



28.  
Sarajevo  
Film Festival  
OFFICIAL COMPETITION



KATALIN  
ROMÁN

ZSUZSA  
JÁRÓ

MÓNI  
BALSAI

# SIX WEEKS

SPARKS PRODUCED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE NATIONAL FILM INSTITUTE HUNGARY  
A FILM BY NOÉMI VERONIKA SZAKONYI CAST: KATALIN ROMÁN, ZSUZSA JÁRÓ,  
IANA SZCZALURSKI, MÓNI BALSAI, ANDRÁS Mészáros, KATALIN TAKÁCS,  
ANNA GYÖRGYI, KITTY KERESZTESI, LAJOS OTTÓ HORVÁTH THE PRODUCER: CSABA PÉK  
SOUND: ATTILA TÓZSÉR, H.S.A.S. COSTUME DESIGNER: JÚLIA SZLÁVIK PRODUCTION DESIGNER: GÁBOR VALCZ  
COMPOSER: ANDOR SPERLING EDITOR: LÁSZLÓ HARGITTAI H.S.E., ANNA VÁGHY  
CO-WRITER: DÁNIEL DAUD (WRITTEN BY) NOÉMI VERONIKA SZAKONYI, MÁTÉ ARTUR VINCZE  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: DÉVÉNYI ZOLTÁN H.C.A. CO-CREATOR: MÁTÉ ARTUR VINCZE  
PRODUCER: JUDIT ROMWALTER DIRECTOR: NOÉMI VERONIKA SZAKONYI



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**NFI** WORLD  
SALES

# SIX WEEKS

## HAT HÉT

first feature film by **Noémi Veronika Szakonyi**

Hungary, 2022, 95 min., HD, Color

World premiere: Sarajevo Film Festival, 2022 August

Hungarian release: 2022 by Budapest Film

### [TEASER to watch](#)

**LOGLINE** / Zsófi, the defiant teenager, gives up her newborn daughter through open adoption, but doubts begin to arise within her body and soul. According to Hungarian law, she has six weeks to change her mind.

### AWARDS



#### ***Just Film Grand Prix***

Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, 2022 (Estonia)

#### ***Silver Atlas for Best Director & Best Youth Film***

Arras Film Festival, 2022 (France)

#### ***Best Actress to Katalin Román***

Bosphorus Film Festival, 2022 (Turkey)

#### ***Adolf Zukor Main Award***

Cinefest Miskolc International Film Festival, 2022 (Hungary)

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**SYNOPSIS** / Zsófi, the rebellious teenager lives in a tiny flat with her little sister Mesi, and her unstable mother, Bea. Zsófi discovered late that she was pregnant and decided to give up her baby through open adoption to a couple. Bea cannot accept her daughter's decision, but she does not realize that neither her, nor the circumstances are suitable to welcome a newborn. Zsófi always had to behave like a grownup, working and making sensible decisions instead of her mother and for her sister. She is still at high school and her only vantage point is her table tennis career for which she works assiduously. She plans the adoption thoroughly with the help of a social worker. Following the birth, she is given six weeks by law to change her mind and ask for her child back. She seems to be able to control her feelings ruthlessly and continue towards the goals she set. At the same time, her maternal feelings intensify, doubts arise, and she slowly begins to question her own decisions.



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**Format (shooting):** 4K UHD  
**Format (screening):** 4K DCP unencrypted, 24fps, 1:66, Sound 5.1  
**Duration:** 95 min  
**Genre:** Fiction, Drama  
**Shooting Locations:** Budapest, Hungary  
**Supported by** National Film Institute - Hungary



**Directed by** Noémi Veronika Szakonyi  
**Screenplay by** Máté Artur Vincze, Noemi Veronika Szakonyi, Dániel Daoud  
**DoP** Zoltán Dévényi  
**Edited by** László Hargittai, Anna Vágghy  
**Sound by** Attila Tózsér  
**Music by** Andor Sperling  
**Production designer** Gábor Valcz  
**Costumes by** Juli Szlávik  
**Produced by** Judit Romwalter / Sparks

#### MAIN CAST

KATALIN ROMÁN	Zsófi
ZSUZSA JÁRÓ	Bea
LANA SZCAURSKI	Mesi
MÓNIKA BALSAI	Emma
ANDRÁS MÉSZÁROS	Gábor
KATALIN TAKÁCS	Judit
ANNA GYÖRGYI	Heni
KITTY KERESZTESY	Réka
KENDRA MOLNÁR	Szonja

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

*"In open adoption, the biological parent adopts the baby through an NGO, knowing the identity of the host family. It is a very stressful situation to have a six-week period, provided by the law, during which the biological mother can change her mind and ask her baby back.*

*In a situation like this, the presence of the camera can have a strong influence on people and their decisions, and we thought it would not be right. We felt that we could go much closer to this situation within a narrative cinematic framework. During the interviews, we found that the mothers who give birth are the most underrepresented. They are often stigmatized, so they tend to remain invisible and get little help."*

During the past seven years, with my permanent co-creator and husband, Máté Artur Vincze, we filmed several documentaries on topics related to adoption. One aspect that stood out during our research was the six-week withdrawal period that only exists since 2014 in open adoptions in Hungary. This controversial law raises fears in adoptive couples, as they are unable to establish a bond with their adopted child during this period, knowing that the biological mother can call them any minute. It also takes a serious toll on the biological mothers, taking them for a turbulent emotional rollercoaster ride after having made the most difficult decision of their lives. In our film, we wanted to explore this tense situation where everyone is right, based on interviews conducted with many mothers and adoptive couples within the context of present-day Hungary. Authenticity was key to us, so the adoptive mother was played by an actress who went through the same procedure.

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We found both birth and adoptive mothers' struggles poignant and moving, but we chose the biological mother as our protagonist. We believe that their status is the most precarious and hopeless during this process, and their story is often like a scream silenced by the rusty norms of our society. These mothers, just like our protagonist, Zsofi, have to take on responsibilities no one should be facing alone. In our film, we portray a character that is based on young biological mothers' untold stories. Despite Zsofi's young age, due to her determined nature, she is able to intellectually assess exactly where she is going and what the consequences of her decisions are, but emotionally, she still lives in a closed, suffocating environment that crumbles slowly during the six weeks and provides a glimpse into her soul. We express these feelings and states through the intimate, documentary style camera movements and the detailed, expressive sound design, so the audience can breathe together with the protagonist.

Society often stigmatizes these biological mothers without knowing or understanding what they are actually going through. With this film, we would like to prove them wrong and empower the many girls, women and mothers who make this tough decision, and embrace them.



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## **NOÉMI VERONIKA SZAKONYI**

is a freelance film director and producer. She studied International Relations in Hungary and Germany. Noémi started her film education on a scholarship at Beijing Film Academy. After leaving China, she applied to the University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest for the Directing Documentaries MA program, from where she graduated in 2015. From 2017 to 2018 she was a graduate candidate at NYU Tisch School of the Arts Filmmaking MFA program.

She is currently running her Budapest based company Match Frame Productions, focusing on social issue driven documentaries and short films.

As a director, she works on her first long-term feature

documentary *Afterglow*, and finished her first feature film *Six Weeks*.

Her short film *Magic Whistle* (2019) was nominated for Best Hungarian Short Film of the Year. Recently, she produces four feature documentaries and a VR project.

Noémi was a Sundance Documentary Film Program Grantee in 2015, 2019 and 2021.



## **FILMOGRAPHY AS DIRECTOR**

<b>2022</b>	Six Weeks (Fiction, first feature length film)
<b>2019</b>	Magic Whistle (Short)
<b>2018</b>	Photographed by Vilmos Zsigmond (Documentary)
<b>2018</b>	The Unnecessary Thing (Short)
<b>2017</b>	Shelter in the North (Documentary short)
<b>2017</b>	Pig Slaughter (Short)
<b>2016</b>	Condemned to Live (Documentary)
<b>2015</b>	Prisoners of Tales (Documentary short)

## **AWARD**

ZUKOR ADOLF AWARD for Best Motion Picture - CINEFEST MISKOLC IFF

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**PRESS**

**VARIETY**

**Six Weeks' helmer Noémi Veronika Szakonyi Talks Fascination With Adoption, New Project 'Bite Into the Soul' (EXCLUSIVE)**

By Marta Balaga

Following the world premiere of "Six Weeks" at Sarajevo Film Festival, about a teenage mother who decides to give her child up for adoption, but still has some time to change her mind, director Noémi Veronika Szakonyi will continue to explore the subject in "Little Ones." In the documentary, which she will produce, the focus will shift to the complicated workings of international adoption.

"We have been working on it for eight years now; we will shoot for four more," she says. Her husband and frequent collaborator Máté Vincze will direct.



"I have a subconscious connection to this topic, which I realized only later. I have been shooting another documentary about my own family, about my mother, who was forced to give up fighting for her child. My brother. I am just interested in that question: how can you give up a child and survive?"

The Hungarian filmmaker already has a slew of new projects, including another documentary "Afterglow," and "Bite Into the Soul," set in New York, where she used to study and live with her husband, who will co-direct.

"It's inspired by true events and characters, and it's based on our research on the life and struggles of the Hungarian illegal immigrant community in Brooklyn," she reveals to Variety, adding she will focus on an older age group this time.

"Our protagonist is Erzsébet, a 59-year-old illegal immigrant from the Hungarian countryside. She takes care of a rabbi's elderly wife in Williamsburg."

Szakonyi will also produce "Gross National Happiness," and "Successful Man," currently in post-production.

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In "Six Weeks," produced by Budapest-based company Sparks, she wanted to show that sometimes, waiting is the hardest part. As adoptive parents settle into their new routine, teenage Zsófi starts to have doubts.

"It's a law that came into power in 2014. It's tough, because when it comes to open adoption, all the parties already know each other. Our friends went through this and they told us they almost went mad," she recalls.

"They finally had this child with them and they were so afraid that any minute a social worker would call, saying the birth mother had changed her mind. They said they packed all their stuff just in case, because they were ready to kidnap the child and run. In their mind, she was already theirs."

Choosing a young mother as her protagonist was crucial, she says. "Based on our research, their status is the most uncertain and hopeless during this process. They are vulnerable, they are alone, they are not receiving any real help. On top of that, our society often stigmatizes them without knowing or understanding what they are going through. They stay invisible due to shame," adds Szakonyi.

Despite her documentary background, she quickly realized that the story — based on the experience of one biological mother they interviewed in the past — would be better served by a fictional retelling.

"We couldn't do it — the presence of the camera would impact these people's decisions. We couldn't risk that. Also, we felt we wouldn't be able to come close enough."

"After the birth the hormones kick in and you start questioning everything. We conducted so many interviews with social workers and NGOs who help with these cases, and they said it's also difficult for the children, who start trusting the people they are with. If this bond is suddenly broken, it can be traumatic," she notes.

Szakonyi also co-produced "Her Mothers," a well-received documentary about a lesbian couple deciding to adopt a child despite a difficult situation in the increasingly right-wing Hungary.

"Yes, it's also about adoption," she laughs. But its subject matter generated some controversy in her home country.

"One festival rejected it, claiming it wasn't promoting Christian values. There was a bit of a fuss and I was afraid it could impact the decision about granting us the funding for 'Six Weeks.' Luckily, it wasn't the case." The film was supported by the National Film Institute.

"What I have learnt is that it's not just about the blood [you share]. There are three mothers here: Zsófi, who gives birth, Emma, who becomes a mother by adopting her child, and Zsófi's own mom. They are all different, but their heart is in the right place."

<https://variety.com/2022/film/global/six-weeks-noemi-veronika-szakonyi-1235345912>

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***Noémi Veronika Szakonyi's feature-length fiction debut is a nuanced and judgement-free portrait of a young woman putting her child up for adoption***

*by Elena Lazic*

Is there such a thing as a right decision when it comes to having children or not? How many obstacles and discomforts are too many? When the future is always more or less uncertain, is there ever a right time to start a family? And is there such a thing as a perfect mother? *Six Weeks*, the first feature-length fiction film by Hungarian director Noémi Veronika Szakonyi, never explicitly spells out these questions. But these are the tense waters that its often silent protagonist must navigate when she gives birth to an unwanted child and puts her up for adoption: by law, in Hungary, the biological mother has six weeks from the day of the birth to change her mind and get her child back, if she so wishes.

Premiering in the Feature Competition at this year's Sarajevo Film Festival, *Six Weeks* avoids easy didacticism in favour of an aesthetic in tune with the emotions and thoughts of a young girl who is both mature for her age in terms of the number of responsibilities she carries around daily, and still youthful in her passion and stubbornness. Repeatedly let down by her own single mother, Zsófi (Katalin Román) finds herself taking care of household duties and of her little sister Mesi (Lana Szczaurski) more than a girl her age really should. She has the no-bullshit sensibility of an athlete who knows what it takes to win, and is indeed dedicated to her after-school table-tennis practice, determined to make it to the European Cup and then to the Olympics.

Highly ambitious, she does not suffer fools gladly, and the film begins with her firmly sticking to her decision not to raise a child in conditions she believes to be less than optimal. We soon learn that the pregnancy was an accident, the father a loser whom Zsófi never cared about, and that the whole affair is, for the young woman, mostly an annoying delay to her plans.

It's a refreshingly modern and unsentimental perspective that puts the mother's rights first, and one that is immediately threatened from all sides. The most vocal opponent of Zsófi's decision is her own mother, who coos at the unborn child inside her daughter's belly in the opening scenes and later bursts into tears whenever she is reminded of the impending adoption. But if anything, this emotional reaction from a parent who has continually disappointed her only strengthens Zsófi's resolve not to follow in those footsteps – which soon reveals a more painful irony: it is very possible that Zsófi, forced to take care of herself from a young age, would in fact make a wonderful mother. It is this realisation, alongside the painful physical changes of a postpartum body designed to feed a child and not, crucially, to withstand intense table-tennis training, that puts a strain on Zsófi's resolve.

Following, as it does, a young woman in limbo and with no one to help or guide her in making a decision that could drastically change the course of her life, *Six Weeks* is an often stressful and gruelling film, and Zoltán Dévényi's sun-drenched cinematography helps considerably soften the experience. Full of pastel colours and rays of sunshine, the aesthetic also puts a subtle emphasis on Zsófi's youth, even as she faces grown-up problems, and allows Román to emerge as a solid young talent who can hold her own in a difficult role. The film otherwise takes a relatively standard, realist formal approach in sync with a storyline that, keen to avoid being obvious or overdetermined in any way, is ultimately without many surprises. This steadfast dedication to nuance and grey areas occasionally makes the film seem one-note, which in turn makes it difficult for it to maintain our interest in what unfolds, but it ultimately proves to be the movie's blessing: when Zsófi makes her final decision, her reasons cannot be reduced to mere logistical considerations, nor to the presence or absence of maternal feelings; her choice is hers and hers alone, and she does not need to justify herself to anybody.

<https://cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/429089>

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## ***Six Weeks* review**

by *Stephen Dalton*

***A rebellious teenage mother gives her newborn baby daughter up for adoption in Noemi Veronika Szakonyi's emotionally raw, elegantly shot drama.***

The heavily pregnant high-schooler heroine at the centre of Hungarian adoption drama *Six Weeks* hides her wounded heart behind an armoured facade of sullen defiance. When her waters break, baby-faced babymother Zsofi (Katalin Román) staggers down to the street, grabs a taxi to the hospital, and asks the driver "got any killer music?" These sharp, witty moments abound in Noemi Veronika Szakonyi's acutely well-observed character study, which world premieres this week in competition at Sarajevo Film Festival. Driven by a strong team of majority-female talent, Szakonyi's assured dramatic feature debut is one of the Balkan platform's most impressive offerings so far, with a stylish look, emotional punch and universal narrative that should help secure further festival bookings and possible art-house interest.

*Six Weeks* takes its title and plot from a recently passed Hungarian law allowing mothers who give their newborns up for adoption a six-week grace period during which they can legally change their mind. Szakonyi and her film-maker husband Máté Artur Vincze, credited as co-writer here, both realised this new loophole created obvious potential for dramatic tension. With their shared background in issue-driven documentaries, the pair initially conceived this film as a non-fiction project before concluding that a real-life version of Zsofi's story would be too intrusive and emotionally raw.

A teenage table tennis prodigy with a high chance of qualifying for regional contests that could mean a shot at the Olympics, Zsofi shares a cramped apartment with her flaky, boozy single mother Bea (Zsuzsa Járó) and her sweet but demanding little sister Mesi (Lana Szczaurski). This hard-hearted adolescent has grown up too fast, frequently obliged to play a parental role at home while desperately dreaming of escape through sporting glory. She is also pregnant by her deadbeat ex-boyfriend, but is keeping this secret from most of her fellow players, and has signed up her unborn daughter Hanna to be adopted by an older childless couple, Gabor (András Mészáros) and Emma (Mónika Balsai), who clearly have more time and money to devote to raising a family.

As soon as Hanna is born, Zsofi is hungry to return to her table tennis training. She signs the adoption papers in perfunctory fashion and sneaks back to the gym just days later, defying medical orders to rest, terrified her big sporting chance might fall to somebody else. But over the following weeks, her hormones haywire, her heart aching, her body leaking and bleeding, she begins to reconsider her decision. Sudden surges of protective maternal empathy towards small creatures everywhere, from pet birds to insects, random children in the street to her own baby sister, begin to dictate her moods.

In one beautifully tender scene, she carries a sleeping Mesi into her own bed, whispering a shared dialogue that both clearly know by heart. It's a subtly rendered moment, not over-explained, smacking of emotional authenticity. The final showdown between Zsofi and Hanna's adoptive parents is another elegantly composed sequence as Szakonyi sidesteps the explosive pyrotechnics we have been led to expect for a more moving, humane, lyrical pay-off.

An uncharitable viewer might take issue with *Six Weeks* for loading audience sympathy so heavily towards Zsofi, making all the other characters either flawed or feckless or too indistinct to care. But overall this is a very strong debut, not just for Szakonyi but for her young star too, a non-professional novice blessed with magnetic screen presence and a natural flair for conveying intense emotion with stolen glances and minimal gestures. The engine of almost every scene, often alone, Román delivers a virtuoso lesson in wordless storytelling. She also gives great Resting Bitch Face, a skill that should not be underestimated. This could well be the start of a glittering screen career, either in Hungary or internationally.

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Crackling with energy, *Six Weeks* has a bright and busy look, its visual grammar alternating between stately wide shots and frenetic close-ups in tandem with Zsofi's febrile emotional state. Zoltán Dévényi's kinetic camera is always alighting on unexpected pockets of beauty, finding poetry in grungy concrete stairwells, zooming in on tiny beetles, or wheeling around Zsofi as the sun sets her bleach-blonde hair aflame. Music is another strong component in the mix, from throbbing electronic dance-pop to hushed, heart-tugging Hungarian lullabies.

<https://thefilmverdict.com/six-weeks>

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