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Documentary follows the stories of four foreign imports

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By James Walling - Staff Writer | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [Post comment](#)



Walter Novak

Director Edward Longmire says of his film, "Some people find it depressing. And maybe it is, but it's what my camera captured."

It may be a touch presumptuous to sound off on the essence of the expat experience in the pages of a news organ formerly edited by the likes of Alan Levy, but local film director Edward Longmire has forced the issue. Hailing from London, Longmire came to Prague in 2001, graduated from the film and TV school FAMU with a diploma in cinema studies, and has spent the past four years shooting footage of various expats for a documentary about the lasting effects of living abroad and the unique characteristics of life in the Golden City.

Alive and Well - an intentionally ironic title - paints a bleak portrait of an alternately beer-soaked, smut-infused and financially grim existence for Western transplants in Prague. Whether this is true of all expats, it is certainly true of the four souls Longmire profiled.

Longmire whittled his list of participants down from seven to four, explaining that they represent the widest spectrum he could find: Stefan is an American pornographer attempting to make his way in a seamy business. Francis is an English teacher who suffers serious problems with alcohol. Todd is a struggling actor finding it difficult to break into something like real success. Ruth, another teacher, struggles with ennui and uncertainty after spending a good deal more time in the city than she'd bargained for.

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Inspired in part by Up - a series of documentary films that have followed the lives of 14 British children from 1964 to the present - Longmire has labored exhaustively to bring his film to the public eye. After considerable pains (and a healthy amount of cutting; the previous version of the film was nearly 50 minutes longer), Alive and Well will enjoy its first public screening at Světozor March 29 at 8:30 p.m. Stefan, Francis and Ruth will be on hand to answer questions and share their feelings about the film.

It's common for many expats to invest energy in selling a version of their lives abroad to their friends, families and even themselves that is insistently positive, skipping over the rougher aspects of living far from home and emphasizing the romance of the city, but Longmire is not among their number. If anything, his vision of Prague is that of a disillusioned lover.

Asked if he feels his film presents a cynical point of view, the director flirts with an affirmative.

"Some people have said it's depressing," he confessed. "And maybe it is, but it's what my camera captured."

When asked directly if he feels personally disenchanted with Prague, Longmire was politic.

"I'm not disenchanted with Prague," he explained. "I'm just a restless person who gets a buzz from new experiences."

Over the years, the filmmaker has put down roots - purchasing an apartment and connecting with an ever-expanding network of friends - but indicates that Berlin may be his next destination.

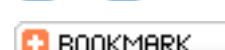
As a document, Alive and Well may indeed be a bit of a downer for locals in the throes of a romance with Prague, but it is honest and surprisingly intimate. Whether the four subjects in the film represent a true cross-section of the expat community is difficult to say, but it seems doubtful. Nonetheless, Longmire's film contains potent warnings about the dangers of giving in to the gravity of long-term relocation.

Every pleasure has its price - even life in Prague - and all expats face the inevitable question sooner or later: Is it worth it? Ruth, who remains in the city, was unequivocal when asked whether living abroad is worth the difficulties and dangers.

"I can see that Prague has a certain gravity," she said. "But is it worth it? Absolutely."

James Walling can be reached at jwalling@praguepost.com

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