



MAMA VLADA (2025)

“A documentary about the legendary New York restaurant Russian Samovar and the woman who became its heart.”

Honored by The James Jay Dudley Luce Foundation for Leadership in Creative Excellence

MAMA VLADA is a documentary film that captures a living cultural legend and a landmark that has shaped the artistic and immigrant fabric of New York for decades.

Centered around the iconic Manhattan restaurant **Russian Samovar**, the film tells the story of Vlada von Shats — a restaurateur, cultural matriarch, and guardian for those who lost their way after losing the right to be themselves. More than a documentary portrait, *Mama Vlada* is a story about belonging, chosen family, and the quiet power of an individual capable of turning a physical space into a cultural sanctuary.

Director Ellina Graypel describes *Mama Vlada* as "a film that gives voice to many untold stories." Her portrait of Vlada is breathtaking, revealing a woman who transformed a restaurant into a haven where those cast aside by society found protection, community, and dignity. Vlada's courage — her refusal to stay silent in the face of injustice — resonates deeply in an era hungry for authentic heroes.

The film has garnered significant media attention across the United States and Europe, alongside numerous awards on its path toward Academy Award consideration. Honors include recognitions from the **LA Movie & Music Video Awards**, **NY Shorts Awards**, **Holly Dubai Film Festival**, and **Frames of NY**, as well as Official Selections at the **Belgrade International Film Festival**, **Hollywood International Indie Film Awards**, and a presence at the **Cannes International Film Market**.

In February 2026, the film enjoyed a successful week-long theatrical run at the historic **Kent Theatre in Brooklyn** — a legendary location famed for its role in Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

SOCIAL IMPACT & COMMUNITY REACH

MAMA VLADA stands at the intersection of human rights advocacy, cultural preservation, and social justice. Through the story of Manhattan's iconic *Russian Samovar*, the film explores how hospitality turns into activism and how a physical space becomes a sanctuary for those cast aside by society.

Key Focus Areas:

- **Cultural Heritage:** Capturing the historic ecosystem of a legendary New York landmark that welcomed figures like Frank Sinatra, Joseph Brodsky, and Mikhail Baryshnikov.
- **Human Rights & LGBTQIA+ Advocacy:** Documenting the creation of safe, accepting spaces long before inclusive support entered mainstream public discourse.
- **Immigration & Belonging:** Illustrating the universal journey of displaced individuals finding dignity, resilience, and chosen family in New York City.

Engagement & Outreach Pathways:

- **Advocacy & Human Rights Groups:** Serving as a powerful narrative asset for awareness campaigns, community centers, and LGBTQIA+ organizations.
- **Academic & Educational Screenings:** Offering universities and research institutions a vivid case study on immigration, urban sanctuary spaces, and social integration.
- **Cultural Institutions & Museums:** Partnering with historical societies, art spaces, and performing arts programs focused on New York's cultural history.

LOGLINE

In the heart of Manhattan, the legendary restaurant *Russian Samovar* becomes a haven for artists, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community, while its owner, Vlada von Shats, emerges as a living symbol of courage, compassion, and chosen family.

SYNOPSIS

At 256 West 52nd Street, between the lights of Broadway and the shadows backstage, a unique venue has served not only caviar and borscht, but also freedom for over forty years. *Russian Samovar* is a cultural island in Manhattan — a restaurant-sanctuary and a home for those who once lost theirs.

The documentary **MAMA VLADA** tells the story of Vlada von Shats: restaurateur, cultural matriarch, and uncompromising defender of human dignity. Long before LGBTQ+ support entered mainstream public discourse, Vlada created a space of safety and unconditional acceptance for those society chose to ignore.

Director Ellina Graypel transforms Vlada's personal journey into a universal narrative of courage, remembrance, and love. This is a story of how one individual can change the destinies of hundreds simply by opening her doors and her heart.

ABOUT VLADA VON SHATS

Vlada von Shats is more than a restaurateur — she is the living spirit of *Russian Samovar*.

For decades, she has welcomed artists, immigrants, Broadway performers, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community into a space where culture and humanity intersect. Her life story reflects the broader ethos of New York itself: a city shaped by outsiders who create new homes through courage and creativity.

When asked about the most important achievement of her life, Vlada answers simply:

"My children."

THE LEGEND OF RUSSIAN SAMOVAR

Russian Samovar is more than a restaurant; it is a living New York landmark. Serving as both the primary setting of the film and a cultural institution, the venue embodies creative freedom and self-expression, gathering Broadway actors, immigrants, political thinkers, dancers, and everyday individuals seeking a place to be heard.

The historic building originally housed *Jilly's*, the famous haunt of Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack. In 1986, Roman Kaplan purchased the venue, preserving its historic interiors and transforming it into a epicenter of Russian culture in Manhattan. In 1987, legendary dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov and Nobel Laureate Joseph Brodsky joined as co-owners. Baryshnikov's piano still resonates within its walls, Brodsky's favorite table remains legendary, and the private dining room famously hosted scenes for the iconic series *Sex and the City*.

The New York Times hailed the restaurant as "*a Russian island in Manhattan*," while *Forbes* recognized it as one of the last guardians of authentic Russian culinary heritage in New York.

DIRECTOR STATEMENT

Ellina Graypel

"MAMA VLADA is a film that gives voice to many untold stories through one woman who embodies them all. My mission as a director was to bring these voices to a wider audience — because today, it is especially vital to tell stories of empathy, courage, and true belonging.

This film is dedicated to everyone who fights for the right to be accepted for who they are. This is both my personal struggle and my personal cause.

By combining music, memory, and social activism through an emotionally rich cinematic language, I focused on human rights and supporting marginalized communities through intimate storytelling. I wanted to show how a single individual can become the emotional center of an entire community — and to reveal the iconic Russian Samovar as a place of emotional safety, where talents find peace, care, and ultimately, their true voice.

Seeing how audiences leave inspired by the power of human connection and the significance of chosen family reinforces why this story had to be told. MAMA VLADA is more than a documentary portrait; it is a chronicle of New York City through the fate of one sanctuary and the woman who became its custodian. It is a reminder that true cultural revolutions often begin around a shared table."

FESTIVALS & AWARDS

Award Winner

- **Los Angeles Movie & Music Video Awards (2025):** Best Director & Best LGBT Film
- **New Wave Cinema Awards (New York, USA):** Best Human Rights Film
- **NY Shorts Awards:** Best Director
- **Holly Dubai Film Festival (2025):** Award Winner
- **Frames of New York Film Festival:** Best First-Time Director

Official Selection

- **Hollywood International Indie Film Awards (2025)**
- **Belgrade International Film Festival (2025)**

Semi-Finalist & Industry Recognition

- **New York Indie Film Awards Short Fest (2025):** Semi-Finalist
- **Cannes International Film Market / Marché du Film (2025):** Official Industry Selection

MEDIA COVERAGE & OFFICIAL LINKS

Official Links & Media Assets

- **Official Website:** mamavladadocumentary.com
- **IMDb Video Preview & Synopsis:** [MAMA VLADA on IMDb](#)
- **Official Teaser:** [Watch Teaser on YouTube](#)
- **Full Documentary Film:** [Watch Full Film on YouTube](#)

Select Press & Media Coverage

- **Vanity Fair Fashion** — [Broadway Meets Forty Years of Russian Samovar and the Rise of Mama Vlada](#)
- **The Hollywood Magazine** — [Russian Samovar & Mama Vlada Feature](#)
- **New York Weekly** — [Vlada von Shats: The Heart of New York Inside Russian Samovar](#)
- **ForumDaily New York** — [Award-Winning Documentary "Mama Vlada" Screened in Brooklyn](#)

TV & Radio Features

- **RTVI TV News:** [Watch Coverage on YouTube](#)
- **Freedom FM Radio:** [Listen/Watch Interview on YouTube](#)

SPECIAL SCREENINGS & EVENTS

Private Premiere & Cultural Reception

- **Venue:** *Russian Samovar Restaurant*, New York City
- **Date:** May 28, 2025
- **Event Highlights:** An exclusive private screening and reception bringing together civic leaders, diplomats, fashion icons, and media partners.

Notable Hosts & Guests:

- **Event Directors & Hosts:** Ellina Graypel, Patrice Samara (Editorial Consultant), and Vlada von Shats.
- **Political & Cultural Honorees:** NY State Assemblymember Michael Novakhov, NY State Assemblymember Alex Brook-Krasny, Senator Steve Chan (represented by Raymond Morales), Dr. Sima Karetnaya (UN Ambassador / Mayor's Office), and Jim Luce (Founder of the James Jay Dudley Luce Foundation).



Michael Novakhov Assemblyman and
L.Gurevich fashion icon



Patrice Samara and Ellina Graypel



Ellina Graypel and fashion
industry professionals

THEATRICAL ENGAGEMENT & SPECIAL GUESTS

Brooklyn Theatrical Run

- **Venue:** Historic Kent Theatre, Brooklyn, NY
- **Dates:** February 6–14, 2026
- **Significance:** A week-long theatrical engagement at the legendary cinema location made famous by Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

Official Guests & Honorees

Dignitaries & Public Officials:

- **Senator Steve Chan** — Presented with an official proclamation
- **Dr. Sima Karetnaya** — U.N. Ambassador, New York City Mayor's Office
- **Assemblymember Alec Brook-Krasny** — New York State Assembly
- **Assemblymember Michael Novakhov** — New York State Assembly
- **Jim Luce** — Founder, The James Jay Dudley Luce Foundation

Film Delegation & Creative Team:

- **Ellina Graypel** — Writer, Director & Producer
- **Vlada von Shats** — Lead Subject & Cultural Custodian
- **Patrice Samara** — Editorial Consultant
- **Raymond Morales** — Representing Senator Steve Chan

Attending Media Outlets:

- ForumDaily New York
- The Stewardship Report
- RTVI US Television
- Freedom FM Radio (Galina Goldberg)



Director Ellina Graypel, Vlada Von Shats
(the film's leading actress), Patrice Samara (editorial consultant)



Raymond Morales (Senator Chan)



Dr-Sima Karetnaya, American Ambassador



Jim Luce, Founder of the James Jay Dudley Luce Foundation, empowering young global leaders and supporting international youth initiatives



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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS & CREDITS

Technical Specs

- **Title:** MAMA VLADA
- **Genre:** Documentary
- **Format:** Short Film
- **Runtime:** 32 min 18 sec
- **Country of Production:** USA
- **Year:** 2025
- **Language:** English
- **Subtitles:** English (Additional languages available upon request)
- **Production Company:** Graypel Productions

Film Credits

- **Written, Directed & Produced by:** Ellina Graypel
- **Lead Subject:** Vlada von Shats
- **Original Songs by:** Ellina Graypel
- **Editing, Animation & Design:** Vitali Prostota
- **Cinematic Music:** Aleksandr Nadtochiy
- **Original Music:** Maksim Tsvetovat
- **Editorial Consultant:** Patrice Samara

