

Small But Perfectly Formed, Merlinka Festival Our Highlights

With a glimmer of hope for a more accepting world, Serbia has gone to great lengths to lessen the pressure of its questionable past regarding LGBTQ issues. Long periods of great pressure are what it takes to produce diamonds, of course, and the International Queer Film Festival Merlinka is one such gem.

Named for Vjeron Miladinovic Merlinka, a transgender sex worker who was murdered 16 years ago, this festival now proudly showcases dozens of queer and LGBT themed films, including over 100 short films. Many of these works have also screened at some of the largest and most prestigious festivals in Europe. As Serbia takes steps towards making a safer world for LGBT youth, the **Merlinka Festival** has become more of a cultural event and source of local pride than an avant-garde film fest. As such, we were more than happy to get a sneak peek at this year's catalogue.



Butterflies in Berlin – Diary of a Soul Split in Two (Director Monica Manganelli)

A lovely animated entry in this year's festival, *Butterflies in Berlin* tells the story of a young man named Alex who moves to Berlin in 1933 to escape sexual discrimination he experienced in his hometown and discover who they really are. Alex meets with a doctor who is forging a new field of study in transsexualism, which gives Alex great hope and courage. However, the 1930's were certainly the wrong time to be trans and living in Berlin.

Loosely based on true events, Monica Manganelli weaves a tale of transformation through illustrative and engaging animation. Alex's transformation is carefully juxtaposed with the transformations affecting Germany at this time, a butterfly waking up in the middle of a forest fire.