss* and *The Clangers*, made by small teams and remembered by whole generations. Czech and Polish animation of the same period, with state studios and a strong design tradition, give a regional comparison (check).

Check the details

Dates, directors and series titles are from general knowledge and vary between sources, and nostalgia tends to inflate the memory of a golden age. Verify against studio catalogues and the full animation course, and separate what was broadcast from what is remembered.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain why animation can be called a bridge between the film and television halves of this course.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose one of the four classics and describe what made it popular, marking which explanations are documented and which are only suggested.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Discuss why nostalgia can make it hard to judge a "golden age" of children's television, and how you would test the claim.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Studio:** Pannónia, from the early 1950s (check)
- **Classics:** *Vuk*, the Mézga Family, *Frakk*, *Hungarian Folk Tales*
- **Habit:** the evening cartoon before the news
- **Fuller story:** *Hungarian Animation & Children's Television*
- **The caution:** nostalgia inflates the golden age

Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Television: From Magyar Televízió to Szomszédok

Television came to Hungary in the 1950s and became, within two decades, the main shared screen of the country. For most of the socialist period viewers had one or two state channels, and what they watched in the evening was a common experience that older Hungarians still recall. This chapter follows the start of regular broadcasting, the serials, quiz shows and dramas of the state years, the soap opera Szomszédok, and the arrival of commercial channels after 1989. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The State Years

Regular broadcasting

Hungarian Television (Magyar Televízió, MTV) began regular broadcasts in 1957 (check the date; earlier test transmissions took place in the mid-1950s). Sets were expensive at first, and viewing was often shared among neighbours.

Channels and colour

A second channel opened in the early 1970s, and colour broadcasting spread during the 1970s (check the dates). The small number of channels meant that large audiences watched the same programme at the same time.

State control

As with film, television was state-owned and supervised, and the evening news, drama and entertainment all operated within official limits (check how supervision worked in practice).

What People Watched

- **Serials and adventure series.** Dramatised adventure serials for young viewers, such as *A Tenkes kapitánya* (*The Captain of Tenkes*, 1964) and *Tüskevár* (1967), became well-remembered favourites (check the titles and dates).

- **Literary adaptations and telefilms.** Television made many adaptations of Hungarian novels and plays, which brought literature (see *Hungarian Literature*) to a mass audience.
- **Crime and detective series.** Police dramas were a popular form, though they had to avoid some subjects (check examples).
- **Entertainment and quizzes.** Variety shows, quiz programmes and New Year's Eve programmes were fixed events in the calendar.
- **Imported programmes.** Foreign series and films were shown dubbed into Hungarian, and some became firm favourites (check which).
- **Children's television.** Cartoons, puppet shows and educational programmes (Chapter 6 and *Hungarian Animation & Children's Television* 8).

Szomszédok

Point (check each)	Note
What it is	*Szomszédok* (*Neighbours*) was a long-running Hungarian television serial about the residents of an apartment block, which began in 1987 (check) and ran for more than a decade.
Why it matters	It is often called the first Hungarian soap opera, in a form that mixed everyday comedy and drama, and it ran across the end of the old system (check how it is classified).
Setting	The apartment block of the story reflects the housing estates in which many Hungarians lived (check).
Afterlife	Lines and characters entered everyday speech, and its theme tune and cast are widely recalled (check the details).

Television and shared memory

Where only one or two channels exist, a hit programme becomes a shared reference. Historians and sociologists sometimes call this "common culture" and note that it faded as channels multiplied (check the sources for the term). The claim that "everyone watched the same thing" should be tested: viewing figures, reruns and the habits of different groups all matter.

After 1989

- **New public service.** Hungarian Television continued as a public broadcaster, and a second public channel for Hungarian-language audiences abroad (Duna Televízió) opened in 1992 (check).
- **Commercial channels.** Commercial national channels such as RTL Klub and TV2 began in the late 1990s after a media law was passed in 1996 (check the dates).
- **Cable and satellite.** Foreign channels and cable packages arrived, and audiences split among many channels.
- **Politics and the media.** The structure and independence of broadcasting have been argued over since 1989, and the story is still unfolding (see Chapter 9; check the current position).

A British comparison

The British pattern is close in outline: the BBC began regular broadcasting in the 1930s, ITV arrived in 1955 and Channel 4 in 1982, and for many years a few channels gave the country shared programmes such as *Coronation Street* and Christmas specials. Hungary's difference was the state monopoly and the later, sudden arrival of commercial rivals in the 1990s (check).

Check the details

Dates, titles and channel histories are from general knowledge, and television history is poorly documented compared with film because early broadcasts were rarely kept. Verify against broadcaster archives and histories, and treat claims about audiences and "everyone watched" with care.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe how the structure of Hungarian television in the socialist period shaped what viewers watched and how they remember it.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain what makes *Szomszédok* historically interesting and how you would check the claim that it was the first Hungarian soap.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare Hungarian television before and after 1989 in terms of channels, ownership and audience habits.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Start:** regular broadcasts from 1957 (check)
- **Era:** one or two state channels, shared evening viewing
- **Hit:** *Szomszédok* from 1987 (check)
- **After 1989:** public service, then commercial channels in the 1990s (check)
- **The caution:** "everyone watched" needs evidence

Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · After 1989: Tarr, Enyedi & Son of Saul

The end of the one-party state in 1989 ended the old studio system, and the money, audiences and rules of Hungarian cinema all changed. Funding became uncertain in the 1990s, cinema attendance fell, and many films were made on small budgets. Yet this was also a time when Hungarian directors won some of the highest prizes in world cinema. This chapter looks at Béla Tarr, Ildikó Enyedi, the thriller Kontroll, the strange films of the 2000s and László Nemes Jeles's Son of Saul. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

A Changed Industry

The end of the old system

After 1989 the state studios lost their guaranteed funding, and the Mafilm structure was broken up or privatised (check). Film makers had to find money from a mix of state grants, television and foreign partners.

Audiences

Cinema attendance fell sharply in the early 1990s as television, video and Hollywood imports took over (check the figures). Hungarian films competed for a smaller audience.

Festivals as a lifeline

Prizes at festivals brought distribution, money and attention, and so shaped which films were seen as Hungarian cinema abroad (Chapter 1). This is a reason to separate prize-winners from the wider output.

Five Names

Director and work (check each)	Note
Béla Tarr (born 1955)	Known for very long takes, black-and-white images and slow pace. *Sátántangó* (1994), adapted from László Krasznahorkai's novel (see *Hungarian Literature* 9), runs for around seven hours. *A torinói ló* (*The Turin Horse*, 2011) was announced as his last film.
Ildikó Enyedi (born 1955)	*Az én XX. századom* (*My Twentieth Century*, 1989) won the Caméra d'Or at Cannes. *Testről és lélekről* (*On Body and Soul*, 2017) won the Golden Bear at Berlin and was nominated for an Academy Award.
Nimród Antal (born 1973)	*Kontroll* (2003), a dark comedy-thriller set among ticket inspectors on the Budapest metro, was a hit at home and abroad (check).
György Pálfi and Kornél Mundruczó	Pálfi's *Hukkle* (2002) and *Taxidermia* (2006) are highly unusual formal experiments. Mundruczó's *Fehér isten* (*White God*, 2014) won a prize at Cannes (check).
László Nemes Jeles (born 1977)	*Saul fia* (*Son of Saul*, 2015) follows a prisoner assigned to a camp's Sonderkommando in a tight, close-focus style. It won the Grand Prix at Cannes and the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

Slow cinema and the long take

Tarr's films are central to the idea of "slow cinema", which uses duration to make viewers attend to space, weather and faces. Some find this intensely rewarding and others find it hard to watch, and it is a reminder that a famous director's work is not the same as the average Hungarian film. The link to Jancsó's long takes in Chapter 4 is real but the intentions differ (check how critics draw the connection).

The Holocaust on Screen

- **Son of Saul.** The film puts the viewer at a close, narrow distance from one man's task in a camp, and keeps most of the surrounding horror out of focus (check the description). Its method was praised by many critics and questioned by others, who debated how the Holocaust should be shown.

- **Earlier films.** Hungarian films had touched on the Holocaust before, among them Szabó's work and the film adaptation of Imre Kertész's *Fateless* (2005; see *Hungarian Literature* 8; check).
- **Handling the subject.** Because the subject is sensitive, discussion should rely on survivors' testimony and historians, and should avoid treating the films as sources of historical fact.

A British comparison

The British film industry also went through a collapse and rebuilding in the 1980s and 1990s, relying on television funding and later lottery money, and produced prize-winners at Cannes and Berlin (check). The Hungarian pattern of a few directors carrying the country's reputation abroad is similar, though the home audience for Hungarian-language film is far smaller.

Check the details

Dates, prizes and running times are from general knowledge and vary between sources. Verify against festival records and film databases, and note that recent films and reputations change quickly.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe how the end of the state studio system changed the position of Hungarian directors after 1989.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain the idea of slow cinema using Tarr as your example, and say why it may not represent Hungarian film as a whole.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Discuss why a film like *Son of Saul* prompts debate about how to show the Holocaust, and how a viewer should use such a film responsibly.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Change:** state studios ended, funding uncertain, audiences down (check)
- **Directors:** Tarr, Enyedi, Antal, Pálfi, Mundruczó, Nemes Jeles
- **Prizes:** Berlin 2017 (*On Body and Soul*); Cannes and the Oscar for *Son of Saul* (check)
- **Link:** Tarr and Krasznahorkai
- **The caution:** festival films are not all Hungarian film

Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Budapest as a Backlot & the Film Fund

Budapest's old streets, grand buildings and large studios, together with skilled crews and lower costs than in the West, have made it a favourite location for foreign productions since the 1990s. Alongside this "service" industry runs a separate story: how the Hungarian state has funded its own films, especially since the National Film Fund was set up in 2011. This chapter covers both, and the debate about who benefits. Names, figures and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check", and recent politics should be checked against current sources.

The Studio and Location City

Why Budapest

The city can double for Paris, Vienna, Berlin or other European cities, and its architecture covers many periods (check which productions used which districts). Crews and facilities were available at lower cost than in many Western cities.

The studios

Mafilm's older studio sites continued to be used (Chapter 3; check), and a large new complex opened outside Budapest at Etyek in 2007, first called Korda Studios after Alexander Korda (Chapter 2) and later known as Origo Studios (check the names and dates).

The crews

Foreign productions hire local crews, builders, stunt teams and extras, which builds up skills that Hungarian films can also use (check examples). Visual-effects and post-production companies have also grown.

Films Shot There

Production (check each)	Note
Evita (1996)	Filmed partly in Budapest, which stood in for Buenos Aires (check).
Atomic Blonde (2017)	Budapest doubled for Cold War Berlin in this thriller (check).
Blade Runner 2049 (2017)	Large sets were built in Budapest studios (check).
Dune (2021)	Parts were shot at Origo Studios (check).
The Alienist (2018)	A television series set in nineteenth-century New York, shot in Budapest (check).

The list is a sample, not a complete record, and which scenes were shot where differs from source to source.

The Film Fund

- **The rebate.** A tax incentive for film production, introduced in the 2000s and increased over time, returns a share of local spending to foreign and domestic productions (check the rates and rules).
- **The National Film Fund.** In 2011 the Hungarian government set up a body to fund Hungarian films, led at first by the Hungarian-born Hollywood producer Andy Vajna as government commissioner (check the date, the role and the structure).
- **Output.** The Fund supported a number of films that won prizes, including *Son of Saul* (Chapter 8), and also many commercial films (check which were supported).
- **The debate.** Supporters point to the stability of funding and the international successes. Critics argued about transparency, the concentration of decisions in a few hands and political influence over what is funded (check; sources differ, and later reforms changed the system).

Two industries in one city

The service industry, which hires out Budapest to the world, and the national film culture, which tells Hungarian stories, overlap but are not the same. The first brings jobs, skills and income, and the second produces the films discussed in this course. Money and attention can flow between them or compete, and claims that one "supports" the other should be tested with figures (check the sources).

The Streaming Era

- **Platforms.** International streaming services commission series filmed in Hungary and carry Hungarian films to wider audiences with subtitles (check which).
- **Domestic viewing.** Hungarian audiences watch foreign and local series on streaming services as well as the commercial channels of Chapter 7.
- **Open questions.** How far streaming helps Hungarian-language work reach outsiders, and how much of the benefit stays in Hungary, are still being worked out (check current studies).

A British comparison

The closest British parallel is Britain's own film tax relief and the studios at Leavesden and Pinewood, which host Hollywood productions and train large crews. Britain's film and television tax reliefs have raised the same questions about how much of the benefit reaches British-made stories (check).

Check the details

Production lists, tax rates and the organisation of the Fund are from general knowledge and have changed more than once. This is a politically contested area, so verify against official sources, audits and several news reports before repeating any claim about who gained or lost.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain why Budapest became a popular filming location and what a local crew gains from foreign productions.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Summarise the arguments for and against the 2011 model of the National Film Fund, marking which claims are documented.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe how you would test the claim that foreign filming "supports" Hungarian film, and what figures you would need.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Location city:** Budapest doubles for other cities; studios at Etyek (check)
- **Samples:** *Evita*, *Atomic Blonde*, *Blade Runner 2049*, *Dune* (check)
- **Fund:** National Film Fund from 2011 (check)
- **Debate:** transparency and political influence
- **The caution:** service work and national film are different things

Hungarian Film & Television

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: A Small Nation on the Global Screen

Hungarian screen history has two stories that run side by side. One is of Hungarians working abroad, from Curtiz and Korda in the 1920s and 1930s to the crews and producers of today. The other is of the home industry, from the state studios through the New Wave and the shared television of the Kádár years to the festival successes after 1989. This capstone follows the thread that links them, the small nation that shapes a global screen, then sets out a timeline, tests some common myths and gives a six-question method for judging claims about cinema. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Thread

Leaving and shaping

In the 1920s and 1930s talented Hungarians left for larger industries (Chapter 2). Curtiz, Korda, Fox, Zukor and Lugosi helped shape Hollywood and British cinema.

Staying and speaking

At home, directors worked within a state system (Chapters 3 to 5). The New Wave and its allegories reached festivals, and television created a shared national memory (Chapters 6 and 7).

Returning and hosting

After 1989 Hungary became both a source of prize-winning auteurs (Chapter 8) and a host for foreign productions (Chapter 9). The country now exports both stories and services.

A pattern, not a law

The thread suggests that a small-language country can have a disproportionate influence when its talent is mobile, its institutions are strong enough to train people, and its stories have a wider appeal. It does not explain everything: popular comedies and television shows never travelled, and many successes depended on the particular politics of a

decade. Treat the thread as a way to read the history, not as a formula (check which cases fit and which do not).

A Timeline

Period (check each)	Landmark
1896	First screenings in Budapest (Chapter 2)
1919 and after	The departures to Vienna, Berlin, London and Hollywood (Chapter 2)
1948	Nationalisation; the 1950s state cinema (Chapter 3)
1957	Regular television broadcasts begin (Chapter 7)
1960s and 1970s	The New Wave: Jancsó, Szabó, Mészáros, Makk (Chapter 4)
1969 to 1979	*A tanú* made and shown (Chapter 5)
1970s and 1980s	Pannónia animation and *Szomszédok* (Chapters 6 and 7)
After 1989	Tarr, Enyedi, Nemes Jeles (Chapter 8)
2011 onward	The Film Fund and the location boom (Chapter 9)

Myths and Evidence

Common claim	What to check
"Hungarians built Hollywood."	Which individuals and which roles; compare with other émigré groups (Chapter 2).
"Communist-era film was all propaganda."	What was funded, delayed and made in between (Chapters 3 to 5).
"A tanú was banned for ten years."	Banned, shelved or delayed, and by whom (Chapter 5).
"Hungarian cinema is slow art films."	What else was made, and who watched it (Chapters 1 and 8).
"Everyone watched the same TV."	Audience figures, reruns and differences between groups (Chapter 7).
"Foreign filming supports Hungarian film."	Trace the money and the skills (Chapter 9).

A Six-Question Method

1. **Who says it?** A director, a critic, a studio, a politician or a fan?
2. **What is the evidence?** The film, scripts, censors' notes, reviews of the time, or later memory?
3. **When was it written?** Near the events or long afterwards?
4. **Which version?** Is the claim about the film as released, a cut version or a restored one, and which subtitles?
5. **Who gains?** Does it serve a nation, a studio, a festival or a funder?
6. **What would change my mind?** What evidence would show the claim to be false?

A worked example

Claim: "The long takes of the New Wave were a form of political protest." Apply the method. Who says it? Critics, often later and often abroad. Evidence: the films themselves, which are ambiguous, and a few statements by directors, who were cautious. When? Many readings date from after 1989, when protest was easier to claim. Version: films were shown in Hungary and abroad in different contexts. Who gains? Festivals, critics and a post-1989 story of resistance. What would change my mind? Contemporary censors' notes or the directors' own letters stating an intent. Result: plausible but unproven, so write "read as protest by critics" until a contemporary source is found.

A British comparison

Britain too has a story of talent moving to Hollywood and returning, of state support through bodies such as the British Film Institute, and of a studio sector that serves foreign productions. A British reader can ask the same capstone question of their own cinema: where does the national story end and the service industry begin?

Check the details

Dates, titles, prizes and the status of recent reputations should be verified against current sources. This course is an overview from general knowledge, and its flagged items form a list for fact-checking and further viewing.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Trace the "small nation on the global screen" thread through at least four chapters, and say where it does not fit.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Apply the six-question method to the claim "A tanú was banned for ten years", or another claim from the course, and give a verdict.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compose a five-film viewing list that gives a fair picture of Hungarian screen history, justifying each choice and noting how to find it with subtitles.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The thread:** leaving and shaping, staying and speaking, returning and hosting
- **Timeline:** 1896, 1919, 1948, 1957, the New Wave, 1989, 2011 (check)
- **Method:** who, evidence, when, version, who gains, what would change my mind
- **Habit:** mark unproven claims as "claimed" or "read as"

Course complete

You have finished *Hungarian Film & Television*: the idea of a small country with a large screen history, early cinema and the Hollywood exodus, nationalisation and the 1950s, the

New Wave, Kádár-era satire, animation, television, the films after 1989, Budapest as a backlot and the Film Fund, and a method for testing claims. Related courses include the other Hungary-specific Culture courses on the site, such as *Hungarian Animation & Children's Television*, *Hungarian Literature* and *Hungarian Music*.