

IT'S ALL ABOUT TAKING CHANCES

Thomas Vinterberg, director of *The Celebration*, has completed his dream project, *It's All About Love*. Cast includes Joaquin Phoenix, Claire Danes, Sean Penn and Douglas Henshall.

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BILLE AUGUST - CANNES JURY

Twice *Palme d'Or* winner for *Best Intentions* and *Pelle the Conqueror* which also received an Oscar, Bille August has been appointed member of the Cannes Jury. Excerpts from an interview.

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WHEN LIFE HAS A WILL OF ITS OWN

Susanne Bier has assembled a powerful team for her new Dogme-feature *Open Hearts* (to be confirmed): Oscar-winning scriptwriter Anders Thomas Jensen, producer Vibeke Windeløv and leading Danish actors.

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Director Thomas Vinterberg / Photo: Jan Buus

“I felt inspired by the idea of treading on thin ice,” says Thomas Vinterberg, who made a world breakthrough with *The Celebration*, his Dogme film. He has completed his dream project, *It's All About Love*, about the struggle for love in a world of the future under threat of collapse.

IT'S ALL ABOUT TAKING CHANCES

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN

The Celebration had barely won the Jury's Special Prize in Cannes when the offers began flooding in from all over the world. Steven Spielberg called *The Celebration* one of the best films he had ever seen, Marlon Brando phoned to discuss the camera work, and Thomas Vinterberg was in constant demand. Promotion, interviews, awards ... it was as if the celebrations would never end. Hollywood courted him and Thomas Vinterberg could pick and choose among all the scripts sent to him for perusal. But he ended up staying in Denmark and dedicating himself to a dream project, *It's All About Love*, a drama shot in English about two lovers struggling for love in a world on the verge of cosmic collapse.

“I was tempted by Hollywood and it would have been far easier to agree to do a finished script, a good thriller you know will work and which you'd have to be a dummy to ruin. I think I must have read and assessed hundreds of big projects but the decider was my visit to Los Angeles. I could tell I could not live

there with my family. I don't belong there”, says 32-year-old Vinterberg as he asks us into his peaceful, sparsely furnished office at Nimbus Film, Filmbyen.

“Artistically, continuing with my own work was the bravest, most reckless and from a career point of view most stupid and self-destructive choice I could make, but no matter what, I am glad I made that choice. After all, fostering a career is an extremely paltry thing to do; it is nothing; it is quickly out of the way. You may succeed, but so what? There is no richness associated with it.”

SUSPENDING THE LAW OF GRAVITY

It's All About Love is not like anything else Vinterberg has made. His previous works - the short fiction films *Last Round* and *The Boy Who Walked Backwards*, and his features *The Greatest Heroes* and *The Celebration* - are all set in the present and characterized by their humour, energetic pulse, strong emotions and characters whom one critic described as “so alive you feel you could reach out and touch them”.

But in *It's All About Love* Vinterberg creates an ominous atmosphere of mystery and doom. Things are not what they seem to be, and the acting assumes a dream-like nature that may seem chill but is in fact a very precise depiction of the characters, who have grown distant from each other and from real life. The plot is a mixture of romance and suspense, an absurd futuristic nightmare Stanley Kubrick could have come up with. We are in 2021 and Earth is afflicted by cosmic disturbances. The law of gravity has been suspended in Uganda, it's snowing in July in New York, and people are collapsing in the street. They're having heart trouble.

"Things have been vibrating in the air and we have tried to catch them and reproduce them", Thomas Vinterberg says. "It's hard to put into words and I can't explain why the Ugandans in the film are weightless or why it is snowing in summer in New York. It is our report on the world, our picture of the way the disasters of the world seem more and more absurd. I hope it will evoke a response in other people, and on some points reality has already overtaken the film. We suddenly hear of hail falling in the Sahara ...".

A NEW WAY OF LIFE

It's All About Love is an international production costing DKK 85 million [EURO 11.5m]. The producer is Nimbus Film, which also produced the Dogme films *The Celebration* and *Mifune*. Joaquin Phoenix and Claire Danes play the leads: John, and the world-famous ice skating star Elena, who live out their cosmopolitan marriage at different ends of the world, John in Poland and Elena in New York. They have drifted apart and John goes to New York to sign the divorce papers but in the middle of everything Elena asks him for help. Her life is completely controlled by her manager and she has a feeling that her life is in danger.

Thomas Vinterberg wrote the script together with his former tutor at the National Film School of Denmark, Mogens Rukov, who also helped to create *The Celebration*. "The major source of inspiration for me was the tumultuous period, during which I travelled about promoting *The Celebration*. In the airspace around the world, I met people who were genuine cosmopolitans. They could be in Budapest in the morning, have lunch in London, and go to bed in Venice. I discovered a world in motion, a world in which individuals moved this way and that without belonging anywhere in particular. It was a new way of life that particularly got to me after *The Celebration* when I was away from my children and my partner. The experience shocked me."

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

It's All About Love, like Vinterberg's other films, is about the relationship between sense and sensibility. It is an existential film about a world in which we have the freedom to do as we please but where the complexity of everyday life is so great that many cling to orderly systems and regular routines. They make their careers the meaning of their lives, for example. They live unreal lives. Vinterberg's strategy is to put the knife to his character's throats, forcing them to let go of common sense and begin living life.

"We have made a story in which we claim that people die from lack of love. I can certainly say that about myself. I'm done for if I don't have intimacy. And I think that's true for all of us. That's the core of this film. You are done for if you turn your back on love, and that is precisely what you do if you are constantly travelling away from what you come from - away from oneself" he says. "But I haven't tried to make a film for the mind. I have tried to make a film that will carry the audience away and take them on a journey."

ANTI-DOGME

The filmic starting point for *It's All About Love* was to do the

exact opposite of what he did in *The Celebration* and the Dogme manifesto (which Thomas Vinterberg wrote with Lars von Trier in 1995).

"I had gained a lot of energy from the courage associated with the Dogme project, and I wanted to pursue the same energy again. I wanted to throw myself in at the deep end and I felt inspired by the idea of stepping out onto completely thin ice and doing a project that would involve risk. We have created a radical project in which everything is illusory and carefully planned. For Dogme the camera had to be hand-held and the scenes had to be shot on location, so this time I went in for tripods and sets and studios. Joaquin Phoenix and Claire Danes' escape through the streets of New York was shot in the car park at Filmbyen. I spat in Dogme's face, but one of the sterling qualities of Dogme was innovation and in that way my new film is completely in keeping with the spirit of Dogme. You may say I've invented a new set of rules that has forced me to innovate".

Although *It's All About Love* is set in the future it is not a traditional science fiction film.

"We have tried to recreate the New York of the old Hitchcock films. We decided to go back in time in order to make a statement about the future. We deliberately left out flying automobiles, blue milk, weird cigarettes and implanted telephones. We are not interested in technological progress. We decided to go backwards partly to direct audience attention to what it's really all about: love and the genuine article. The past becomes the core of what our characters and our film are seeking and it impregnated itself in our picture of New York and the settings in which our characters move."

DESIRE

Thomas Vinterberg is responsive, likeable, and attentive. You immediately sense his ability for empathy that has made him the leading Danish director of his generation. Thomas Vinterberg seems to be somebody with a huge amount of surplus resources, but in interviews he talks time and time again of his doubt and uncertainty, about his fear of not fulfilling the enormous expectations made of him since he got into the National Film School of Denmark at the age of 21. Success hasn't diminished this fear.

"I talked to Ingmar Bergman on the phone after *The Celebration*. He thought it was idiotic of me not to have thrown myself into a new film immediately. 'You must always be working on a new project before the previous one is finished', he told me. And he is quite right. I am not going to spend a year and a half again wondering what is good for me. It's a sign of egomania and egocentricity and bears no fruit. You have to be driven by some kind of desire or some kind of necessity," he says as the press officer from Nimbus knocks on the door to say that the interview is over.

On his way out he just has time to recount the anecdote about Ingmar Bergman who found some recent newspapers on the floor of the toilet shed on his island, and when he inadvertently moved one of them aside he suddenly saw himself on the front page. He had won the Palme d'Or in Cannes a week before and had never even noticed!

"That's how it should be", Thomas Vinterberg says, and waves goodbye.



It's All About Love. Photo: Per Arnesen



It's All About Love. Photo: Per Arnesen



Mogens Rukov / Photo: Finn Frandsen/Polfoto

"I don't think I'll ever help to make a film more important to me than *It's All About Love*," Mogens Rukov says. He wrote the script together with Thomas Vinterberg. As a consultant and scriptwriter he has also helped to generate successes such as *The Celebration*, *The Idiots* and *Mifune*.

SEE IT AS A DREAM

BY MOGENS RUKOV

HEAD OF THE SCRIPT-WRITING DEPT. AT THE NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL OF DENMARK

See it as a dream! A love story for grown-ups, a not-a-Romeo-and-Juliet romance, a millennium film, an anti-Dogme film, an experiment, a homage to Kubrick, a yearning for order, a description of the state of the world, a chamber piece about two people who have loved each other for fourteen years but stopped doing so eighteen months ago, a story about New York, about the fascination New York exerts, and much, much later than its time of writing, a story that contains 11 September within it; not a visionary film, but merely a film whose logic in some way or another intervened in the logic of real life and thus corresponds with real life events, a piece of science fiction about the present, and as I most recently discovered, a modern *King Lear* without the conspiracies, Cordelia's almost wordless story, in the same way as *The Celebration* is linked to *Hamlet*.

We wrote the script over a two year period; not non-stop, but spread out over the two years. *The Celebration's* world fame

proved to be fateful in many ways as regards the good things and the difficulties. It is pleasant being famous. A little famous. There's nobody in film who doesn't know *The Celebration*. It is a concept. Almost a form in itself. I am famous in three streets in many of the great cities of the world and in a few minor cities, too. It is pleasant seeing young women brighten and want to talk when they hear what you have made. Thomas is world famous. Being world famous is hard. It's good, but it is also a burden. We felt the burden while we were writing this new film.

It's All About Love took shape when we decided it was to be set in New York and Elena, the female protagonist, would be an international ice skating star.

To me, the princesses of the ice rink have something sensual about them. They deliver a refined performance in the spotlight in front of a very large audience in clothes that emphasise their sex, with dramatic movements that make the body animal-like, with limbs constantly being splayed, with a smile on their faces as if of joy, with a kittenishness throughout their sequence that

just invites admiration and lionization. There is something scary about the princesses of the ice rink.

We started with a big story but little by little we made it smaller. I understand the idea that human life is a chamber piece no matter which events it takes part in. The innermost gesture of a chamber piece is that one person takes the other person's hand. In gratitude. The way Elena takes her husband's hand in the white limousine in Central Park at the moment when she realizes that although their relationship has ended, he loves her all the same.

That's what makes the film an anti-Romeo-and-Juliet story. It is not sensual obsession, not great declared or declaring love, not a love in word or gesture, not young Romeo's bravado or maiden Juliet's floral, animal-masochist metaphors. It is love that is over, love that is silent. A love that cannot find words. The most sensual line in the film is Elena's "Come here!" It is a fine thing to take each other by the hand and to say something as simple as "Come here". That is as it should be. I have come to distrust people who make declarations, just as I distrust the language in which they do so.

King Lear is also about love that is silent. Now, that was a strange discovery. I noticed when I reread the play recently. *King Lear* gives everything to Regan and Goneril because they know how to talk with overflowing superfluity of their love for him. Cordelia gets nothing because she says practically nothing. She merely says "Good my lord, You have begot me, bred me, loved me: I Return those duties back as are right fit, Obey you, love you, and most honour you."

It is Cordelia, not Goneril or Regan, who loves Lear, but not with words. So it is actually most consistent that the last lines of the play contain an indication of the ability of language to deceive.

Edgar says "The weight of this sad time we must obey; Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say."

Of course Shakespeare is far greater than we, but the similarities are the strangest thing, as if the same notions are at play in our film and in *King Lear*. Very strange! I don't understand it. We have the "Man on the plane" almost as an independent, moral fable. Shakespeare has the Fool. We, like Shakespeare, set our big scene in the wilderness – mountain and heath respectively. In the film and the play nature's disorder recurs again and again. It is surely what is most on Lear's mind; not his daughters nor his kingdom, but disorder in nature. There is this doubt as to man's motives, and lack of knowledge of the motives and their inevitable inscrutability. There is even Lear's heart defect. This puzzles me. I really don't understand it. Does it mean that silence causes nature's disorder? Or that loneliness places people in a dramatic wilderness?

The most important difference is the intrigue. We have practically none. I no longer believe that people participate in conspiracies. Our deviousness or malice is not what governs us, but our lack of knowledge, our stupidity.

We have made a film that almost cannot be made. We have tried to find the minimum limit to drama. The world we live in is not full of conspiracies but full of rationality. Apparent rationality. We are used to having everything done for us. We do not take responsibility for our lives; we are sleepwalkers. So it is a great moment in the film when Elena's husband intervenes to pull Elena out of the utterly regulated star existence she is living. It is a scandalous intrusion – and it is love.

I am very proud of this film but also afraid of it. I don't think I will ever help to make a film more important to me than *It's All About Love*.

IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE / IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE
RELEASE 2002 Summer
DIRECTOR Thomas Vinterberg
SCREENPLAY Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov
PRODUCER Birgitte Hald
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Bo Erhardt, Lars Bredo Rahbek, Peter Aalbæk Jensen, Paul Webster
PRODUCTION Nimbus Film
CATEGORY Drama
APPEARANCES BY Joaquin Phoenix, Claire Danes, Sean Penn, Douglas Henshall, Margo Martindale, Mark Strong, Alun Armstrong, Geoffery Hutchings
SALES Trust Film Sales / Avedøre Tværvej 10 / DK-2650 Hvidovre / t +45 3686 8788 / f +45 3677 4448 / post@trust-film.dk / www.trust-film.dk & Film Four / 76-78 Charlotte Street / GB-London W1LX / t +44 2078 68 7700 english territories
FESTIVALS Danish Film Institute

■ *It's All About Love* is the story of two lovers and their attempts to save their relationship in a near-future world on the brink of cosmic collapse. John, and world-famous ice skating star, Elena, are about to sign divorce papers when they realise that, in spite of everything happening around them, their love is worth fighting for. *It's All About Love* is a new take on modern love and future life as two lovers struggle in a conspiracy of epic proportions.



Joaquin Phoenix and Claire Danes in *It's All About Love*. Photo: Per Arnesen

FILM PRESENTS EXCERPTS FROM 'THE DANISH DIRECTORS – DIALOGUES ON A CONTEMPORARY NATIONAL CINEMA'

The resurgence for Danish film continues with irrefutable strength and confidence at the beginning of the new century. As a response, this book presents a collection of in-depth interviews with nineteen of Denmark's finest filmmakers.

Profiling the canonized figures alongside recently established filmmakers, this book features interviews with Lars von Trier, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Thomas Vinterberg and Henning Carlsen among many others. Each interview is preceded by a photograph of the director, biographical information, and a filmography. The text is illustrated throughout with frame enlargements to help clarify particular points of discussion, and the editors present the central concerns of the book as a whole through two informative introductory chapters.

Mette Hjort and Ib Bondebjerg: *The Danish Directors – Dialogues on a contemporary national cinema*. Intellect BOOKS 2001. 288 p. www.intellectbooks.com

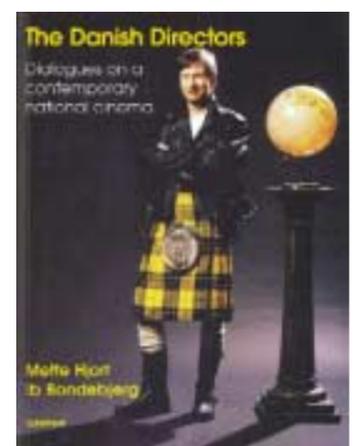
FILM has taken this opportunity to choose a handful of excerpts from the dialogues with Bille August, Lars von Trier and Susanne Bier.

METTE HJORT

Former Director of Cultural Studies at McGill University in Canada. Currently Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Film at the University of Hong Kong and of Intercultural Studies at Aalborg University. Author of 'The Strategy of Letters' (Harvard UP) and editor or co-editor of 'Rules and Conventions' (Johns Hopkins UP), 'Emotion and the Arts' (Oxford UP), 'Cinema and Nation' (Routledge), 'The Danish Directors' (Intellect), and 'The Postnational Self' (forthcoming, U of Minnesota P).

IB BONDEBJERG

Professor in the Department of Film and Media Studies, University of Copenhagen. Former Chairman of the Board of the Danish Film Institute. Present leader (with Peter Golding) of the European research project *Changing Media – Changing Europe* and the *National Center for Media and Democracy in the Network Society*. Editor in chief of 'Northern Lights. Film and Media Studies Yearbook'. Most recent book: 'Moving Images, Culture and the Mind' (University of Luton Press).



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BFI PUBLICATION

'PURITY AND PROVOCATION: DOGME 95'

TO BE PUBLISHED

Mette Hjort is currently preparing a new volume on Dogme 95 in collaboration with Scott MacKenzie:

Purity and Provocation: Dogme 95, edited by Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London: BFI Publications, 2002).

The remarkable and wide-ranging impact of Dogme 95 calls for a critical response that properly reflects the many dimensions of the Dogme phenomenon. *Purity and Provocation* brings together leading international scholars from a number of disciplines – film studies, literature, philosophy, theatre and dance – in order to focus on some of the key historical and conceptual issues associated with the manifesto's original formulation. In addition to identifying many of the

epistemological and aesthetic puzzles to which Dogme 95 gives rise, *Purity and Provocation* foregrounds questions concerning the relationship between the avant-garde and popular cinema, the role of 'minor cinemas' in contexts dominated by Hollywood, and the history and future of art-cinema as a means of cultural exchange between national cinemas. Contributions focus intensely on the Danish Dogme films and the most significant foreign works, while passing reference is made to a number of the less successful films. The aim throughout is to contribute to an in-depth, interdisciplinary and properly international scholarly discussion of the many implications of von Trier's and Vinterberg's initiative. The volume includes filmographies and an appendix with the original Dogme manifesto and various reactions to it in manifesto form.

THE DANISH DIRECTORS: FROM THE CHAPTER ON BILLE AUGUST

MEMBER OF THE JURY IN CANNES 2002



Photo: Rolf Konow

BILLE AUGUST
Born 1948

FEATURE FILMS

- 1978: *In My Life (Honningmåne)*
- 1983: *Zappa*
- 1984: *The World of Buster (Busters verden)*
- 1984: *Twist and Shout (Tro, håb og kærlighed)*
- 1987: *Pelle the Conqueror (Pelle Erobreren)* - Palmes d'or & Oscar for Best Foreign Film
- 1992: *The Best Intentions (Den gode vilje)* - Palmes d'or
- 1993: *The House of the Spirits (Åndernes hus)*
- 1996: *Jerusalem*
- 1997: *Smilla's Feeling for Snow (Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne)*
- 1998: *Les Misérables*
- 2001: *A Song for Martin (En Sang for Martin)*

SHORT FILMS

- 1969: *The Wrestling Club (Bryderklubben)*
- 1970: *The Excursion (Udflugten)*
- 1975: *Kim G. - A Cyclist on the Ordrup Track (Kim G. - en cykelrytter på Ordrupbanen)*
- 1981: *The Heart of Gold (Guldhjertet)*

TV PRODUCTIONS

- 1978: *A Couple of Days with Magnus (Et par dage med Magnus)*
- 1980: *It's a Wide, Wide World (Verden er så stor, så stor)*
- 1982: *Maj*
- 1984: *The World of Buster (Busters verden, episodes 1-6)*
- 1991: *The Best Intentions (Den gode vilje, episodes 1-4)*
- 1992: *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles (two episodes)*
- 1996: *Jerusalem (episodes 1-4)*

“Making a character believable begins during the script writing. It then intensifies once the script exists and it’s a matter of beginning to think very concretely about a specific actor. I begin to fashion an image of very specific kinds of actors very early on inasmuch as I’m also involved in the script writing process. ‘What do these people look like?’ ‘Which established actors could embody this role?’ These are the kinds of questions I ask myself. In the case of *Pelle the Conqueror*, I wrote the role for Max von Sydow, although I had no idea whatsoever whether he’d even be interested in it. I couldn’t think of any other actor in Scandinavia capable of playing that role, so I had Max von Sydow in mind constantly, and fortunately he wanted to play the part. If I don’t have a specific actor in mind while writing, then I start very early on to think about who could possibly play the role in question, especially if it requires an adult. If it’s a matter of finding a child, it’s especially important to have some kind of image in mind of the character in question, because you have to comb various schools and institutions, and for that matter, streets and alleyways, in order to find the right person. The actor and I constantly discuss the role in very, very concrete terms, from our earliest conversations to the more detailed discussions of various scenes with regard to something as apparently superficial as make-up and in the context of the dress rehearsals. Suddenly the role becomes very, very tangible and very concrete, and what you’re really talking about in those situations is the psychology of the character whom you’re beginning to understand. Another important stage in the process is the arranging of reading rehearsals with the actors. I never do full-fledged rehearsals, but I think the reading rehearsals are important. This is when we discuss the psychology of the various roles and the dramatic conflict more generally. Also, this is the actor’s chance to try out their lines. We read through the script, so that I can hear what the various lines sound like. At that point I can still work on them and even rewrite them. The actors can also make suggestions. It may be a matter of proposing to rephrase a line so that it corresponds better to the nature of the role. I’m very open to that sort of thing, but above all else, these reading sessions provide an excellent opportunity for the actors and I to discuss the characters’ reasons for reacting as they do and for saying

what they say. You can basically discuss the deeper causes of, as well as the more immediate reasons for the characters’ actions.”

“I see nature as an important element in our Northern culture. I’m thinking of the light that changes so frequently, so rapidly, and to such a great extent. The dramatic seasonal changes are also a significant part of our culture, in literature, music, and all our other modes of cultural expression, and they’ve clearly coloured us as a people and are an integral part of us. That’s why it was important to me in *Pelle the Conqueror* and *The Best Intentions* - but also in *Jerusalem*, where nature plays a key role in the whole narrative - to try to capture nature and the character’s place in nature so that I could shed light on their psyches and the circumstances of their lives. I put a great deal of effort into this while we were actually shooting the films and I insisted on shooting during two different seasons. This did, of course, make the projects more expensive, but I also think that the narratives are more powerful as a result. What’s also interesting is that when these films are shown outside of Scandinavia people really experience this aspect of the films as truly exotic. It’s different and it’s part of our culture, and people understand this. People elsewhere in the world are very intrigued by this dimension, precisely because it’s so different and exotic.”

“Film music can enhance a feeling to the point of perfection if it’s chosen with care and is properly integrated into the film. If, on the other hand, it is used poorly, then film music can totally destroy a scene. You see that a lot in American films, where there’s wall-to-wall music throughout the entire film, because the producers don’t believe the members of the audience are capable of thinking an independent thought or having an independent emotional experience, but instead need to be led by the hand and stimulated all the way through. However, on numerous occasions I’ve realised that the composers I was working with simply didn’t understand the mode of expression or psychology relevant to the story or scene in question. They simply got it wrong and couldn’t get it right, so we finally had to replace them. Film music is a very special and tricky thing and requires a certain amount of experience, training and discipline



In the World of Buster / Photo: Jan Richter-Friis



Jerusalem / Photo: Bengt Wanselius

on the part of the composer. Take, for example, any scene from *The Best Intentions*, which Ingmar Bergman presumably has written with great precision and conviction, and in all likelihood also with a great deal of subtlety. In that kind of context, the composer needs a good deal of humility if he's to get the tone right. If, however, it's used properly, then film music can, as I said, help to enrich a scene, because music, much like film, has that special ability to trick our intellect and to speak directly to our feelings. That's what's so unique about music and that's why it's so important that it be 100 percent right."

"I've been very intent on not making political films, because I think 'politically correct' films are one-dimensional, and oftentimes simplistic and lacking in nuance. The idea with my first feature film, *In My Life*, was to create an emotional portrait of two people, two individuals, which would comment indirectly on our welfare society. Part of the film's prehistory has to do with the fact that I worked in a lot of different factories during my years in Sweden because I needed money to live on and with which to finance my studies. What I simply could never understand was how the people I met could stand to spend their lives on something so meaningless, and I found myself wondering whether this was really the point of our entire welfare society. The lot of the working class had improved over the years and this class had gained access to certain goods, to the point where it basically became part of the middle class, and social democracy had itself made it possible for workers to have a say in the development of society more generally, but the emphasis throughout had been uniquely on material goods, and there was a high price to be paid for this. Whereas workers previously had been involved in somewhat meaningful work involving genuine skills, they were now reduced to mere support mechanisms, to machines. That was basically what I wanted to get across. I didn't understand how people could stand to live a life that involved spending eight hours on some totally meaningless job, at a conveyor belt, for example, in order then to spend the rest of the day at home firmly planted in front of some bovine TV program. I then discovered that the whole set-up was

governed by expectations about the future. Perhaps you'd have plans for the weekend and then when the weekend turned out to be a lot less successful than you'd anticipated, then you could still hope for a good vacation. The future was always full of promise. The point apparently was that expectations about the future were much more important than the present itself. It was never a matter of living here and now. Instead dreams were constantly used as a means of escaping from the present. I think the film provides a critical and to some extent melancholic commentary on those kinds of attitudes. By the way, I don't think Danish society has changed one iota."

"The audience simply has to be part of your awareness during the editing phase, when it's a matter of working very concretely with a particular conception, of trying to convey a given thought. You've worked through all these different elements, and you've thought long and hard before choosing what for you is the right mode of expression, and to what end? In order to convey something to other people. That's why the audience necessarily is part of your consciousness during the filmmaking process. That simply has to be the case, otherwise I've understood nothing. You sit there carefully editing a scene and you constantly try to clarify your mode of expression, so that the person on the receiving end will be able to understand what you're trying to say. You structure your communication in a way that avoids misunderstanding and that ensures that your message gets across, but during your day-to-day work, you cannot think about the viewer. That's when you have to follow your own intuitions, your own precise sense of how best to articulate the drama, and so on. At the same time, what's so wonderful about film and which no other medium really has, is that if all your efforts are optimally executed, then you're able to reach a very, very large audience, not only nationally, but also internationally. However, I don't for example, engage in a calculation that says that if I edit an image of a snowstorm into a given scene because there's nothing like that in Italy, then the film suddenly becomes international. That's not how it works. In the final analysis it's all about performing a magic trick, but for whom? An audience, of course."



Pelle the Conqueror / Photo: Rolf Konow



The House of Spirits / Photo: Rolf Konow

THE DANISH DIRECTORS: FROM THE CHAPTER ON LARS VON TRIER



Photo: Rolf Konow

LARS VON TRIER
Born 1956

FEATURE FILMS

1984: *The Element of Crime* (Forbrydelsens element)
1987: *Epidemic*
1991: *Europa* (Grand Prix Technique & Prix Spécial du Jury, Cannes 1991)
1994: *The Kingdom* (*Riget*, co-director with Arnfred)
1996: *Breaking the Waves* (Grand Prix, Cannes 1996)
1997: *The Kingdom 2* (*Riget 2*, co-director with Arnfred)
1998: *The Idiots* (*Idioterne*)
2000: *Dancer in the Dark* (Palme d'Or, Cannes 2000)

SHORT FILMS

1977: *The Orchid Gardener* (*Orchidégartneren*)
1979: *Joyful Menthe* (*Menthe - la bienheureuse*)
1980: *Nocturne*
1981: *The Last Detail* (*Den sidste detalje*)
1982: *Images of a Relief* (*Befrielsesbilleder*, graduation film)

TV PRODUCTIONS

1988: *Medea*
1994: *The Teachers' Room* (*Lærerværelset*, co-director with Rumle Hammerich, episodes 1-6)
1994: *The Kingdom* (*Riget*, co-director with Arnfred, episodes 1-4)
1997: *The Kingdom 2* (*Riget 2*, co-director with Arnfred, episodes 5-8)
2000: *D Day* (*D dag*, collaborative Dogme project)

“Peter Aalbæk and I created Zentropa so as to be able to produce my films. It was to be a 50/50 company that involved our having to agree about everything. This quickly changed, as Peter went his way and I went mine. On the whole it's functioned well, and Peter has been a good producer, but there have been a number of crises, and the idea of my having full control over my films has at times been a total lie. For example, Aalbæk and Vibeke Windeløv allowed filters to be used during post-production of *The Idiots*. That was an insane cock-up, but it may have involved a break-down in communication on my part. Part of the problem with the Dogme concept has been that nobody has taken it completely seriously. It's been viewed as a bit of a joke. Why would anyone in his right mind impose such ridiculous restrictions on himself? It's the equivalent of making fire with two stones instead of a Ronson lighter.”

“Even Napoleon's mother was terribly fond of her son; she thought that whatever little Napoleon did was wonderful. My mother was like that. If I drew a squiggle on a piece of paper, she'd think it was absolutely wonderful. That kind of response encourages you to do things. At the same time, like all families my family had a lot of skeletons in the closet, and I was a sensitive child with intense angst as far back as I can remember. The childhood influences that caused me to develop in an artistic direction are probably a combination of constant praise and a kind of escapism, because art, for me, was a universe that I could control. Control means a lot to me, and to all people, I think. I'm very envious of people who have the courage to allow themselves to be controlled. It must be wonderful not to fear that, but in my case the aim was to construct a universe that I could control. That's why the practice of my art has never been a source of angst. I've never feared I might produce something that wasn't good enough. There's no guaranteeing that I won't ever feel that way. Whatever I'm involved in may turn out not to be viable in audience terms or in any number of other respects, but I've never questioned the deeper qualities of my work. This has

nothing to do with talent. It's just a question of personal disposition. The fact of not being nervous frees up a lot of productive energy, because it's common to think: 'Its not good enough, I can't live up to the expectations.' I've never felt that way. I can't say I'll never feel that way, but this ability simply to regard those who don't appreciate your qualities as stupid is a tremendous strength.”

“It is very important to make a fool of yourself in the beginning. It's always interesting to see precisely that film in which a director makes a fool of himself, and this holds for virtually all the directors whose films are worth seeing today. In some ways, that film always has a special place. At the very least we want to be able to see it afterwards. Somehow those moments of stupidity contain the essence of it all. After all, it's because you expose yourself that you make a fool of yourself.”

“I've never undertaken stylistic exercises in order to practice something. I've just made things the way they needed to be made. The themes and styles reappear in my later work, but my early films did allow me to experiment with certain techniques. It was fun to have a go at a tracking shot and a freeze frame. I also worked with masking, both horizontally and vertically. The result wasn't bad and it was damned interesting work, but it wasn't just a stylistic exercise. My first film, *The Orchid Gardener*, was quite good, and I used any number of different cinematographers. I haven't seen it in a long time, and it's excruciating to watch it because I've exposed myself in it. As the years go by you become better at not exposing yourself quite as much, at exposing yourself only as much as is required. At that point there's an element of control, whereas earlier there was no control. *The Orchid Gardener* was virtually psychotic, the expression of a young man who was in really, really bad shape. As for the provocative themes, in that respect I haven't changed at all. I still deal with exactly the same things, but in a more controlled way. The problem is that you become better at what you're doing, which means that you more easily



The Element of Crime / Photo: John Johansen



Breaking the Waves / Photo: Rolf Konow

satisfy any number of different standards, but I constantly try to force myself to undertake things I don't yet master. That sounds very snooty, but it's really true. You can become so good at producing things that they become nauseatingly boring to look at. That might have happened had I continued to make the same film again and again, as some people do. In the case of *Europa*, I really felt that I'd come to the end of the tracks. Everything had become so aesthetic and was so cleverly made, relatively speaking, that something new had to happen. I feel the same way about *Dancer in the Dark*."

“A provocation is nearly always implicitly understood to be other-directed, but that's not necessarily the case. No matter what I'm dealing with, I nearly always try to provoke myself and to see the issue from a new perspective. My attempts often involve the same things: different kinds of sexual perversion, the entire gamut of disorders. Like Freud I see sexuality as a drive that really means a lot to humans. There's probably a close connection between sexuality and art. Whether the connection is particularly strong in my work, I don't know, but it may be that I live out a lot of my sexuality through my films, instead of behaving promiscuously. There are different ways of doing things, and some people do precisely the opposite.”

“During the early years I didn't want to engage in a dialogue with the actors about their views on the psychology of a given character. I had my own, very precise interpretation of what I wanted, but that doesn't mean that I considered the acting negligible. The actors' presence was just as important as in other films, but the psychological dimension was of no interest to me.”

“The images also tell a story. It's just a question of what we mean by 'story'. If you take all the great stories and boil them down to the bare bones, then there are five to ten basic stories in the world. Should we only, then, allow ourselves to explore images if the film is governed by those kinds of stories, and

should we have to refrain from exploring images creatively if those bare bones are absent? That would be a little too restrictive. At some level this has to do with the audience's expectations. The audience cannot be allowed to unplug, but in order to avoid that only the most minimal skeleton is required. The skeleton is much more pronounced in my films now than it was earlier, and I'm not worried about that because I feel as though I'm able to put ornaments on the skeleton. However, even back then I was aware of the fact that a more general audience would only sit through a film if that skeleton was there. I may have felt that it was cheating to stick it in when what was important, in my mind, was something else, and generally speaking I'm not really in favour of cheating.”

“I'm not as crazy about American film as a lot of people are. I remember that there were quite a few people in the Department of Film and Media Studies who really cultivated American film. I've never had that kind of relation to action films and gangster films. I thought Huston was good and I quite liked the various Humphrey Bogart films, but they never meant a lot to me, whereas I was wild about the neo-realist films. I'm thus most inspired by the European tradition, but this is also because we're constantly exposed in various ways to the narrative model that the American directors employ, and as a result it's just not that interesting (...) We're now trying to make some films that are so sentimental that even the Americans would be ashamed to make them, but the relevant American films have never interested me that much. I've watched Douglas Sirk's films, but that was mostly because you were supposed to be interested in him as a student of film. It's a matter of provoking yourself. I'm now trying to be very sentimental in my films. I've had good experiences with that. I think that I'm good at being sentimental, even if sentimentality is something that people tend to keep at arm's length. However, we can't help but be influenced by American film, for it's all we ever see during childhood and adolescence.”

IN PRODUCTION

DOGVILLE / DOGVILLE
RELEASE 2003 February
DIRECTOR Lars von Trier
SCREENPLAY Lars von Trier
PRODUCER Vibeke Windeløv
PRODUCTION Zentropa
 Procutions
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
 Peter Aalbæk Jensen
CATEGORY Drama
APPEARANCES BY Nicole Kidman, Stellan Skarsgård, Katrin Cartlidge, Poul Bettany, Philip Baker Hall, Chloé Sevigny, Jeremy Davies, Shioban Fallon, Lauren Bacall
SALES Trust Film Sales / Avedøre Tværvej 10 / DK-2650 Hvidovre / t +45 3686 8788 / f +45 3677 4448 / post@trust-film.dk / www.trust-film.dk

■ Set in an American town in the Rocky Mountains in the 1930s. Trier re-explores the concept of goodness, but this time in an idiom very different from that of his Gold Heart Trilogy (*Breaking the Waves*, *The Idiots* and *Dancer in the Dark*). Shot exclusively in an empty studio with a handful of props and a set drawn in chalk on the floor, Trier's new concept is an attempt to reconstruct the language of the cinema.



The Kingdom / Photo: Henrik Dithmer



Dancer in the Dark / Framegrab

THE DANISH DIRECTORS: FROM THE CHAPTER ON SUSANNE BIER



Photo: Leif Schiller

SUSANNE BIER
Born 1960

FEATURE FILMS

1990: *Freud Leaving Home*
(*Freud flytter hjemifrån*)
1993: *Family Matters*
(*Det bli'r i familien*)
1995: *Like It never Was Before*
(*Pensionat Oskar*)
1997: *Credo* (*Sekten*)
1999: *The One and Only*
(*Den eneste ene*)
2000: *Once in a Lifetime* (*Hånden på hjertet*)

SHORT FILMS

1987: *Island of the Blessed*
(*De saliges ø*, graduation film)
1991: *A Letter to Jonas*
(*Brev til Jonas*)

TV PRODUCTIONS

1992: *Luischen*

“My starting point is a firm belief in the idea of very specific and clearly defined characters. I’ve never been interested in people who are a bit anonymous, and I would never be able to describe someone who is very anonymous. If you look at the characters in all my films, you’ll notice that they’re all very clearly defined; they’re very extreme, for better or worse. I suppose that that is what interests me about them, and this is probably also true of my own personal life. It’s also the case that if the character is very clearly defined and extreme, then everything having to do with the description of that character has to be equally definitive. That’s essentially how I work with actors, because I think things become very clear that way. My feeling is that in Scandinavia there’s been a tendency to emphasise a certain naturalism, and I must say that I don’t actually experience the naturalism in question as particularly true or as particularly descriptive of how people really live together. My characters are always a little more crazy. I’m sure that other people wouldn’t describe them as naturalistic characters, although they *are* authentic, because they’re emotionally authentic.”

“My greatest strength has to do with characterisation, with my understanding of people and my ability to convey that understanding cinematically. Deep down I just know that I have a gift for understanding people and their relations to each other, and that this is why I’m able to make films that are moving. I don’t know that the thriller is really my genre. The thriller is by definition not a character-based genre. If I were to come across a character-based thriller I’d be really intrigued, but I’m convinced that what I have to say, what I want to say, has to do with personal relations. I don’t think I’ll be making any films that consists of cars chasing other cars, people talking on mobile phones, shots being fired through windows, and that sort of thing. I like that kind of film, but I think they’re better made by others. I’m drawn to stories about people and that’s what I would like to continue to immerse myself in. I’m also able to do something with humour, but those two things are related. I often think that I have a tendency to find a lot of situations a little bit funny – including situations I might find myself in – even though they’re in fact deeply serious. I think

that duality will always be there in everything I produce. I think that I’m a bit of a chameleon when it comes to style. I don’t think that I have a particular visual style. I suspect that I’d always want to subordinate stylistic considerations to the specific story at hand, to the specific theme”.

“I’m enormously interested in eroticism at all possible levels, and this is reflected in everything I do. I don’t mean sex, but rather a kind of underlying erotic drive or erotic frustration, which I think is very important. I think this interest perhaps also sets me apart from what is traditionally Scandinavian. My characters are far more erotic than those you typically encounter in Scandinavian film. This is also why I feel such an affinity for Spanish film, because Spanish film makes this erotic dimension completely central. In Spanish film you might have a conversation between two people, who are sitting in a train, an elder and a younger woman. The situation might be one that wouldn’t typically be experienced as erotic, and yet, the scene might nonetheless be extremely erotic because both people are so clearly driven by their erotic longings. I think all my characters have this dimension, and I suspect that I have it too. I can’t help but cultivate this side of the characters I deal with. I think erotic longing is one of the most salient factors in our lives. We can suppress it and do all kinds of things with it, but I think it’s decisive for who and what we are.”

“I’ve been fortunate, for a lot of women have paved the way for me. As a result of their efforts I’ve never had to fight for the right to be a woman *and* a film-maker. So in a certain sense I’m not preoccupied by feminist issues. I don’t make films because I want to make some political statement about women. I do make films in which I say a lot about women, because they’re what really interests me. If I were to identify an issue on which I take a radical political stance, it would be nationalism, and that issue can of course hardly be said to be irrelevant for gender politics. I can hold forth at length about racism and the government’s policies on refugees and immigrants, and I probably find those problems more acute and urgent in a Danish context than gender-related issues.”



The One and Only / Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen



Ellen Hillingsø and Sofie Gråbøl in *Credo* / Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

WHEN LIFE HAS A WILL OF ITS OWN

– Susanne Bier on her new Dogme-feature *Open Hearts*

“Popular film is the ultimate goal. I do, of course, have a positive, inclusive sense of ‘popular’ in mind here. I don’t think that one should talk down to people, although this really happens a lot. However, if you have something to say and can express it with such precision and simplicity that it moves a lot of people, then I think you’ve achieved something important, especially in the case of film, for film is, after all, a popular medium. I don’t think there’s anything particularly attractive about the idea of making films that nobody wants to see. Or at least in that case, the films would have to be very, very cheap. I do respect the film artists who make that kind of choice, but then you have to be sure that you’re willing to restrict yourself to a particular category of budgets. As far as the audience is concerned, I believe that I always try to encourage an ongoing discussion with myself and other members of the film crew about basic questions of comprehension: How will this be understood? What kind of experience will this prompt? Who is likely to understand this? For example, when I was shooting *The One and Only*, we were discussing the characters and realised that although I and a couple of the other female members of the crew might find it amusing when a given character does such and such, there are a lot of people, who don’t happen to live where we live or eat the kind of food that we eat, who simply won’t get the point. It’s easy to get trapped in a kind of internal code, so in that sense I certainly do think about the audience, and in any event these issues really interest me. I think of film as a type of mass communication and I care about reaching a lot of people, or particular kinds of people. Admittedly, this is all very complicated and it’s frequently a matter of speculation. If you read the relevant American studies – and they’re based on a lot of experience in the area of audience research – you’ll see that they’re also wrong sometimes. It’s really a question of being very clear and of breathing life into what you create. That’s what excites people, and their responses aren’t necessarily governed by a lot of deep reflections. If the film has some life in it, then it’s off to a good start.”



Once In A Lifetime / Photo: Johan Paulin



Sonja Richter and Mads Mikkelsen in *Open Hearts* / Photo: Rolf Konow

BY MICHAEL KJÆR

**OPEN HEARTS
ELSKER DIG FOR EVIGT**

RELEASE 2002 Autumn
DIRECTOR Susanne Bier
SCREENPLAY Anders Thomas Jensen, Susanne Bier
PRODUCER Vibeke Windeløv
PRODUCTION Zentropa Entertainments4
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Peter Aalbæk Jensen
CATEGORY Drama
APPEARANCES BY Sonja Richter, Nikolaj Lie Kaas, Mads Mikkelsen, Paprika Steen
SALES Trust Film Sales / Avedøre Tværvej 10 / DK-2650 Hvidovre / t +45 3686 8788 / f +45 3677 4448 / post@trust-film.dk / www.trust-film.dk
FESTIVALS Danish Film Institute

What happens when tragedy strikes a perfectly ordinary family? How do they react? How do they go on with life? These are the central questions Danish director Susanne Bier poses and attempts to answer in her new feature *Open Hearts* made according to the Dogme rules. Bier assembled a powerful team for her seventh feature: Anders Thomas Jensen – whose previous work includes the scripts for Søren Kragh-Jacobsen’s Dogme film *Mifune* (1999), Kristian Levring’s Dogme film *The King is Alive* (2000), and his own *Flickering Lights* (2000) – wrote the screenplay with Susanne Bier, and the cast includes some of the best Danish actors and actresses: Nikolaj Lie Kaas, Paprika Steen, Mads Mikkelsen, Birthe Neumann, and Sonja Richter, who makes her debut.

A FATEFUL BLOW

“It’s about what happens when fate suddenly snaps its fingers and turns life upside down at a stroke. A young couple is looking forward to their wedding when a road accident befalls them. How do they react? The fragility of life is a theme that has always absorbed me, and it’s interesting that since 11 September it has absorbed the entire western world. It was very much in our minds while we were shooting. You think your biggest problem today is going to be getting the shopping done and suddenly your fiancé gets run over. It’s a knife blade into your life, for better or for worse. The “worse” is the event as it takes place; the “better” is what happens afterwards – that your desire and will to appreciate what you’ve got is intensified to such a degree.”

“I suppose it’s a modern problem: The foundations on which we have built our lives are far more fragile than we think, and so we are severely shaken when life turns out to have a will of its



Open Hearts / Photo: Rolf Konow



Director Susanne Bier / Photo: Leif Schiller

own. The modern aspect is our naïve belief that everything is controllable. As a result we are amazingly ill-equipped when the unexpected occurs. Tragedy is not an integral part of modern life the way it has been in other eras so we just don't fathom how tragic events can take place in our own lives. This incomprehension is not tragic per se, but one of its consequences is that we are shockingly bad at functioning amidst the tragedy when it occurs.

HUMOUR AND GRIEF

In her previous films Susanne Bier has concentrated on humour. Her two most recent films were unalloyed comedy, and although (or perhaps because) *Open Hearts* (to be confirmed) is on a tragic theme humour again plays a vital part. "Humour is a way of getting our heads round grief. I don't think it distances us from it. On the contrary - humour can be an extremely relevant way of relating to grief. Nikolaj Lie Kaas, who plays the young man stricken by the accident, very much uses humour to describe his own tragic predicament. I'd say that a good comedy is nearly always serious. It's simply the most effective way of putting across serious truths. That's the life-confirming aspect of my film: The lesson is that weeds will always find a way of growing through the tarmac no matter what. There is a dramatic force beneath the surface of the people my film portrays. It is so strong that it cannot be vanquished, and humour is vital to this process. I suppose that's what I mainly want to say with my film."

THE DOGME STYLE AND THE DRAMA

"The great advantage of working within the Dogme rules is that the moment you don't arrange lighting, for instance - as the rules say you mustn't - you enjoy fantastic freedom in relation to your cast. They can move around without regard for the lighting. But it is sometimes irritating not being able to see their eyes the way you could if you put a light up round about. I enjoyed making a Dogme film. My only real reservation is that the rule on sound actually trips up the whole idea of the Dogme

rules. The sound has to be recorded along with the images, and that makes recording it so difficult that it becomes a restrictive factor compared to the freedom otherwise embodied in the whole Dogme concept."

The Dogme films have proved to share an aesthetic approach, a kind of 'anti-aesthetics' close to documentary style, in Susanne Bier's opinion: "You can't superimpose an aesthetic approach on reality. You have to film in the street and accept the way it looks. This prevents you from putting aesthetics ahead of the plot and the characters. But although on the face of it the Dogme rules are anti-aesthetic the overall aesthetic is that they all more or less resemble documentaries."

This documentary style is to be found in Bier's film, crosscut with a compressed dramatic development that contributes to the film's special touch. The story takes place over a period of five or six weeks during which the leading characters all find their lives turned completely upside down. This combination of elements from the documentary aesthetics and more conventional, melodramatic films conveys a very special original mood to the film. "We don't describe the external effects of the drama. We could have included flashing lights and ambulances but it didn't interest us. We wanted to describe the inner effects of what happens. The focus may roughly be expressed as follows: We lower a barrier in front of these people as they move through life. What happens when they crash into it? Such material is highly dramatic. What happens when the direction in which you thought your life was proceeding is suddenly blocked? In that way the film differs from a pure documentary style by being incredibly dramatic. But it also differs from the way conventional films often portray dramatic events as it does not portray them in a spectacular fashion - literally speaking. As I say, there are no flashing lights and ambulances; something quite different is at stake!"

DANISH ACTORS THE FIRST FILM GENERATION

In the silent movie era Danish film bred the first international film star: Asta Nielsen. A clutch of talented young actors is successfully picking up the gauntlet. They're the best all-round actors in the country and they have a special talent for acting in front of the camera.

BY LISELOTTE MICHELSEN AND MORTEN PIIL



Jens Albinus in *The Bench* / Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

JENS ALBINUS, 1965

He had already played many major roles on stage when he made his feature debut as the choleric, visionary leader of the spasser commune in Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* in 1998. In this film he demonstrates the stubborn strength and temperamental menace that is his special feature. In *The Bench* (a drama of everyday life, 2000), he plays a large supporting role as an eternal student with a mental illness whose insanity explodes when his love is not requited. Here, too, Albinus reveals his ability to play complicated, possessed loners who try to intellectualize their way out of their inner turmoil. Albinus is good at portraying awkward characters, and the protagonist's struggle with himself and his background is also a vital motive force in his first leading role as the uncompromising, truth-seeking, perfectionist brain surgeon in *Facing the Truth* (2002) by Nils Malmros. Since 1999 Albinus has written and directed several plays to critical acclaim for small, experimental theatres.



Jesper Asholt in *Mifune* / Photo: Lars Høgsted

JESPER ASHOLT, 1960

He turned the supporting role into a lead when he played his biggest film part to date as the mentally retarded Rud in *Mifune*, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's Dogme film (1999), reacting with a child's unalloyed honesty and sense for the mystery of life while imbuing the character with a cunning, humorous undertone. Is Rud as simple as he looks? Asholt's vitality sheds liberating rainbow hues across the scenes he appears in and his performance brought him major Danish film awards for a portrait that very much contributed to gaining another award for the film, the Silver Bear at the Berlin Festival in 1999. Jesper Asholt has otherwise become a familiar name in minor film roles. He has appeared in over a score of films in just six or seven years. He is a

transformation artist of rare talent and plays the hyped-up advertising agency director and humble, mousey everyday Dane with equal credibility.

ANDERS W. BERTHELSEN, 1969

Alongside with Ulrich Thomsen he is the transformation artist non plus ultra of his generation. He is most celebrated for leading roles in two Dogme films: in *Mifune* (1999) he is the self-centred yuppie who develops into his retarded brother's guardian, and in *Italian for Beginners* (2000) he plays the sensitive priest, the self-effacing link between the lonely suburbanites of the film. Anders W. Berthelsen is no self-promoter either. Modest at interviews and quiet in behaviour he changes acting style as required from film to film. His neutral physiognomy becomes transformed from within in accordance with the character he is playing. He made his debut as a violent drug dealer in *Portland* (1996), rough and unspeaking. He became a household name in Denmark thanks to his portrayal of a charming but laid-back taxi driver in one of DR TV's most successful soaps, *Taxa* (*Taxi*, 1997-99). He recently starred in *Chop Chop* (2001), a black comedy in which he plays a petty criminal with little between the ears and even less money. Berthelsen's range is so enormous that it is hard to imagine the kind of role he could not play. As a graduate of the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance he is also much in demand in the theatre, playing serious drama and light comedy with equal aplomb.



Anders W. Berthelsen in *Italian for Beginners* / Photo: Lars Høgsted



Kim Bodnia in *In China They Eat Dogs* / Photo: Anders Askegaard

KIM BODNIA, 1965

He has been given the role of the dangerous man of Danish film. He made his breakthrough as the unpredictable student who toys with evil and unbridled satisfaction in Ole Bornedal's hit thriller *Nightwatch* (1994). But his most powerful performance came as

the tough drug dealer in trouble in Nicolas Winding Refn's psychological crime story *Pusher* (1996), where he generates a provocative impenetrability blended with a splash of pain in an explosive combination more familiar from performances by Robert de Niro and Al Pacino than most Danish movies. Violent, clad in mental armour, he maintains something enigmatic and self-sufficient in a role in which the macho pose is remorselessly worn away as he battles inner demons. In *Bleeder* (1999) by the same director he resumes his desperado character and in the black comedy *In China They Eat Dogs* (1999) he is seen as the brutal gang boss, a part he repeats in the prequel, *Old Men In New Cars* (2002). He is a graduate of the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance and his stage roles include Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*.

JESPER CHRISTENSEN, 1948

At the age of 52, after a huge number of major and minor roles on stage and screen he made a decisive breakthrough with box office success, critical plaudits and film awards for his leading role in Per Fly's feature *The Bench* (2000). Bitter, aggressive and raddled he simply was Kaj the self-destructive alcoholic who clings desperately to the remnants of his pride, drowning his self-loathing in booze and sarcasm until his daughter unexpectedly appears. With a marked sense for tragicomedy Jesper Christensen turns what is in many ways a dislikeable character into a moving, unsentimental portrait of a modern anti-hero. With over thirty films to his name Jesper Christensen is renowned as one of Denmark's most intelligent, wide-ranging character actors. His ability to switch between good nature and unpredictable menace has given him special status. He played a large role in *Minor Mishaps* (2002), which he helped to get started and which was a prize winner at this year's Berlin Film Festival. He has also enjoyed an extensive career on stage, with roles including the eponymous *Richard III* and *Faust*, while on TV he starred in *Le misanthrope* by Molière.



Jesper Christensen in *Minor Mishaps* / Photo: Connie Arnfred

PETER GANTZLER, 1958

He was splashed all over the front pages as the sex symbol of the year when he made his breakthrough in the successful TV soap *Taxa (Taxi, 1997-99)*, playing a tough, likeable, unsettled taxi driver who shuns responsibility. But he turned on a sixpence to play the self-effacing hotel receptionist with a straight parting in *Italian for Beginners* (2000) – a drastic change of character beyond the wildest imagination. It was an impressive total transformation because his bashful

receptionist with his impotence and sympathetic nature possessed the same utter credibility as his thoroughly recognizable city taxi driver. Since then he has played a related lead as the undertaker tied to his mother's apron strings in *One Hand Clapping* (2001), a comedy drama. Gantzler graduated from the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance in 1990 and has played a large number of parts in films, on TV and in the theatre since the mid 1980s.



Peter Gantzler in *One Hand Clapping* / Photo: Thomas Petri

IBEN HJEJLE, 1971

She is the strongest candidate for stardom among her generation of Danish actresses. In just two years (2000-2001) she played major parts in three English-language films including Stephen Frear's *High Fidelity* (1999), creating the strongest female character of the film as vinyl-freak John Cusack's girlfriend, Laura. With blond, sassy, sensual charisma that caused one US critic to compare her to Julie Christie and Marianne Faithfull, she plays women who combine sweetness and experience, humour and sobriety. Her Danish breakthrough came in *Mifune* (1999) as Liva, the classy hooker whose life is turned upside down when she seeks refuge as a housekeeper on a dilapidated farm. Hjejle finds spontaneous expression for both the painful experience of prostitution and a newfound, redemptive sense of life. Immediacy is her strength. She creates her best effects seemingly without meaning to. She plays the leads in the US movie, *Dreaming of Julia* (2001), a Cuban story from the 1950s, playing opposite Harvey Keitel, and in the British comedy *The Emperor's New Clothes* (2001) – an historical fantasy – opposite Ian Holm. In Denmark she recently played the female lead in *Old Men In New Cars*, a prequel to the action comedy *In China They Eat Dogs* (1999). She graduated from the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance in 1996 and went on to play a number of major stage roles.



Iben Hjejle in *Mifune* / Photo: Lars Høgsted



Sofie Gråbøl in *Mifune* / Framegrab

SOFIE GRÅBØL, 1968

At the age of thirty three Sofie Gråbøl has become something of a godmother to the new generation of Danish film actors and actresses. She has appeared in seventeen films, usually in the lead, and has received the Danish Academy and Critics' awards five times. Her development from a seventeen-year-old 'find' for teen roles to superb character actress is the best example of the way Danish film – independently of the stage – can breed an all-round actress of enormous range. She has no formal training but she has conquered the stage and screen by constantly developing as she has got older. The talent for heroines and character roles seems equally obvious in this pioneer. Before any audience became familiar with her, this teenage girl had made three features – Henning Carlsen's Gauguin film *Oviri* (1986), Astrid Henning-Jensen's *Early Spring* (1986) and Bille August's *Pelle the Conqueror* (1987). She became a specialist in playing young women in historic dramas until she turned up modern, witty and sexy in the thriller *Nightwatch* (1994). The smash hit comedies *The One and Only* (1999) and *Mifune* (1999) provided her with a new breakthrough as a character comedienne.



Ann Eleonora Jørgensen in *Italian for Beginners* / Photo: Lars Høgsted

ANN ELEONORA JØRGENSEN, 1965

She projects the still young but nevertheless experienced woman's perceptive knowledge of life, and her winning smile and unusually vivid, dark brown eyes can contain unrestrained frankness and bittersweet irony. She became a household name with her hairdresser Karen in the huge Dogme smash *Italian for Beginners* (2000) that is wowing US audiences this spring; her slightly stand-apart irony disappears completely in the role in favour of a more direct sensuality and emotionalism. The pain and grief at saying goodbye to her alcoholic mother give way to a wondrous joy at starting a new love affair. Maturity and

vulnerability go hand in hand in this perfectly rounded portrait, prior to which she was a highly esteemed supporting actress who excelled at the independent, unconventional kinds of women. She is also highly adept at comedy, as seen most recently in *One Hand Clapping* (2001). She graduated from the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance (1993).

NIKOLAJ LIE KAAS, 1973

Growing apace on stage and screen, after a whole range of highly acclaimed supporting parts Nikolaj Lie Kaas was given his first leading role as the Kaspar Hauser-like elder brother in the Dogme film *Truly Human* (2001). With his open, trusting, boyish face he encompasses a rare purity and plays without sentimentality the puzzled, naïve man child born into the strangest of all worlds: the Danish welfare state AD 2001. As early as 1991 he received the Danish Film Academy and the Danish Critic's awards for best supporting role as the young, bitter resistance fighter in Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *The Boys from St. Petri*, and won another Danish Academy Award in Lars von Trier's Dogme film *The Idiots* (1998), where he played the sensitive, boyish commune member Jeppe, who falls hopelessly in love. He revealed a flair for comedy as a cook in *In China They Eat Dogs* (1999) and an inept gangster in *Flickering Lights* (2000). Since graduating from the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance his stage roles include *Peer Gynt* in Ibsen's play at the Royal Danish Theatre.



Nikolaj Lie Kaas in *Truly Human* / Photo: Per Arnesen

SIDSE BABETT KNUDSEN, 1968

She shot to fame with a novel, liberating naturalness in the improvised *Lets Get Lost* (1997) about four Copenhagen twenty-somethings who drift through life dreaming of happiness. Sidse Babett Knudsen is among the First Ladies of Danish cinema's new wave. With spontaneity, musicality, and particularly her sense of fun she has created a series of characters that conceal eccentricity, lofty dreams and astonishing talents beneath seemingly ordinary appearances. Her four major roles and a range of supporting roles in films and on television speak for themselves: this is an actress blessed with the indefinable gift that is authentic silver screen charisma. She scored popularity by the bucket load in the leading role of confused beauty parlour assistant who meets true love in *The One and Only* (1999), the biggest Danish box office success in Denmark in recent years. She appears in a very different, forbidding guise as a company clerk afraid of human contact who excites desire in *Mona's World* (2001), a film built entirely around her. Sidse Babett



Sidse Babett Knudsen in *The One and Only* / Photo: Rolf Konow

Knudsen trained at the Théâtre de L'Ombre, Paris, from 1987 to 1990, and despite her declared preference for the silver screen she has appeared at a number of Copenhagen's most prominent theatres.

THOMAS BO LARSEN, 1963

In Thomas Vinterberg's Dogme hit *The Celebration* (1998) he plays a major role as the black sheep of the family, racist and male chauvinist. A dislikeable variation of his breakthrough role in another Vinterberg film, *The Greatest Heroes* (1996), the director's feature debut in which he plays a cheeky street lad who is not as tough as he would like to be. Low comedy wide boy or unadulterated thug - Thomas Bo Larsen demonstrates remarkable authenticity as either. But this qualified glazier has many other hues to his palette as he has proved in a wide range of short fiction films, TV dramas and features in which he dexterously turns his hand to anything from toffee-nosed pot-boiling artist to New Age hippie with his own pottery. Most recently he came across as the streetwise angel with a talent for rock in *Miracle* (2000, a children's musical), and as a romantic bank robber in *Mona's World* (2001, a romantic comedy). He has also appeared in a large number of major contemporary dramas for the stage by writers including Line Knutzon and Ole Bornedal.



Thomas Bo Larsen in *Miracle* / Photo: Lars Høgsted

TROELS LYBY, 1966

With his puppyish appearance he looks like the embodiment of the new man, kind, sensitive and weak, but with the potential to come good, and indeed it is his more dynamic facets that appear behind the reliable facade in his two greatest film roles. In the gay romantic comedy *Shake It All About* (2001) his leading character clenches his teeth without abandoning sensitivity when he sees his husband-to-be fall for a woman, and in the everyday drama *Okay* (2002) he



Troels Lyby in *Okay* / Framgrab

employs the same elegance and musicality to render the difficult supporting role as the non-confrontational unfaithful husband who is finally forced to make up his mind. He is a remarkable character actor of considerable range as his gentle evening school teacher in Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* (1998) and the corrupt cop whose soul is going down the tubes in *Edderkoppen* (*The Spider*, a TV series, 2000), show. He has also played a large number of parts on stage.



Mads Mikkelsen in *Bleeder* / Photo: Casper Sejersen

MADS MIKKELSEN, 1965

With his rough-hewn charisma he is currently Denmark's most popular male star, and at the same time one of the most highly respected young character actors. He made his decisive breakthrough on the silver screen last year as the indecisive bisexual protagonist of the comedy hit *Shake It All About*, in which he plays a charming but irresponsible 'Sunday child' with musicality and grace. In another massive audience success, the TV series *Rejseholdet* (*Unit One*, 2001-02) he has become an idol by going for the macho hard-hitting look. His high-cheeked Asiatic profile makes him quite unlike a traditional movie hero and his first parts were as hard, lowlife types; he played the callous drug dealer in Nicolas Winding Refn's internationally acclaimed *Pusher* (1996), for example, and in *Bleeder* (1999) by the same director he strikes a gentler tone as an introverted dreamer and video fanatic. In Ole Bornedal's grandiose international *I Am Dina* (2002) he has a large supporting role as the thrifty merchant. Mads Mikkelsen is a trained dancer and plays leading roles at many Danish theatres.

PAPRIKA STEEN, 1964

Her first major role - in *Okay*, a comedy-imbued drama of everyday life (2002) - shows the full extent of her talents. She plays the pushy Nete who finds life's knife at her throat when her family starts falling to pieces. Her dad is dangerously ill, her husband has a bit on the side, and her daughter is a teenage rebel. Paprika Steen's character, forceful, full of flaws, but first and foremost heartrendingly human, is one of the most powerful portraits of a woman Danish film has seen in the last few years. She made her name as a satire expert on stage and the television screen. Humour is inextricably combined with her film performances, often emerging as biting self-irony. On the surface she looks like a funny, rather naïve blonde but this is a front for a sensitive, vulnerable woman. Her witty remarks and laughter that ranges from mocking to deprecatory, are survival tactics for when life gets too painful, as it does for many of her characters, including the sorely tested daughter who witnesses terrible revelations at her father's 60th birthday celebration in *The Celebration* (Dogme, 1998). Paprika Steen played a supporting role in Lars von Trier's Dogme film, *The Idiots* (1998) and won the Danish Academy Award for her supporting role in the massive box office smash hit *The One and Only* (1999). In the last couple of years she has starred in leading roles at the Royal Danish Theatre (Denmark's national theatre).



Paprika Steen in *Okay* / Framegrab



Stine Stengade in *Kira's Reason - A Love Story* / Photo: Per Arnesen

STINE STENGADE, 1972

Beautiful in a slightly decadent, film-noir fashion one moment and unravellingly insane the next, Stine Stengade is difficult to pigeonhole. She made her silver screen breakthrough in the Dogme film *Kira's Reason - A Love Story* (2001) which brought her and its director, Ole Christian Madsen, the Danish Academy and Critics' awards. She plays Kira, a hypersensitive, manic

depressive in an uncompromising, desperately moving portrait of a woman who is simultaneously self-centred and self-pillorying as she tries painfully to adjust to normalcy. Prior to Kira, Stine Stengade had aroused considerable attention in the theatre, and in 2000 she was given a major supporting role as the classy love interest in a grand-scale, expressionist TV series, *Edderkoppen* (*The Spider*), also directed by Ole Christian Madsen. Stine Stengade is a graduate of the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance and appears regularly at many of Copenhagen's leading theatres.

ULRICH THOMSEN, 1963

Most familiar from the Dogme film *The Celebration* (1998) as the tormented Christian who has a major showdown with his father at the latter's 60th birthday celebration, a major role in which Thomsen with sublime understatement embodies the conflict between vacillation and vigour. His international success in the role has made him a sought-after supporting actor abroad; he played the Russian security chief in the 1999 James Bond film *The World is Not Enough*, a fisherman in Kathryn Bigelow's *The Weight of Water* (2000) and most recently a larger role in the eminent Chinese director Chen Kaige's first western film, *Killing Me Softly* (2002). But although he has made a dozen international movies Thomsen has far from abandoned Denmark, and remains a major name at home in a wide range of parts. He can play the decent man as he did in Anders Thomas Jensen's Oscar-winning *Election Night* (1998) but is just as convincing as a criminal cocaine wreck in the same director's box office smash *Flickering Lights* (2001). As a decided character actor he transforms himself from the inside, eschewing external aids. He is co-producing and playing one of the leads in Linda Wendel's *Baby* (2002). He is a graduate of the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance (1993).



Ulrich Thomsen in *The Celebration* / Photo: Lars Høgsted

MARIA WÜRGLER RICH, 1974

She is an actress who takes chances. Neither of the two films in which she has played the lead was made the traditional way. She made her breakthrough four months ago as the extremely shy, security-seeking Marianne in *Minor Mishaps* (2002), which aroused considerable attention in competition at this year's Berlin Film Festival. Rich was named a Shooting Star, and welcomed as a promising new character actress with a sense for the moving and the comic. The part of Marianne, who slowly breaks away from her father-dominated life, was one that Rich improvised her way

to by the Mike Leigh method, and she was one of the people on whose initiative the film was produced. She also plays the lead in *Baby* (not yet released), directed by Linda Wendel, and based on a novel by best-selling Danish author Kirsten Thorup. It was produced with no state funding by the director and two of the cast - Ulrich Thomsen and Jesper Christensen.



Maria Würgler Rich / Photo: Per Arnesen



Nikolaj Coster Waldau in *Enigma* / Photo: Bueno Vista Int.

NIKOLAJ COSTER WALDAU, 1970

Alongside with Ulrich Thomsen he is the most internationally oriented film actor of his generation. He played minor roles in films such as Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Enigma* (2001), and *Bent* (1996), and in 1999 he played the lead in the Norwegian co-production *Misery Harbour* as Espen Arnakke, the alter ego of the writer Axel Sandemose. He may look like a clean-cut movie hero but character acting clearly appeals to him more. He was something of a teenage idol as the shiny-cheeked law student on a slippery moral slope in *Nightwatch* (1994) but his most powerful performance to date is in the war thriller *Foreign Fields* (2000) in which he brings credibility and acute perception to his role as the gun-happy, brutalized sergeant. He graduated from The Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance in 1993.

In 2001 the publishing company Gyldendal published Morten Pii's encyclopedia 'Danske filmskuespillere - 525 portrætter', which contains 525 portraits of Danish actors.

THE DIRECTOR: DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE SERIOUS SIDE

OKAY



Director Jesper W. Nielsen / Photo: Jan Buus

“Comedy may be an escape from the things that really hurt”, says director Jesper W. Nielsen, whose third feature is a serious comedy about a modern mum and her family when life puts a knife to their throats.

BY LISELOTTE MICHELSEN

“Yes, why is the film called *Okay*?” Jesper W. Nielsen smiles raffishly. “It’s such a beautifully stupid American nothing word, enigmatical and equivocal, and terribly overused. It describes something in between, not too bad, the way everyday life so often is. Childhood and youth are huge extremes from “I’m going to hang myself” to “I’m having a ball, I’ll never die, I’m going to change the world”. In your thirties you start a family and take on responsibilities; you have to find some kind of equilibrium. *Okay* is about people in their late thirties and the impending midlife crisis when you say ‘Whoops, I’ve reached the middle of my life, I’ve got half left, and this is where I’ve got to’. You have to compromise, and if anyone asks, you say you’re okay”.

Okay is Jesper W Nielsen’s third feature and differs in many ways from the two others, *The Last Viking* and *Little Big Sister*. *Okay* is an amusing, moving story about Nete, whose throat life puts a knife to when her sick father comes to live with her and her husband. With the best intentions she steamrollers temperamentally ahead, trying to control everyone in her vicinity, keep her teenage daughter on a tight rein, and reconcile her brother with her father; the two of them haven’t been on speaking terms since her brother came out of the closet. Meanwhile, Christian, her husband, is having an affair with a dishy student.

THE MICRO CONFLICTS

Kim Fupz Aakeson wrote the script and right from the start he and the director agreed that *Okay* would be a mixture of comedy and drama. They both wanted the story to lean to the serious side; a priority that became even clearer as the script went through its various rewrites and while the film was being edited.

AYOK

“Comedies are nice because they float above the ground – so distant from real life, whereas the drama may be narcissistic and blinkered. But this distance may easily become an escape from the things that really hurt. We tried to combine comedy and drama and use the best things from each genre. In *Okay* we take the conflicts seriously. A minor argument about where dad’s going to sleep can be a drama as great as the Battle of Stalingrad if you take it seriously enough,” Jesper W. Nielsen says.



Framegrab

“The drama may lie in the way a word is accentuated, in a pause, or in what is unspoken. On the face of it, it’s easier to work with a clear plot full of external action rather than these inner psychological dramas. But Kim Fupz is a genius at portraying micro-conflicts in a way that makes them important and relevant – and when he succeeds the little, intimate story strikes deepest. The less drama there is, the more moving it becomes. There is a lot of humour in *Okay* as well; the humour of the embarrassing moment when you see through the characters and spot their vulnerability ... and where we recognize ourselves and use laughter as a shield.”

Initially the script partly attracted Jesper W. Nielsen because of its contemporary portrait of family life, but he was primarily fascinated by Nete. “She is a real heroine; the temperamental, energetic woman who looks round for solutions and fixes things, while you are constantly aware of anger inside her. If she is harsh and rejects those about her it’s in order to avoid getting hurt. There is strength in her drive and energy; she is courageous, with the guts to pull the skeletons out of the cupboards. She is also a



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person who cares; she tries to bring the family together in just the right way. But looking after other people is also a way of parrying the blows. She is surrounded by all these New Men who evoke your indignation so you feel like saying: “For goodness’ sake give her a hug! You love her! Don’t just stand there!”

LOVE SUPPRESSED

Jesper W. Nielsen doesn’t think there is any difficulty in working with a protagonist of the opposite sex. “Making a film about the opposite sex is quite delectable. Men wonder about women; we are puzzled by them; we think they act strangely. This kind of curiosity is good to work with, and Nete is familiar from real life. I am quite the opposite kind of person, more restrained and introverted, so there’s the attraction of opposites at work here; she seems very exotic to me.”

Jesper W. Nielsen underlines that he was well-supported by Paprika Steen, who took part in the process from the scriptwriting stage and helped to develop her character. Besides, he thinks it is easier to avoid the typical, one-dimensional beautiful-but-distant-woman cliché when the woman has the leading role. “It makes it easier to beat her up a bit and make her amusing. But one of the sexes will always be left a little to one side. In this film Christian has to play second fiddle”, Jesper W. Nielsen says; he sees Christian as the New Man incarnate, the type who grew up in the 1970s.

“We thought that if we were sensitive and had our feminine side, we’d be all right. But it’s not enough.

It’s great that the traditional gender roles have been changed and that men do a bit more in the kitchen – in their own way, as if the kitchen was a garage – and that women pay the bills. But if the man in the house is to emerge as a human being he needs vigour. It’s no good being like Christian and concealing things, being scared to come out with them. You have to have the guts to act and take a few blows. Otherwise the whole thing turns into emotional fumbling and neither men nor women can be happy with that.”

The family in the film is in a crisis, and according to Jesper W. Nielsen, this reflects what the nuclear family is going through in modern society. But *Okay* is also about love that has slipped into oblivion, suppressed love, the love that means more to us than we believe. “We have to go to the extent of losing it before we realize that we’ve screwed up and not cherished it enough. This goes for all the characters in the film, just as it goes for lots of people in family life,” the director says.

REALISM AND POETRY

Whereas Jesper W. Nielsen’s previous features, which received critical acclaim but did less well at the box office were fairytale fables in pictures imbued by fantasy-like, sometimes almost surrealistic sets, *Okay* is visually rooted in realism. But the cinematographer is the same, namely Erik Zappon, with whom Jesper W. Nielsen has worked on most of his short fiction films and features. “As a director it is very confidence-inspiring to have a person you know so well and with whom you share references; we can almost predict what the other will do while the cameras are rolling. But actually we are very different; he is much more of an aesthete than me, but that allows me to pull him in the opposite direction. We complement each other well.”

For *Okay* they chose a visual style that is simple and everyday-like. “*Okay* is about being there for one another and being there in real life, so keeping things realistic was important. Visual subtleties didn’t fit the story. We concentrated on bringing out the acting and used a visual idiom straight from real life: this is what things look like – a crowded kitchen, a mess, a

OKAY

wide shot, there you are, and there they are! No conjuring tricks. We didn't do Dogme and the shots are lush and large-scale, but we deliberately avoided overloading them with tricks and tracking shots. The more realistic the story, the more powerful it is."

Jesper W. Nielsen had wanted to use a style closer to reality and a simpler idiom for a long time. "Of course you have to win the tricks elsewhere in a film like *Okay*. Very little is posed; you can't make a scene work by creating a surrealistic atmosphere; it's vital for the acting to be authentic and for the audience to believe in the characters. As a director you run into the problem that when you know the story too well you lose your sense of what's funny. At one stage during shooting we started doing things that were a bit more filmic. Our nerves rather got the better of us. However, we cut them because they didn't fit the story. Nevertheless the film now has considerably more poetry than I dared hope."



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TAKING CHILDHOOD SERIOUSLY

It is striking that Jesper W. Nielsen's children's films are fairytale-like and visually playful, while his feature for grown-ups is imbued with matter-of-factness and stripped of frills. But the visual choices he made were determined by the scripts and not by a change in his view of the world.

"There is just as much surrealism and dreaming in adult life as in childhood. As I've got older, though, I've become better at staying within reality. In the past I was probably more escapist."

Although his initial reaction when asked about his

previous films was "Oh, can't we forget about talking about those children's films?" his keenness rises when we start talking about the difference between making films for children and films for adults.

"To distinguish children's films from adult films is absurd. The idea that adults should only see films about adults is ridiculous. It's just as important and interesting for adults to see films about childhood; who the hell denies it? After all, our childhood is the starting point for our lives. But apparently the way things are right now nothing serious may be said about it. The film censors ban it. There is no adult audience because a completely awful snobbery among adults dictates that seeing films with child protagonists is beneath them. As a result part of our culture is vanishing and that angers me. Childhood is no less serious by dint of being childhood; on the contrary, there is a huge gap between what children are and the way adults want to see them. Making cute, cuddly kiddies' films has never interested me. I like crossing the line and ending up out of my depth. Unfortunately art films for children can't be made any longer because they don't attract audiences, despite the fact that children like these films when shown them at cinema clubs and places like that."

NOT JUST FOR AMUSEMENT

It would be fine if more art films were made for children, he thinks, not least because they would accustom new audiences to the idea that there is more than just mainstream cinema. "The last couple of years in Denmark have been about making box office successes. Danish film has an impressive share of the market, too. But remember that if you attract



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people to the cinema you have to have something to tell them. I am sure there will soon be more films with depth and more focus on society. That sort of thing always comes in waves. The cinemas have been won over and now it's time for depth and content while still keeping the cinemas."



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Jesper W. Nielsen would like to see a change to the popcorn and Coca-Cola culture in Danish cinemas. Just for a start, how about writing "Not just for amusement" on cinema fronts - the motto above the stage of the Royal Danish Theatre?

"We are in the entertainment business and people want a thrill. But I've always tried to put some substance into my films. I want to hold up a mirror for us to see ourselves and what we're like. You feel forgiveness when you see your own ill-humour and stupidity on display - suddenly it doesn't seem so bad, and perhaps you don't need to deny those sides of you. It is very redeeming to see people acting stupidly. As a director I want to describe sides of life in a way that opens up new paths and new thought sequences in the audience. If just a couple of people feel like that when they watch the film you light up like a Christmas tree. After all, at bottom that's why you make films."

JESPER W. NIELSEN's work as a director includes *Veiled Hearts* (*Hjerter i slør*, short fiction, 1992), *The Bogeyman* (*Buldermanden*, short fiction, 1996), *The Last Viking* (*Den sidste viking*, 1997), *Little Big Sister I* (*Lykkefanten*, short fiction, 1997), *Little Big Sister II* (*Forbudt for børn*, 1999), and *Okay* (*Okay*, 2002). He has also edited a number of features including *Black Harvest* (*Sort høst*, 1993) and *The Greatest Heroes* (*De største helte*, 1997).

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT JESPER W. NIELSEN'S OKAY REFER TO 'DANISH FILMS 2002-2003' IN THIS ISSUE.

THE SCRIPTWRITER:

AMBUSHING

MY SENSE OF LOGIC

Kim Fupz Aakeson is one of the most prolific Danish scriptwriters today. His stories have become more serious but his features are all populated by zany, loveable characters and borne along by everyday stories with absurd twists to them. His films provide satirical snapshots of reality, packed with sure-fire dialogue and unforgettable one-liners.



Scriptwriter Kim Fupz Aakeson / Photo: Jan Buus

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN

“The plot of *Okay* comes from a couple I know who took the wife’s sister into their home because she was dying. But she didn’t die after all, and she stayed there. It’s the kind of thing that makes you think “Wow!” and that’s a good starting point for a plot. I had the whole film on paper in just six lines, and with such a clear pitch it was easy for other people to make up their minds. I could tell the idea grabbed people. I wouldn’t like to try to define what a good story is, but you usually know one when you see one.”

“When I’m writing a script I use the recipe I was given at film school [the National Film School of Denmark]. It has six points: introduction, plot point 1, and what causes it, the midpoint, plot point 2, and the outro: where is the protagonist now in relation to plot point 1? I think frameworks are inspiring and fun. When you’re planning a hundred-page script like *Okay* it helps to know that on about page 50 the worst conceivable thing happens: Nete is told by the doctor that they can’t tell her when her dad will die after all. I also knew that on page 23 to 25 Nete would find out that her father had a fatal illness and decide to take him into her home. That’s plot point 1. What you have to do is to humanize this six point model. The audience must be gripped by what happens to these people. My litmus test is to give the story to other people to read. Will it grab them? Writers are blind and need to have their scripts read by fresh eyes.”

THE THIRST PRINCIPLE

“Unlike packed lunches, where we leave the best thing till last, I always take the best bit first. I jump about in the script rather than writing sequentially. There’s an attraction to this approach that I really think one should simply follow. But our job is to make every scene imperative, and when you manage to fill with human interest a scene that’s only included for the sake of the plot you are thrilled to bits”.

What kinds of scenes do you like writing most?

“The scene in *Okay*, for example, when the cabinet maker visits the undertaker to choose his coffin and

OKAY



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insists on good craftsmanship. That was fun to write. Actually, real life is very helpful where scenes are concerned. At my mother's funeral several years ago we carried the coffin down the aisle but one of the vergers stopped us. He announced with regret that the hearse hadn't arrived and we'd have to carry the coffin back up the aisle again. Talk about a turning point! I included it in *Minor Mishaps*. You suddenly see the whole world in a new way - it's great to act, great to direct and great to come up with. Scenes like that often end by getting a bit in the way, like darlings you really ought to kill, but sometimes you should refrain from doing so because we also live off enthusiasm and the story-telling urge; a darling may give you a sense of life and unpredictability."

"I always try to give each scene a turning point. In *Okay*, for example, there is a scene in which Nete realizes her husband has a mistress but he doesn't yet know that she knows. I could have got straight to the point and made Nete ask what he was thinking of. But instead she talks about his undrinkable coffee. She has the ball, she knows it, and she enjoys it. It goads us. Why is Nete talking about his coffee? I once

had a friend who, when he was really thirsty, would put his juice down on the table without drinking it. He'd say 'I'm enjoying my thirst'. It's rather like what story-tellers do. Of course we have to get to the end of the story, but the detours are as important as getting there as straight as the crow flies."

"With material from everyday life the job is to find the exotic. Doing a story about a taxi driver who lives a taxi driver life is too dull. But if you can find the special angle his story becomes interesting. Conversely, to do a story about gangsters I'd describe the way they take their kids to day care. How do they have dinner parties? What happens when a mafia boss gets dumped by his girlfriend? Perfectly everyday sorts of things. Besides, 'normal people' are just people we don't know. If we get to know them we discover how strange they actually are. 'Normal people' is a huge falsehood; we are all special with our own temperaments and ways of tackling the world. The human race is a bottomless pit."

A TOUCH OF EMPATHY

"When I realized I was going to be doing a lot of writing I learned how to type with ten fingers. As a result I don't have to wait for my fingers when I'm thinking. My thoughts go straight through my fingers and things appear on the page before I have time to consider them; sometimes they even ambush my sense of logic and later survive all the rewrites because they simply happen to be good."

"Working on character is my Achilles heel. It's always been difficult for me to create complicated characters. But I am determined to learn. You can benefit considerably from approaching the cast and creating the characters with them. We ought to make more use of read-throughs. It's a silly place to save money."

You want to hear people's views during the creative process but once the film is finished you don't like test screenings. Why not?

"My first encounter with test screenings was a shock to me. I saw these questionnaires asking the audience how much they liked the protagonist, for example. I

could feel the artist in me squirming. It's sensible to ask them if they understand the plot but I think asking them how much they like the protagonist is problematical. Shakespeare's *Richard III* proves we don't need a likeable protagonist as long as there is a touch of empathy there. The questions reveal a desperate desire to be liked. But of course it's easy for me to say; it's not my money at stake.

MORE ASSAULTS ON COMEDY

How do you feel about endings? Your films are generally unambiguously happy ones?

"In a romantic comedy it's practically inevitable. But I like the way we are now able to discuss endings. The Danish film industry has undergone a mutual grand tour in the last few years with a sequence of well-made everyday comedies with endings you can guess at quite early on in each film. The time has come to kick our comedies up the backside and move on. I'm picking up a feeling of tiredness with feel-good comedies. I think we'll see more assaults on the genre in the next few years. Comedy won't be pure comedy, tragedy won't be pure tragedy; and we'll probably see more films derived from improvisations. Whatever happens we must not stagnate as a "country that makes whimsical everyday comedies."



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KIM FUPZ AAKESON: Scriptwriter, cartoonist and author, born 1958, started illustrating magazines and newspapers in the early 1980s. He went on to write books and has now published over 40 titles ranging from cartoon albums, children's books, novels for teenagers, collections of short stories and novels. From 1995 to 1996 he studied scriptwriting at the National Film School of Denmark. Feature scripts include *Hannibal & Jerry* (*Hannibal & Jerry*, 1997) *The One and Only* (*Den eneste ene*, 1999), *Miracle* (*Mirakel*, 2000), *Minor Mishaps* (*Små Ulykker*, 2002) and *Okay* (*Okay*, 2002).



Framegrabs

The Dogme films have enjoyed audience and critical acclaim but what do the four Dogme brethren think of them? Was the project also a success by the yardstick of the intentions of the Dogme manifesto? In *The Purified* documentarist Jesper Jargil assembles Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Kristian Levring to evaluate the Dogme works.

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN & LISELOTTE MICHELSEN

“For the last ten years film has been rubbish!”

It was 1995 at the Odéon theatre, Paris, and Lars von Trier had been invited to take part in a conference on the future of cinema. When his turn came to speak his face was deadpan as he wrote off a decade of filmmaking before showering the audience with red pamphlets. The pamphlets contained a two-page manifesto he had dubbed Dogme 95. “Today a technological storm is raging of which the result is the elevation of cosmetics to Gods,” it said. “As never before, the superficial action and the superficial movie are receiving all the praise.”

The first page of the manifesto was an analysis of the crisis in film while page two was a recipe showing how it could regain credibility. Lars von Trier and his colleague Thomas Vinterberg had drawn up a set of artistic rules that they swore to obey in their future films, sticking to meagre rations, with no expensive camera effects, no sets, no lighting, no background music, no post-production work on image or sound, no superficial action, and no guns!

“I swear to refrain from creating a ‘work’, as I regard the instant as more important than the whole ... I swear to do so by all means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations. Thus I make my Vow of Chastity – Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg.”

THE HEART OF DOGME

The rest is history: it is *The Celebration*, *The Idiots*, *Mifune*, *The King Is Alive*, *Italian for Beginners*, *Truly Human*, *Kira’s Reason – A Love Story*. It is one of the most important movements in the cinema of the nineties, described and analyzed in innumerable articles and books. One would think that no stone remained unturned.

“That’s just not the case”, Jesper Jargil responds. He is currently putting the finishing touches to *The Purified* – his documentary on Dogme 95. “Despite all that’s been said and written about Dogme I spent almost a year simply figuring out what the manifesto actually meant. What does it mean, for example, that directors must not perceive things aesthetically? Does it mean that the cinematographer must create blurred images and force himself to film from ugly angles? What does it really mean when you say that the moment must come before the whole? What is at the heart of Dogme?”

In search of answers to his questions Jesper Jargil assembled the four original Dogme brethren – Lars von Trier (*The Idiots*), Thomas Vinterberg (*The Celebration*), Søren Kragh-Jacobsen (*Mifune*) and Kristian Levring (*The King Is Alive*) – and showed them what his little DV camera had captured as he flitted around them while they were shooting their Dogme films. The four directors were now given a chance to study and comment on one another’s creative approach to the Dogme rules for the first time, and Jesper Jargil’s camera recorded their unusual meeting for posterity, a meeting that continued for a day and a night in an atmosphere devoid of ceremony.

DEVIL-MAY-CARE ENERGY

“Faith in the rules bred a devil-may-care energy in all four directors”, Jesper Jargil says. “Paradoxically, eschewing the technological possibilities film enjoys was extraordinarily liberating and a great challenge to the imagination.

“Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, for instance, used the rules as a means of returning to a state of filmic innocence. He is the most experienced director of the four and he saw Dogme as a chance to go back to the happy days when he was not burdened by large budgets, big film crews and ‘super-aesthetics’. He wanted to go back to ‘joyful filmmaking’, as he calls it. Instead of spending time and energy on crane shots, lighting and make-up, with the Dogme rules in his hand he was able to concentrate on contact with his cast.”

According to Jesper Jargil Lars von Trier was the director of the four who liberated himself from the script the most.

“Trier wrote the script for *The Idiots* in just four days and gave it to the cast as a trampoline they could jump from. The takes ended up by moving in many different directions and Lars shot sequences lasting an hour at a time, providing enough time to invoke a state of emotion that actually became the motive force of the film,” Jesper Jargil says.

INHALING LIFE

The Purified also includes a beautifully clear, easy-to-understand description of the ten Dogme rules, and it is spiced with cuts from the director’s Dogme films. Occasionally Jesper Jargil also lets us hear from

THE PURIFIED



Framegrabs

Mogens Rukov, the head of the scriptwriting faculty at the National Film School of Denmark, who co-wrote *The Celebration*, *The Idiots* and *Mifune*. “Dogme gave the directors enormous freedom”, Mogens Rukov says in the film. “Instead of remembering that they were preparing something for a take, they were able to consider it as something taking place in reality that was *by the way* being captured on film.”

Jesper Jargil agrees. “When making traditional films directors try to control every aspect; the idea is to make the film as perfect as possible. But when they make Dogme films they have to seek out surprise and they must be prepared to be ambushed. Reality must arise on the spot, so to speak. They have to capture something that *is* instead of something that *pretends* to be. The point is to capture the moment of truth even if this particular moment doesn’t perfectly fit into the structure planned for the film. They must go out and inhale life, as Lars von Trier puts it”, Jesper Jargil says, having chosen *The Purified* as his title because Dogme is a purification process in which everything superficial is purged from the narrative.

CHALLENGING VON TRIER & CO.

The Purified might easily have turned out to be a pleasant, slightly dull tribute to the Dogme brethren, but the great strength of the film is that Jesper Jargil challenges von Trier & Co. by mischievously reminding them how their films were actually made. The brethren pick up Jargil’s gauntlet good-naturedly, with a genuine desire to search their hearts.

“We see four guys who signed up to obey a set of cunningly-devised rules and regulations; they get together after a harvest of awards and international celebrity. But does outward success equate with inner success? Were they faithful to the Dogme rules? Did they preserve their artistic integrity? That’s what we examine in the film,” Jesper Jargil explains.

“The rules are simple and specific and on the face of it you’d think they were easy to obey. But letting go of convention and relinquishing the practical routines your experience has taught you is not as easy as that. Film directors have budgets to stick to. Six weeks had been allowed for shooting each Dogme film and if the director had let go completely he might have ended up without a single useable shot once the six weeks were up”, Jesper Jargil says.

He confronts the Dogme brethren with clips from their films that reveal major or minor breaches of the rules, ranging from Thomas Vinterberg’s cameraman, who put a tea towel over a window to mute the light in one scene to Lars von Trier’s use of professional porno models in the notorious sex orgy scene in *The Idiots*.

BREAKING THE RULES

“Remember, the director has to get the scene in the can. When Tomas Vinterberg, for example, started shooting that scene the day was overcast. A few hours later the weather had become sunny. To ensure continuity from edit to edit the cinematographer – more or less instinctively – manipulated the light. To assuage his conscience he didn’t use black film drapes but a prop he found on the spot, namely a tea towel”, Jesper Jargil smiles. He admits that it is sometimes hard to decide whether a breach of the rules is serious or merely of academic interest.

“Fundamentally, however, Dogme means that if you encounter an obstacle you must use it. It must be a source of inspiration. If you can’t work within the limitations the obstacle imposes you must come up with an alternative,” Jesper Jargil says, citing the scene from *Mifune* in which Kresten (Anders Berthelsen) performs a Samurai dance on the roof of a high-rise building. “The script states that the scene takes place on a beautiful summer morning. But that morning there was a howling gale and it was raining cats and dogs. Normally you’d postpone the scene till another day. But in true Dogme spirit Søren Kragh-Jacobsen decided to shoot the scene, thus imbuing it with a different mood but certainly not rendering it any less interesting. It’s a good example of letting yourself be ambushed by the moment.”

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

“The interesting thing about Lars von Trier is that he makes public commitments. He draws up manifestos and sets of rules, thus involving everyone else. He gives us the change to learn about an act, which is usually kept secret and shrouded in mystery. Von Trier opens the door into art’s secret chamber; it’s absolutely fascinating. Just what governs the process of artistic creation? Some think we destroy art if we reveal the mechanisms behind it. I don’t feel that way at all. I think it just reveals even more layers. We enter new layers of magic that are even more fascinating.”

THE PURIFIED / DE LUTREDE

CATEGORY Documentary

RELEASE August 2002

DIRECTOR Jesper Jargil

SCREENPLAY Jesper Jargil

CINEMATOGRAPHY Jesper Jargil

EDITOR Camilla Schybert; Consultant: Janus Billeskov Jansen

SOUND DESIGNER Morten Holm, Jan Juhler

MUSIC Joachim Holbek

APPEARANCES Lars von Trier, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Kristian Ievring, Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov

PRODUCER Helle Ulsteen

PRODUCTION Jesper Jargil Film

SALES Jesper Jargil Film

TECHNICAL DATA 58 min. / DigiBeta:16:9

/colour / Stereo SR / Danish and English dialogue, English subtitles

■ Four Danish directors form a brotherhood, swearing solemnly to uphold ten incontrovertible rules that made it impossible to make films in the usual way. In *The Purified* Jesper Jargil documents the artists’ visions through to their completed films. Afterwards he confronts them with their actions and results – which are not always in accordance with the spirit of Dogme. With *The Purified* Jesper Jargil has created a unique record of a major epoch in the history of the cinema.

The Purified concludes *The Kingdom of Credibility*, Jargil’s trilogy on the creative processes of the cinema focusing on Lars von Trier. The other films in the trilogy are *The Exhibited* (2000), a documentary on Trier’s *The World Clock*, a living art exhibition in Copenhagen 1996, and *The Humiliated* (1998), which shows the making of *The Idiots*.



Director Jesper Jargil. Photo: Jan Buus

STRUGGLING WITH YOUR CONSCIENCE



Photo: Kæmte Film

NILS MALMROS
Born 1944

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY
FEATURE FILMS

1973: *Lars Ole 5th grade*
(*Lars-Ole 5.c*)
1977: *Boys* (*Drenge*)
1981: *Tree of Knowledge*
(*Kundskabens træ*)
1983: *Beauty and the Beast*
(*Skønheden og udyret*)
1989: *Århus by Night*
(*Århus by Night*)
1992: *Pain of Love*
(*Kærlighedens smerte*)
1997: *Barbara* (*Barbara*)
2002: *At kende sandheden*
(*Facing the Truth*)

Facing the Truth is produced by
Thomas Heinesen, Nordisk Film.
Release: November 2002.

Nils Malmros is currently putting the finishing touches to his ninth feature, *Facing the Truth*.

BY MICHAEL KJÆR

A retired brain surgeon is driven by his conscience to review a number of patient files from the period when he was head of a department of neurosurgery at around the time of the Second World War. He wants to find out exactly what happened as regards Thorotrast, which was used to make blood vessels visible on X-ray. Thorotrast was later discovered to be carcinogenic. A reporter gets hold of the story and events unfold with a thriller-like tension arising from the two men's very different views and motives. But beneath this plot another story gradually emerges: From the framework of the present the film goes back in time, portraying the aged doctor's life from child to man, and soon an image emerges of a man engaged in a tragic struggle with himself, his perfectionism, his uncompromising nature, and his conscience.

The doctor's name is Richard Malmros and in the film he receives help to review the files from his own son, none other than the director of the film, Nils Malmros.

RETURNING FROM THE SEA

Since his debut in 1968 Nils Malmros has developed a unique ability to describe young people's loss of innocence when they encounter the adult world, as we saw in *Tree of Knowledge* (1981) and *Pain of Love* (1992) amongst others. Malmros, who writes his own scripts, professes his debt to the auteur tradition inspired by the directors of the French nouvelle vague. From

the editing table at Nordisk Film in Copenhagen he talks passionately about his work on his new feature, *Facing the Truth*. "My aim was to make a film about my father, whatever themes it might include. Many of my films have been about the trauma of sex but *Facing the Truth* is about another aspect of growing up: the burden of conscience. The film contains a reference to Francois Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups* (*The 400 Blows*, 1959). Its closing scene in which the boy ends up by the sea is a metaphor for the future opening up. My story is the reverse: the boy returns from the sea to face the old conflict. My film is about the man who carries the conflicts of the past within him."

SETTLING YOUR AFFAIRS

Nils Malmros has been thinking about this film for years. Concurrently with his career in cinema he has graduated in medicine. He spent the last two years of his training working on his father's old ward in order to get a feel for the problems brain surgeons face. He was also able to provide the hands for the surgery scenes in the film. At the end of the 1970s Nils Malmros taped his mother as she described her happy childhood; afterwards he asked his father if they couldn't make a similar tape recording of him. He replied that his memories were of such a kind that he would rather not relive them. "But then in 1995, when he was 90 years old and facing a dangerous operation, he asked me if we shouldn't make the tape after all. So we sat there for four or five afternoons at my home and he told me about his entire life. My story is very much based on the tapes we made. I already had plans to make this film at the time. But I never asked my father for permission to do so, and it remained unspoken between us. On the other hand he knew perfectly well how I usually use what I know."



Jens Albinus incarnates Malmros' forceful father who ended his days in dejection. Photo: Erik Aavatsmark



Director Natasha Arthy / Photo: Robin Skjoldborg

DOGME

A COLD SHOWER

BY MICHAEL KJÆR

When the American professor David Bordwell visited Denmark recently he was interviewed for FILM #21, where he said that he saw in the Dogme manifesto a neo-realistic aesthetic that was a rejection of artifice and conventional plots but excluded a number of genres at the same time. This challenge appears to be meeting

with a response. The young director Natasha Arthy, whose career includes television programmes for public service broadcaster DR TV, directed a short fiction film for children in 1997 that she called *Penny Plain* and proceeded to her first feature, *Miracle*, in 2000. Now she is ready to shoot her first feature for the adult market. It will be made according to the Dogme rules laid down by Lars von

Trier and Thomas Vinterberg in 1995 and it will be called *The Dog's Called ...* Natasha Arthy's previous films demonstrate her particular talent for visualizing grotesque, fantastical stories for children, and *Miracle* was none other than a musical for the young.

FILM met the director and Kim Fupz Aakeson, who has written the script, on a spring day in Copenhagen to ask them about the challenges of working within the Dogme rules and their desire to turn them in their very own direction. Although *The Dog's Called ...* will be a Dogme film it is also quite obvious that it will be the work of a director who loves glittering gold dresses and characters who burst into song!

THE PLOT

"The film tells the story of a woman who finds it hard to face the difficult things in life: things that may hurt others, unpleasantness. She is asked to phone the doctor on behalf of a dear friend to make sure his HIV test is okay. It isn't, but she can't find it in her to tell him", Kim Fupz Aakeson says. Natasha Arthy continues: "The situation is all the more stressful because the plot takes place over a three day period; we meet her just before her wedding. It's about not being able to say how you feel or figure out what is really deep down inside you. It's about three people who suffer from this, people who can't get the words out, daren't ask, and don't want to listen. So the problems suddenly surge over them, compounded many times, and they have to come to grips with them in the course of the three days covered by the film. The important thing about the film is that figuring out how we really feel can be extremely tough when there's so much we have to relate to."

"there is still a certain sassiness or rawness about Dogme: "Hey! We'll just damned well do it!"

Kim Fupz Aakeson isn't afraid of challenging the Dogme rules in partnership with Natasha Arthy. "It'll be a feel-either-way film. We've picked some of melodrama's features: It'll be really serious and cruel in places, and very funny in others. We want to challenge the Dogme rules in the direction of realistic everyday portraits. It'll turn out to be either absolutely fascinating or a complete disaster. Films cost a lot to make so

you are often not allowed to play around; there's a great deal of caution associated with filmmaking, whereas there is still a certain sassiness or rawness about Dogme: "Hey! We'll just damned well do it!"

THE DOGME RULES

The rule on sound and music is one of which they are particularly conscious:

Rule No. 2: The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot).

Kim Fupz Aakeson explains: "Stylistically the music will be very important. A little trio has been written into the plot. Natasha didn't think films could be made without music, so we decided to challenge the strict Dogme rules on sound this way. The fun thing about rules like that is challenging them. So it'll be possible to release a neat little sound track. We thought that was something."

Although Natasha Arthy is going to challenge the Dogme rules through her penchant for musicals she is happy to give in to the limitations intended by the rules.

"Dogme will be a huge challenge to me because I am used to thinking so much in terms of form, lavish costumes and sets. I was terrified at first: "I can't make Dogme films! Where will my gold dresses come in?" But Dogme really suits our plot because it means I won't be seduced by the gorgeous pictures and sumptuous cars I'm so fond of. Under Dogme you have to keep the story in mind the whole time. Having a really good story makes me dependant on the plot in quite a new way." Kim Fupz Aakeson concludes: "One of the things Dogme can do is to help other directors get back to basics and take a new look at the whole medium. You develop tried and tested ways of doing things, and Dogme can be a much-needed cold shower before you continue your career in traditional films again."

The Dog's Called ... (Og hunden hedder ...) is being produced by Birgitte Hald, Nimbus Film, and is scheduled for a February 2003 release.

NATASHA ARTHY
Born 1969

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

1997: *Penny Plain* (*Fanny Farveløs*, short fiction)
2000: *Miracle* (*Mirakel*)
2003: *The Dog's Called ...* (working title, Dogme) (*Og hunden hedder ...*)



Little Big Girl / Photo: Nille Leander

LITTLE BIG FILMS



Catch That Girl / Photo: Jens Juncker Jensen



Wallah Be / Photo: Per Arnesen



En som Hodder / Photo: Erik Aavatsmark

“The kids ducked behind the chairs when it was scary, cried when it was sad, and clapped when things went well”, Morten Køhlert says. He is one of five young Danish directors who want to enthral young audiences with serious, entertaining tales told in a modern film idiom.

BY RALF CHRISTENSEN

“*Adult* was our codeword. To the film unit it meant that we had to be just as ambitious and make the film just as splendid, exciting and realistic as if it had been a film for adults.”

The director of *Catch That Girl*, Hans Fabian Wullenweber, sets the tone for five young directors who have made or are on their way with a new children’s film. The titles of the films are *Catch That Girl*, *Little Big Girl*, *Someone like Hodder*, *Wallah Be* and *Youth Film* (English title to be announced); the five directors are Hans Fabian Wullenweber, Morten Køhlert, Pia Bovin, Henrik Ruben Genz, and Anders Gustafsson. They are all graduates in direction from the National Film School of Denmark, and one thing they share in common is that they do not want to distinguish between children’s films and ‘ordinary’ films.”

They say that a good children’s film is one that unites depth and entertainment in a modern filmic idiom. They aim to address their audience as equals, thus continuing the Danish tradition in films for children and young adults.

AFRAID OF TEARS

Morten Køhlert’s *Little Big Girl*, based on ‘Hungerbarnet’, a novel by celebrated Danish authoress Cecil Bødker, is set in 1850. When Tinke’s mother and father die she is left all alone in the wilderness until she meets Laurus, a cowherd of her own age. Together they bury Tinke’s mother.

“Many adults who read the script thought it was incredibly macabre to have them bury the mother”, Morten Køhlert says. “But I really don’t think children see it that way. Children have a much more down-to-earth attitude to life and death. I think it’s the adults who think on behalf of the children “Oh, dear, oh, dear”. When Tinke and Laurus bury Tinke’s mother children think “It’s a good thing she could bury her at last because that’s what she’d promised her”. It’s a really good scene. I was most surprised when we did test screenings for school children. Once one class had been to the cinema to see it rumours soon started spreading about the film. Some parents with eight or nine-year-old children from another class phoned to ask if we thought it’d be suitable for their children. “The other kids say it’s so sad”, the parents told us anxiously. I don’t understand their concern. I’d understand if it involved something too violent or blood-curdling, something that might terrify their children. But apparently it is better to giggle at lightweight entertainment: I think it’s sad that some parents want to deprive their kids of powerful experiences in the cinema.”

CREDIBILITY

Asked what makes a good children’s film the five directors say you need a good story with something at stake. The emotions of the characters must be taken seriously and conflicts must be genuine.

The five directors tackle situations and settings that are problematical but important for children to handle. They want to make their audience think but to entertain as well. Hans Fabian Wullenweber says he wants to “take my audience on a journey – but one anchored in their everyday lives”. He continues: “We had to keep the tempo up throughout the film because we know that kids today pick things up very quickly;

their eyes are highly tuned. We used lots of crosscutting and had several subplots running at the same time. We also wanted to visualize live and death, high and low, and so we tried as far as possible to shoot from below and above. We wanted the widest scope in the framing that we could achieve. There would be wide shots and ultra close-ups; and we used monochromatic colours. When it's hot it's really hot!"

NOBODY SWEARS LIKE THAT

The same attitude to the film palette is shared by Anders Gustafsson, a Swedish director resident in Denmark. His forthcoming youth film is set in a hostel for young adults in a grey suburb, but he emphasizes that this doesn't mean the film idiom employed should be devoid of imagination.

"I wanted to make something playful, utilizing the film medium as much as possible. Many of the things we can do – fast motion and slow motion, the deliberate use of colour – are exploited far too rarely. I also wanted to make music into an important part of the film, and make it absolutely up to date. A vigorous dynamic style can lend life to the suburb with its electric trains and council flats. Social realism is an ugly term, but I think you can do social realism in lots of ways. You can do it in a way that is entertaining without losing credibility", he says.

"Another important aspect of the film is in the language spoken by its characters. It is emphatic, witty, and explicit. We picked the cast a year ago and they'll colour their roles more than is usually the case. My writer is good at that kind of dialogue. But we have already had rehearsals where the kids have considered the language they'll be speaking in the film. "This is great, but nobody swears like that", they'll say, and we have to change the lines.

USEFUL CLICHÉS

Language is vital to any sense of contemporaneity, and the latter is vital when you're communicating with children and young adults. Even *Little Big Girl* has a number of modern stylistic features: it is effectively edited by Anne Østerud (of *Pusher* and *Bleeder*) and veteran Janus Billeskov Jansen (*Jerusalem*, *Pelle the Conqueror*, *Best Intentions*); and Bo Tengberg (*Let's Get Lost*) shot it dynamically, intimately, and with very few of the wide shots otherwise so typical of period films. Even though the film is set in the 19th century the director has deliberately aimed for 21st century language.

"I was very concerned not to let my cast behave and talk like the olden days, because then the film would have collapsed like a pack of cards", Morten Køhlert says.

The present pervades *Wallah Be*, Pia Bovin's feature debut. The plot revolves around three families – Aksel, his lone mum and elder sister, a typical nuclear family, and an extended Palestinian family – from the same council estate. Behind the portraits there is a long research phase, and Pia Bovin and her writer stayed with a Palestinian family for a while.

Pia Bovin says, "We wanted to build up, refine and add details so that the families would reach beyond the cliché. We deliberately used the clichés as a springboard for refinement and reinterpretation. In a way clichés are useful because people recognize them right away; you very quickly get through to your audience. So why not pick up a cliché, work on it, and see what happens?" In her film Pia Bovin goes behind the clichés about Muslim patriarchs and young second generation immigrants who drive flashy cars.

FEW RESOURCES

Wallah Be is realism in a world of concrete, with none of the traditional escape routes of children's films such as a splash of

magic realism or a pinch of fairy tale. But the concrete is not demonized; Pia Bovin lived in it as a child and is fond of it. The realistic elements do not directly relate to the physical and financial circumstances, either, but to the internal interplay in families whose members are mainly portrayed from their wittiest, most viable sides.

"At bottom the film is about the fact that being a child – and thereby a human being – is pretty tough. It's not easy to figure out how to be a good person or a good friend. We wanted to make a contemporary realistic comedy and we've tried to create a drama using few resources that will make children and hopefully adults feel that they too could be part of the plot."

THE WHOLE RANGE OF EMOTIONS

With *Someone Like Hodder*, Henrik Ruben Genz wants to portray reality in distorted form: the more elaborate and vivid Hodder's fantasy world is, the more tragic his real world becomes.

"We are not promoting a social realist message; on the contrary, we use a stylized, almost cartoon-like realism", the director says. "Reality is not what's interesting about this story, but what goes on in the minds of Hodder and the others, and what is human and existential in a stylized world. We are also considering choreographing the pupils. Instead of a playground full of children at play we are thinking of putting them into a choreographic system so it becomes symbolic rather than a reportage from a playground", he says. "But the transition between fantasy and reality must not be oversold, either. The audience must not be underestimated. Loneliness and rejection afflict everyone regardless of the setting. When we put pressure on tender spots perhaps we're reminded that there's somebody quiet and overlooked in the vicinity. There is a Hodder in every class. There is a Hodder in all of us. It's a very, very painful story if you choose to see it that way. But I choose to see it complete with the defiance and fighter instinct Hodder possesses."

In terms of quantity 2002 is a great year for children's films. Major US features like *Harry Potter* and *Monsters, Inc* are still doing well in Denmark and more big American movies are on their way. But *Catch That Girl* is also doing well and the five directors are full of optimism on behalf of Danish children's films, certainly now they've been to test screenings with the most empathetic audiences in existence.

"They ducked behind the chairs when it was scary, cried when it was sad, and clapped when things went well", Morten Køhlert says of the test screenings for *Little Big Girl*. "They may need a grown up to hold their hands during the film but afterwards their eyes sparkle as they say it's the best film they've ever seen. I believe in the powerful drama that drags the audience through the whole range of emotions but brings them safely home again in the end."

"The test screenings reminded me of the powerful emotions I felt as a kid when I went to the cinema. You were in a different world, and you could see yourself in the films as well", says Hans Fabian Wullenweber. "A trip to the cinema is still a great experience for a kid, but it is also a family outing. After the preview of *Catch That Girl* I heard families talking about the film a lot. "Do you talk like that to one another?" The parents asked. Seeing films may get children to talk about things their grown ups don't normally hear about."

Pia Bovin adds, "At the test screenings I saw children and adults reading different things into the story. I was thrilled to bits. I don't want my film to impose anything on anyone. But I'm very happy if the dilemmas move people and nothing else – all those dilemmas involved in being human."

LITTLE BIG GIRL / ULVEPIGEN TINKE
RELEASE 2002.06.14
DIRECTOR Morten Køhlert
PRODUCTION ASA Film Production (Henrik Møller Sørensen)

■ A heart-rending story about Tinke, a destitute orphan, who must recover a pendant in order to prove her true identity.

MARKET SCREENING IN CANNES

CATCH THAT GIRL / KLATRETØSEN
RELEASE 2002.01.25
DIRECTOR Hans Fabian Wullenweber
PRODUCTION Nimbus Film (Lottie Terp Jakobsen, Bo Ehrhardt)

■ In the name of a good cause, 12-year-old Ida, together with two friends, plans the most audacious bank heist in the history of Denmark.

WALLAH BE / KALD MIG BARE AXEL
RELEASE 2002.10.04
DIRECTOR Pia Bovin
PRODUCTION Zentropa Productions (Louise Westh, Ib Tardini)

■ 10-year-old Axel takes matters into his own hands in order to transform a song contest and the school holidays into a grand success.

SOMEONE LIKE HODDER / EN SOM HODDER
RELEASE 2003.01.31
DIRECTOR Henrik Ruben Genz
PRODUCTION Nordisk Film (Tina Dalhoff)

■ When a fairy appears to nine-year-old Hodder, he is asked to go out and save the world, but first he must find friends to help him.

ENGLISH TITLE TO BE ANNOUNCED / UNGDOMSFILM
RELEASE 2003
SHOOTING Summer of 2002
DIRECTOR Anders Gustafsson
PRODUCTION Nimbus Film (Birgitte Skov, Bo Ehrhardt)

■ A young girl, with enormous strength of mind, is involved emotionally with two male youths, one of whom recognizes her inner capabilities.



Photo: Erik Aavatsmark

I AM DINA

EXCERPTS FROM REVIEWS

In *I am Dina*, the \$15.9m English-language film by Danish director Ole Bornedal (*Nightwatch* – both Danish and US versions), starring Gerard Depardieu and Christopher Eccleston, Bornedal unleashes all the passions at once:

“I am very proud of this film. It’s a film that’s been made so you won’t have time to think when you are watching it. You mustn’t have time to use your mind. You mustn’t have time for anything at all. You must feel it, go home, and then everything will come to you afterwards. That’s the idea and it works. (...) I don’t like boring my audience. I want to entertain, and that means not talking down to people but speaking to their feelings and trying to take them by surprise.”
(Ole Bornedal to *Weekendavisen*)

The Norwegian-Swedish actress 27-year-old Maria Bonnevie is heading for world celebrity for her acclaimed performance as Dina in Ole Bornedal’s blockbuster. Dina was an inspiration to her, she says – an uncompromising man eater who obeys her primal force and masculine instinct:

“I really was most inspired by her, although of course I don’t want to kill my boyfriend! I was inspired by her great force (...) Dina flies in the face of all the conventions. She is her own woman. That makes her hard to place (...) because she is in such close contact with death, life becomes intense.”
(Maria Bonnevie to *URBAN*)

“Bornedal has created a film on the grand scale (...) Dan Laustsen, the cinematographer, has created images of incomprehensible dimensions. My goodness how beautiful they are!”
(Rud Kofoed, *Ekstra Bladet*)

“The film is like the book: dramatic, high-flown, sweaty, and full of sex right in your face. You either like it or you don’t, and lots of men are bound to run away screaming from this over-the-top movie. But I bet even more women will run screaming to see it.”

(Birgitte Grue, *B.T.*)

Ole Bornedal tells the story in co-operation with cinematographer Dan Laustsen with a visual mastery that impresses and enchants in turn. The shots often support our understanding of events by the way they frame the characters.”
(Per Calum, *Jyllands-Posten*)

“[Dan Laustsen, the Director of Photography] has developed into a cinematographer at the same technical level as masters such as Sven Nykvist and Vittorio Storaro (...) nobody can accuse Ole Bornedal of meanness, and you’d have to be a desiccated Puritan to deny that his unbridled film is powerful entertainment.”
(Ebbe Iversen, *Berlingske Tidende*)

“I am Dina is a radical melodrama about the greatest emotions told in an idiom that matches them.”
(Palle Schantz Lauridsen, *Kristeligt Dagblad*)

“Dina (...) takes on so much immediacy and sensual import that we believe in her as a character and accept the world of the film unreservedly.”
(Bo Green Jensen, *Weekendavisen*)

PRODUCER ON THE MOVE MICHEL SCHØNNEMANN

Danish producer Michel Schønnemann (born 1969, Nairobi) – who studied economics before enrolling at the National Film School of Denmark from where he graduated in 1999 – has been selected by European Film Promotion to participate in their third programme of ‘Producer on the Move’ which will take place in Cannes from 17-19 May. European Film Promotion has invited 18 producers from 17 European countries. Informal as well as round table discussions will take place, and some hundred producers throughout Europe will meet on Sunday 19 May to discuss developments in European cinema.

FILMS IN THE MAKING

Michel Schønnemann is presently producing Thura Film's *Old Men In New Cars* aka *In China They Eat Dogs II*, written by Anders Thomas Jensen and directed by Lasse Spang Olsen. The film will be released 12 July 2002. Michel Schønnemann was also part of the Elektropa-project ‘Army Base’ at Zentropa, and on the production team of Thura Film's and Bech Film's *Beyond* (2000), an adventure thriller directed by Åke Sandgren. His next project will be *Søllerød Blues*, to go into production autumn 2002.



Producer Michel Schønnemann / Photo: Erik Molberg Hansen

FILM IS ALL ABOUT TIME (AND MONEY)

The pan-European law firm specializing in the film industry, D&P, will be represented in Cannes by Christian Scherfig from Lindh Stabell Horten, Denmark. Scherfig represents D&P's TIME-practice (the acronym for Telecom, IT, Media and Entertainment), which provides integrated legal services across Europe. Scherfig will be supporting clients, as well as looking for new opportunities. "The classic understanding of legal aid has adjusted itself to a modern way of working as a partner to your legal adviser", says Christian Scherfig.

"We are commercial in our interpretation and add value to our clients' dealings through timely practical solutions. We consider ourselves as strategic partners for our clients, because the nature of the film and entertainment industry has changed from working with relatively simple contracts between two or three parties to a complex series of contacts and agreements between a wide range of stakeholders within finance, distribution, and production in an ever increasing number of windows on a wide range of different markets", says Christian Scherfig.

D&P plays a significant role advising film and media companies, radio and television stations, advertising agencies, music companies, artists and artists' organizations, especially on intellectual property rights, as well as on the contractual and regulatory aspects of the media and entertainment industry.

D&P

3800 employees in 12 countries. Specializes in all aspects of the film production process i.e. Development and preparation / Funding / Production / Distribution / Use of rights / Corporate and tax matters / Employment contracts.

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or visit D&P at the Scandinavian Film Office pavilion at 55 La Croisette., Cannes.

TOP TWENTY DENMARK 2001 - ALL FILMS

DANISH TITLE	COUNTRY	DISTRIBUTOR	RELEASE YEAR-WEEK	ADMISSIONS 2001	ACCUM. 17.03.2002
1 Italian for Beginners	Danmark	SMD	2000.49	648,664	818,835
2 Harry Potter	USA-GB	SMD	2001.47	629,419	
3 Anja & Viktor	Danmark	Buena Vista	2001.31	571,660	
4 My Sister's Kids	Danmark	SMD	2001.41	394,910	405,703
5 Bridget Jones' Diary	GB-USA-FR	UIP	2001.30	381,299	
6 Shrek	USA	UIP	2001.36	364,235	
7 Shake It All About	Danmark	Angel	2001.46	328,848	568,493
8 Pearl Harbor	USA	Buena Vista	2001.26	285,981	
9 The Lord of the Rings	USA-NZ	SF-Film	2001.51	281,224	
10 The Flying Granny	Danmark	Nordisk	2001.06	257,035	
11 The Emperor's New Groove	USA	Buena Vista	2001.06	244,447	
12 What Women Want	USA	Nordisk	2001.11	235,922	
13 America's Sweethearts	USA	SF-Film	2001.37	212,302	
14 Moulin Rouge	AUS-USA	SF-Film	2001.41	205,457	
15 One-hand Clapping	Danmark	SMD	2001.33	199,249	
16 Cast Away	USA	UIP	2001.03	180,270	
17 The Mummy Returns	USA	UIP	2001.20	178,267	
18 Hannibal	USA	UIP	2001.08	174,251	
19 Tomb Raider	USA-GB	UIP	2001.29	174,243	
20 American Pie	USA	UIP	2001.41	168,026	

DANISH FEATURE FILM RELEASES 2001

PRODUCTION COMPANY ABBREVIATED

RELEASE	ENGLISH TITLE	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION
1 2001.01.05	The King is Alive	Løvring	Zentropa
2 2001.04.06	Count Axel	Fauli	Cosmo/Holst
3 2001.04.27	Truly Human	Sandgren	Zentropa
4 2001.06.08	Kat	Schmidt	Balboa 2
5 2001.08.17	Leila	Axel	Angel Arena
6 2001.08.17	One-hand Clapping	Fredholm	Zentropa
7 2001.09.07	Mona's World	Elmer	Holst
8 2001.10.26	Kira's Reason	Dogme	Nimbus
9 2001.11.02	Chop Chop	Oplev	Zentropa
10 2001.11.16	Shake It All About	Joof	Angel/Apollo

CHILDREN-YOUTH-FAMILY

11 2001.01.26	Prop & Berta	Fly	Zentropa
12 2001.02.02	Jewel of the Desert	Borch Nielsen	Thura
13 2001.02.09	The Flying Granny	Wikke & ...	Græsted
14 2001.04.06	Bunny's Tales 4	several	several
15 2001.07.06	Send More Candy	Holbek Trier	Crone
16 2001.08.03	Anja & Viktor	Sachs Bostrup	Grasten
17 2001.10.12	My Sister's Kids	Villum Jensen	Moonlight
18 2001.10.12	Jolly Roger	Spang Olsen	M & M
19 2001.12.14	The Olsen Gang Jr	Flinth	Nordisk

OFFSHORE COPRODUCTIONS

1 2001.02.02	(SE) Songs from ...	Andersson	Studio 24/DR TV
2 2001.03.23	(SE) A Song for Martin	August	Svenska Filmk./Moonlight
3 2001.06.15	(SE) As White As In ...	Troell	SVT Drama/Nordisk
4 2001.08.10	Honour of the ...	Halldórsdóttir	Gótafilm/Nordisk

DANISH FEATURE RELEASES 2002-2003

PRODUCTION COMPANY ABBREVIATED

RELEASE	ENGLISH TITLE	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION
1 2002.01.25	P.O.V. - Point of View	Gíslason, T.	Bech/Angel
2 2002.02.15	Minor Mishaps	Olesen, A.	Zentropa
3 2002.03.27	Okay	Nielsen, J. W.	Bech
4 2002.05.03	Charlie Butterfly	Steiness, D.	Zentropa
5 2002.06.07	House of Hearts	Rygård, E.	Zentropa
6 2002.06.28	The Man Who Couldn't Say ...	Bay, Peter	Angel/Apollo
7 2002.07.12	Old Men in New Cars ...	Spang Olsen, L.	Thura Film
8 2002.10.00	It's All About Love	Vinterberg, T.	Nimbus
9 2002.10.00	Fear X	Winding Refn, N.	NWR
10 2002.10.00	Open Hearts (to be confirmed)	Dogme	Bier, S.
11 2002.11.00	Wilbur Wants To Kill Himself	Scherfig, L.	Zentropa
12 2002.11.05	Facing the Truth	Malmros, N.	Nordisk
13 2002.11.15	Halalabad Blues	Ryslinge, H.	Angel
14 2003.01.00	The Anatomy of Evil	Nyholm, O.	Digital
15 2003.02.00	Inheritance (to be confirmed)	Fly, P.	Zentropa
16 2003.03.00	The Dog's ... (to be confirmed)	Dogme	Nimbus
17 2003.04.00	Dogville	von Trier, L.	Zentropa
18 2003.04.00	Skagerrak	Kragh-Jacobsen, S.	Nimbus

CHILDREN-YOUTH-FAMILY

19 2002.01.25	Catch That Girl	Wullenweber, H. F.	Nimbus
20 2002.06.14	Little Big Girl	Køhler, M.	ASA
21 2002.10.04	Wallah Be	Bovin, P.	Zentropa
22 2002.10.11	Bertram & Co	Kristensen, H.	Grasten
23 2002.10.11	My Sister's Kids 2	Villum Jensen, T.	Moonlight
24 2003.00.00	Untitled (a youth film)	Gustafsson, A.	Nimbus
25 2003.01.00	The Boy Who ...	Hastrup, J.	Tegnefilm2/ ...
26 2003.01.31	Someone Like Hodder	Genz, H. R.	Nordisk

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