

IN SEARCH OF A STORY

Camera d'Or winner Christoffer Boe is returning to Cannes in Directors' Fortnight with *Everything Will Be Fine*, a vertiginous ride following a film director's attempts to uncover a terrifying conspiracy.

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INTO THE BATTLEFIELD

Combining the keen eye of an anthropologist with the skill of a storyteller, Janus Metz' *Armadillo* takes us to the front lines in the Afghan Helmand province among a platoon of Danish soldiers. Selected for Critics' Week.

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AN UNFAMILIAR FRIENDSHIP

A 2009 Cannes competitor, Daniel Joseph Borgman is participating yet again with a short film. Selected for Critics' Week is *Berik*, a universal narrative about finding true friendship set in a remote region in Kazakhstan.

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EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE
/ DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
ARMADILLO / CRITICS' WEEK
BERIK / CRITICS' WEEK

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COVER Christoffer Boe, director of *Everything Will Be Fine*. Photo by Helene Hasen and Paul Wilson

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The Danish Film Institute is the national agency responsible for supporting and encouraging film and cinema culture. Operations extend from participation in the development and production of feature films, shorts and documentaries, over distribution and marketing, to managing the national film archive and the Cinematheque.

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Armadillo Photo: Lars Skree



Berik. Framgrab



Lone Scherfig Photo: Jan Buus



Freddy Frogface Photo: Crone Film



Carl Theodor Dreyer Photo: DFI

THE JOYS OF RETELLING / DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT

FILM set out to find the meta-layers and genre experiments in *Everything Will Be Fine*, when all Christoffer Boe really wanted with his film was to tell an entertaining story. Interview in three takes with Boe and lead Jens Albinus. **PAGE 03**

BETWEEN HEROES AND KILLERS / CRITICS' WEEK

Janus Metz spent six months embedded on the front lines in Afghanistan's Helmand province. *Armadillo* is the first Danish documentary to take the audience into the battlefield and look the realities of war straight in the eye. **PAGE 06**

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THE JOYS OF RETELLING



ROUGH CUTS. A film set is a battlefield of sorts. Luckily it rarely amounts to more than the occasional cut to the forehead. Boe and Albinus on the set of *Everything Will Be Fine* **Photo:** Max Stirner

Who really directed Christoffer Boe's fourth feature *Everything Will Be Fine*, screening in Directors' Fortnight in Cannes? It took more than one take as Lasse Kyed Rasmussen, Boe's PA on the shoot a year back, met with the director and his lead actor Jens Albinus to try and find out.

BY LASSE KYED RASMUSSEN

TAKE #1

One afternoon in March I'm strolling through a sunny Copenhagen to meet Christoffer Boe and Jens Albinus for a talk about the meta-layers in *Everything Will Be Fine*, convinced that I've come up with a sufficiently sophisticated angle to encapsulate the film's thematics and construction. But I'm nervous, too. Boe can be quite unapproachable.

In recent years, Boe has made his mark in the European film landscape as an elitist and contrary director, insistently crafting tales that play out in the space between human pain and literary construction. His new film, *Everything Will Be Fine*, is full of big emotions and ingenious constructions, too. Jens Albinus stars as Jacob Falk, a director struggling to make his next feature come together but

losing himself in a web of fiction, conspiracy and personal tragedy.

Considering the metafictional plot, it seems obvious, and not least extremely Boe-sian, to stage the interview as a conversation between the two directors, Boe and his creation Falk, reflecting the confusion about when Boe's film ends and Falk's film takes over. Who really directed *Everything Will Be Fine*?

Having settled on this angle, I confidently ring the doorbell to Boe's office, attractively located in a patrician apartment in central Copenhagen.

THE FALSE ENDING

Twenty-four hours later the sun and my faith in my clever angle are both gone. Instead I'm left staring at a transcription of the interview that makes it painfully clear that Boe's laconic, laid-back answer to my cryptic question of who is behind the film has blown my premise out of the water:

"*Everything Will Be Fine* is directed by a team which calls itself Hr. Boe & Co. That's pretty obvious. Who else could it have been?"

Hr. Boe & Co is a team Boe has surrounded himself with since his film-school days. Together they are behind all four of his features, *Everything Will Be Fine* being the latest. Alas, I was angling for a dead-end story, and perhaps the article should end here.

FINDING THE RIGHT STORY

Yet, as I read the transcription looking for another story, I discover my resemblance to the director Jacob Falk. Falk, too, has a hard time finding the right story.

"Specifically, Falk does not know what story to tell. All he knows is that he'll be making a film about a war. But the great unanswered question for him is understanding why he has a need to tell that story," Boe says.

Then I stumble on Albinus' remark that, as *Everything Will Be Fine* develops, Falk "reconstructs his personal narrative, hoping it will be better than it actually is", and it dawns on me that both this interview and the film itself revolve around the universal human desire and opportunity to write yourself into new and meaningful stories.

"We all tell stories about ourselves," Boe says. "We can't live life without writing ourselves into a story that gives us a sense of purpose and a goal in life. Life is a series of stories that we are constantly rewriting in a complex relation with our feelings - so that the stories both reflect and determine how we feel.

Albinus hasn't showed up yet, so Boe offers me a cup of coffee from a French press coffeepot and we spend the waiting time swapping experiences about how to avoid invoking the curse of the French press - maladroitness handling can summon a geyser of scalding brew from the glass cylinder. Together we manage to pour the coffee without incurring burns and, as I sip it, I realise that Boe actually is not an arrogant mystic but a good-natured, absent-minded filmmaker.

There is still some coffee left in the pot when Albinus joins us shortly after, and the interview can finally begin.

Still, even though I open this second version with a fairly innocuous yet central question, I again run into trouble. When I ask Boe to explain what *Everything Will Be Fine* is about, he can barely take the question seriously and responds with irony:

"That's way too big a question. We have to get to that by a roundabout way." I immediately regret my uninspired question, but luckily Albinus, who plays the director Falk, comes to my aid, articulating the film that his character



"Falk does not know what story to tell. All he knows is that he'll be making a film about a war." Christoffer Boe

STAGING THE STORY. Jens Albinus is Falk, a film director who accidentally comes across some terrifying evidence but has a hard time making the pieces fit. Paprika Steen plays his journalist sister **Photo:** Max Stirner

Suddenly, the girl you gave your life to is the bitch who betrayed you and whom you never want to see again. Later on, she may be just someone you don't appreciate anymore or she may be the girl you ignored, forcing her to act the way she did. Rewriting the same story, you're always redefining yourself and the world around you."

These statements make it clear to me that, by the same simple move, I can rewrite my interview. This does not have to be the story of a sophomore interviewer coming up short in his meeting with the Danish auteur. Just like that I can write Boe, Albinus and myself into the story of a far more cheerful and relaxed meeting.

TAKE #2

One afternoon in March I'm strolling through a sunny Copenhagen to meet Christoffer Boe and Jens Albinus for a talk about the plot of *Everything Will Be Fine*. Having time to spare, I pause to catch a few rays of the first spring sun.

I arrive at the office a few minutes early and Boe cuts short his lunch with his co-workers at Alphaville Pictures Copenhagen to ask me into one of the rooms housing the production company he founded with his producer, Tine Grew Pfeiffer.

is completing in *Everything Will Be Fine*. "Jacob Falk is doing a film about a war," he says. "That's simple enough. However, if you picture the road to the finished film as a stairway, Falk is only standing on the first step and the next step is missing. Falk then envisions all kinds of things that the next step might potentially be and at some point those visions become the actual film."

THE IMPERFECT FILM

Everything Will Be Fine lets us follow Falk's obsessive struggle to finish the script for his film. All Falk's efforts notwithstanding, Albinus is not convinced that Falk will ever finish his film project.

"He can't really get things to work, because he is carried away by a current that collapses the distance between him and his material. He loses any sense of distance between himself and his stories. And once that dividing wall vanishes, you're no longer telling stories, you've become psychotic. That's kind of what happens to Falk."

According to Albinus, Boe on the other hand manages to maintain the distance between himself and his material, which is why he was able to actually make *Everything Will Be Fine*. Although Boe has no personal experience with the problems Falk is having, he can still diagnose the suffering filmmaker. "Falk's

“Life is a series of stories that we are constantly rewriting. Suddenly, the girl you gave your life to is the bitch who betrayed you and whom you never want to see again.” Christoffer Boe

problem is that his film overshadows the life he is actually living,” Boe says. “But at the same time, the film is an invaluable help for him in understanding his own life.”

RUNNING MAN

The role of Jacob Falk was specifically written for Albinus. Though a year has passed since they shot the film, Albinus still has his character down pat.

“To boil Falk way down, he is a man who runs,” he says. “Like the man on the exit signs, Falk is always running for a way out. But he is also a ‘man who errs’, and in that way he is like everyone else. To err, after all, is the most human of all.”

“It’s a universal story precisely because of this, that we all make mistakes,” Boe adds. “It’s about what it takes to make us acknowledge our mistakes, to confront them and accept that the process is good for us. All my films have that naïve little story. They’re always about someone who is forced to recognise his mistakes. This preoccupies me, because deep down I believe it’s good to confront your mistakes, even if it is a painful thing to do.”

Boe is getting warmed up after the opening exercises and suddenly decides to answer my banal opening question.

“So, *Everything Will Be Fine* is about examining a person and that person’s search to find himself and recognise his mistakes,” he says.

I have my answer. There are no questions left on my pad. There is nothing more to discuss, and the amiable interview appears to be over before it really got going.

Boe would seem to agree. As he sees me out, he seems intent on making up for the initial misunderstandings, ensuring me that neither he nor his films are as mysterious as a lot of people think, “I really try to tell entertaining stories in entertaining ways. I’m not out to scare away audiences.”

In light of this abrupt and intriguing send-off, it seems incomplete to end the article here. Taking Boe’s advice to heart, I willingly admit that I probably was not adequately prepared that afternoon in March as I strolled through Copenhagen for the second time. Consequently, like Falk, I will seize the opportunity to retell my own story one more time and see if I can improve on it.

TAKE #3

One afternoon in March I’m strolling through a sunny Copenhagen to meet Christoffer Boe and Jens Albinus for a talk about the genre experiments in *Everything Will Be Fine*. I’m relaxed though slightly anxious about how it will go, since I’m not an experienced interviewer.

No sooner have I taken a seat across from Albinus and a chain-smoking Boe, who has decorated his office to resemble a well-worn film set, than nerves rattle my peace of mind. Boe and Albinus are chatting easily like old friends running into each other in the university cafeteria after a long separation. It’s hard to get a word in edgewise and I have to pay close attention, as they juggle terms like *hypercomplexity* and *the Baroque ideals*, while referring to Kafka, Dreyer and Luther like they were old acquaintances. Not that they’re pretentious about it. Their joy in conversation more seems to express that life is full of topics a lot more pressing than their collaboration on *Everything Will Be Fine*.

AN UNINTERESTING WAR

Though it’s tempting to let them go on, my mission, of course, is to get them to talk about their film. Delicately I butt in, asking Boe to describe how he got the idea for *Everything Will Be Fine*, which deals in part with the Danish war effort in Afghanistan.

Boe picks up the cue without missing a beat and launches into a rambling monologue, interrupting himself only when he has to light another cigarette.

“When a small nation like Denmark is at war, there’s a big story to tell,” he says. “The only problem is that *that* story doesn’t really interest me. Just as it doesn’t interest most Danes. The fact is the war doesn’t figure in people’s consciousness. Not at the dinner table and not at the ballot box. Nor does it for me. I couldn’t get the war to unfold in a way that made it seem important or relevant to me. I only had this idealistic faith that it was a story that had to be told.” That idealistic faith

resulted in a fit of manic work, as Boe wrote 40 widely different scripts all based on the story of a returning soldier who knows something other people don’t want to believe. However, *Everything Will Be Fine* only began to take shape once Boe set his sights on Albinus.

“It was all really unspecific in a lot of ways, because I didn’t know what this film should be,” he says. “The big redeeming moment came when I realised that I wanted Jens to play Falk. Then the film fell into place.”

AN INTERESTING STORY

Though the film that emerged once Albinus came aboard may resemble a political thriller, it is neither a political film nor a thriller in the classic sense. *Everything Will Be Fine*, as Boe sees it, is an attempt to merge the suspense of thrillers with the emotion of melodrama.

“My intention was always to get a thriller going, which creates certain expectations that are then continually deconstructed. We do that by allowing the film to stop and say, ‘This thriller is only interesting in light of the melodramatic tale of two people failing at love,’” he says.

The coffee is finished. The smoke in the cramped office is so thick it’s hard to breathe, and both the interview and my lungpower are winding down. But Boe has more to add:

“A thriller is basically the story of a paranoid person who loses his faith in and his control of his daily life. Something has shifted and suddenly the story he was has stopped making sense and he is desperately looking for a truth that can form the basis of a new story, so his life can make sense again. That’s a good story in its own right and the principal theme of *Everything Will Be Fine*.”

Following this characterisation of the interplay of genre and theme, I get up, discreetly coughing to signal the end of the interview. Not losing a beat, Boe returns to his lofty conversation with Albinus, as I withdraw from the smoke-choked room.

THE SUN IS ALWAYS SHINING

That afternoon in late March, as I leave Boe’s office, I still don’t realise that my attempt to rig the interview to make it look like a conversation between Boe and Falk was no less desperate than Falk’s destructive search for a story.

Blinded by my comforting ignorance, I put on my shades and walk home, never noticing that the sky has turned overcast.

Twenty-four hours later my comforting ignorance has evaporated, and only the odour of heavy cigarette smoke is still clinging to my clothes. Reading the transcription, I realise that, of course, *Everything Will Be Fine* is directed by Christoffer Boe, but who he really is, a lot less obvious. Then I come across something he told me that explains the trouble I was having communicating the story: “First you have to find out how you want to tell your story. What’s it going to be about and how do you tell it?” At that moment I realize that it was the answers to precisely these questions that I hadn’t properly thought through that afternoon in late March as I strolled through a sunny Copenhagen to meet Christoffer Boe and Jens Albinus ■

Lasse Kyed Rasmussen was a personal assistant to Christoffer Boe on Everything Will Be Fine and is currently in the screenwriting programme at the National Film School in Copenhagen.

For further information on Everything Will Be Fine, see reverse section.

CHRISTOFFER BOE

Born 1974, Denmark. Graduated in Film and Media, 1996, and in direction at the National Film School of Denmark, 2001. His feature film debut *Reconstruction* (2003) received the Camera d’Or and the Critics’ Week Youth Jury Award. Recipient of FIPRESCI’s Director of the Year in 2003. Second feature *Allegro* (2005) was chosen for Venice Days and Toronto, and won the Prix du Jury Jeunes. *Offscreen* (2006) won the Fantastic Jury Award in Austin and the Altre Visioni Award in Venice. *Everything Will Be Fine*, released January in Danish cinemas and selected for Directors’ Fortnight in Cannes, is Boe’s fourth feature film. In post production is *Beast* (see reverse section).

ALPHAVILLE PICTURES COPENHAGEN

Founded 2003 by director Christoffer Boe and producer Tine Grew Pfeiffer. Prior to this they produced their first feature *Reconstruction* (2003, Nordisk Film), winner of Cannes’ Camera d’Or. First films were *Allegro* (Christoffer Boe, 2005) and the experimental *Offscreen* (2006). Titles 2009-2010: the documentary *Out of Love* by Birgitte Størmose, honoured with a Special Mention in Berlin and the Prix EFA in Rotterdam, and Christoffer Boe’s fourth feature film *Everything Will Be Fine*, selected for Cannes’ Directors’ Fortnight. alphavillepicturescopenhagen.com



BETWEEN HEROES AND KILLERS

Denmark lost its innocence when it became a warring nation, Janus Metz says. For six months the Danish filmmaker was embedded on the front lines in Afghanistan's Helmand province. His documentary *Armadillo*, selected for Critics' Week, describes the brotherhood and sensitive sides of soldiers across from the cynical mechanisms of war.

BY RENÉ FREDENSBORG

Like every soldier who ever went to war, Janus Metz has, technically, tried to die. Though they only shoot with a camera, embedded filmmakers go through the same rites of passage as ordinary Danish soldiers when the time comes to fasten their chinstraps and grab their guns. Like the rest of the regiment, Metz wrote a farewell letter to his girlfriend and family, basically saying "I'm dead now, these are my last words", a combination of a thank-you note to those you remember and miss and to those who remember and miss you back, and last will and testament with practical instructions about funeral arrangements, who will inherit the car and, in Metz' case, what would happen with his film.

Luckily, the filmmaker made it back in one piece and completed the first Danish documentary ever to really take the audience into the field and look the Taliban in the eye. Literally.

In a key scene, a platoon of Danish soldiers from sorely tried Team 7 survives a close call and kills a group of Taliban fighters. That's war. Someone has

fives, loud music, badass attitudes. Pure euphoria. "Release," Metz calls it.

A MISUNDERSTOOD TRIBE

When he started the film, the 35-year-old filmmaker hadn't really thought through that doing a film from the front lines naturally meant that he, too, would have to learn how to "snake run" and "pancake" or that he would eventually find himself lying in a muddy ditch, being all too familiar with the sound of whizzing bullets.

Armadillo is the name of a Danish outpost in Helmand Province, where the filmmaker clearly turned on his camera at crucial moments. He's there during violent combat action. He's there when Mini says goodbye to his deeply concerned parents at their nice exurban home before leaving on his first tour of duty. And he's there when the shit-faced cadets are having a going-away party and the stripper suddenly tries to talk the gung-ho boys into staying in Denmark and saving themselves.

"The film was possible because I'm willing to be there on the same terms as the soldiers, saying, 'I'm doing this with you and I'll try my best to tell your story.' I made it clear to them that this wasn't an ad campaign but an attempt to depict the war the way it really is. For good and ill. A nuanced tale, not some slapdash, highly spun story of the kind that often misrepresents soldiers. They feel a bit like a misunderstood tribe," Metz says, cocking an eyebrow.

How so?

"The soldiers often feel that a lot of people are too quick to pass judgment on the war. It's



NUANCES OF WAR. Janus Metz was out to capture the whole picture Photo: Lars Skree (left and above)

to die. It's them or the Danes. This time, ten holy warriors would be needing *their* farewell notes.

That could just as well have happened to a Danish soldier. The way it sometimes does. And that's why the Danish camp is triumphant, like a dressing room after a big football victory. High

"I made it clear that this wasn't an ad campaign but an attempt to depict the war the way it really is. For good and ill."

romanticised or over-simplified. The soldiers were really upset at a headline in a Danish tabloid newspaper that went, 'Another Life Wasted in Afghanistan'. They find that to be too easy. The media isn't adequately covering what they are really trying to accomplish over there," he says.

A SOLDIER'S FALL FROM GRACE

Metz and his cameraman Lars Skree did meet some scepticism. One soldier called them "war tourists" and told the well-meaning filmmakers to go home.

"Those we didn't know through our research were unsure of our motives and worried about



PARADOX. The soldier's work is about killing to make peace, and that interests me, says Janus Metz **Photos:** Lars Skree

exposing themselves," Metz says. "The turning point comes the first time they go into combat. And get their release. Everything had seemed a bit distant to the soldiers until they defeated the enemy at close range. That's the day they are all still talking about. The day the distant war came close for real, along with fear and cynicism."

Killing for peace triggers all sorts of conflicting emotions in a soldier. Metz mentions a jumble of fear, callousness, euphoria, pride and all the medals awarded after bloody skirmishes.

"You have to understand that the euphoria comes from the mental pressure and the psychological development the soldiers are undergoing. Of course, it's a huge release to strike back and defeat the enemy when all the time they are firing at you. These are people who have seen combat 10 or 20 times. Suddenly, the enemy is lying right there, close up, and they're dead. That's a release," he stresses.

While most people have seen scenes like this in American war movies, they obviously make a much bigger impression in real life.

"War is about killing," Metz says. "It's as simple as that. Let's face it. If a film does its job well, it will add nuances to the issues and the characters to a degree that makes you understand why the soldiers act like that. You don't have to sympathise with them, but at least you understand the mechanism that makes them act the way they do," he says.

"As a nation, we're pretty innocent when it comes to war narratives, and so this film is a kind of fall from grace. We're innocent in the sense that we're not used to dealing with what it means to send people to war. We haven't really seen the pictures yet, because the Danish media haven't been allowed to photograph the *real* war," he says.

Many in the military are naturally concerned about the effect that real-war images would have on

people at home in their living rooms. "Some of the images we get to show in *Armadillo* will seem new and shocking to a lot of Danes. But it's important to take a position and accept co-responsibility when we send our soldiers to war with daily combat, where not only soldiers are wounded and killed but civilians as well."

"As an embedded filmmaker, I had to juggle a difficult dual role. I couldn't shut off when things got rough. I had to maintain my openness to be able to record and report."

WE'RE NOT DOING KELLY'S HEROES

The director is referring to an incident where an Afghan girl is killed by Danish mortar fire. In military jargon, that's collateral damage. There's nothing more tragic than civilians, especially innocent children, being killed by bombs, but it happens in all wars and from all sides. Including from the Danish forces.

However, while Americans are confronting their own brutality in films like *Battle for Haditha*, the TV series *Over There* and the mini series *Generation Kill*, tough features and raw documentaries about Danes at war have yet to appear. The reason is the inherent complexity of war, Metz says.

"War is breakdown, but at the same time it's exactly where an attempt is made to most stringently uphold certain international laws. And still things go wrong. For me, it's a question of showing life the way it is and not covering it up so much that it becomes just words we can't relate to. After all, we're not doing *Kelly's Heroes* here," he smiles.

"For me, the soldier as a stereotype is split in two. At one pole, we have the hero. On the other side, there's the killer - one who has been made cynical by the system. Some prefer to hold up the heroic image. That tends to be when we're burying our dead. Others go for the killer. That's what we talk about every time we kill civilians. The soldier's work is about killing to make peace. That paradox and that split interest me. A little girl who dies as a consequence of Danish mortar blasts is, sadly, an unavoidable part of the war."

Metz points out a long line of filmic references. There are the classic, disillusioned antiwar films, like *Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter*, *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*, which are about desensitisation, alienation and a fall from grace. He also mentions *Jarhead*, a more ironic portrayal of the modern soldier's total lack of release during the first Gulf War where laser-guided missiles took care of the enemy. All these films influenced Metz' work on *Armadillo*.

"They are all about lost innocence, and on many levels they are religious films. That narrative exists in our war, too. Our experience may be that we're in Afghanistan to help. To do good. That narrative provides some meaning a good deal of the way,

JANUS METZ

Born 1974, Denmark. MA in Communication and International Development Studies. Has worked as a researcher on documentary film projects. Metz lived in Johannesburg for one year (2002-03), working on a South African drama series, *Soul City*. The stay inspired him to make his debut film, the documentary *Township Boys* (2006). Also in 2006, he produced the programme *Clandestine* for the national broadcaster DR, which follows a group of illegal African migrants through Sahara on their way to Europe. *Love on Delivery* (2008), awardwinner at CPH:DOX and selected for IDFA's Silver Wolf programme, is Metz' first film about Thai women and their pursuit of a Danish husband. Succeeding this is *Ticket to Paradise* (2008), selected for IDFA's Panorama, and honoured with a Special Mention at CPH:DOX.

FRIDTHJOF FILM DOC

A newly launched documentary division of Fridthjof Film focused on high-end, director-driven documentaries for a broad international and domestic audience. Fridthjof Film founded in 2000 by producer Ronnie Fridthjof. Projects ranging from TV documentary series and corporate films to commercials and single documentaries – and from 2008 feature films. Widely successful was the feature documentary *Solo* (2007) about Danish ex Popstar Jon, winning three awards at Odense Film Festival. *Take the Trash* (2008) is the company's first venture into feature films, followed by *The Christmas Party* (2009). f-film.com

THE FACES OF WAR

Armadillo is part of a larger project launched by Kasper Torsting of Fridthjof Film who set out to do six films for the Danish broadcaster TV 2 on the military operation in Afghanistan, seen from six different angles by six different directors under one theme: *The Faces of War*. The aim was to add emotions to the Danish war, so that we could better relate to it.

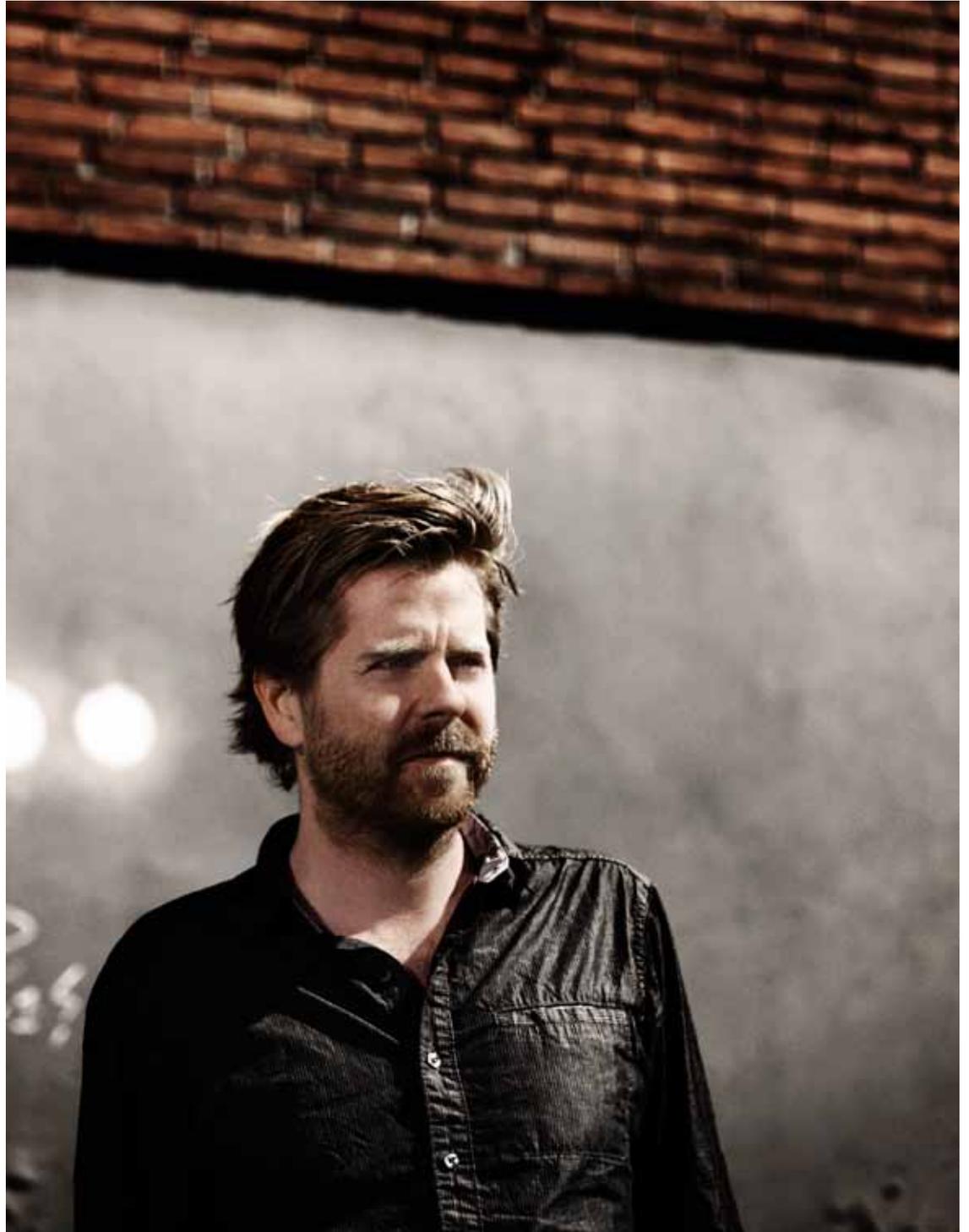
“I had to say goodbye to my family and my girlfriend, basically without knowing if I would ever come back again.”

but it's also a narrative that struggles with its own legitimacy. For what do the Afghans want? Does it even make sense to speak of the Afghans as one people? Every time someone is killed, especially civilians, those questions pop up and come to a head.”

THE CHECKOUT LINE

Metz gladly admits that he, too, felt the intensity, the adrenaline rush and the release when the Danish soldiers struck back and got the Taliban.

“I used my own feelings as a tool to understand how the soldiers are doing. I had to be embedded do get to do the work, but I made a virtue of necessity and used the fact that I was going through some of the same emotional stages as the soldiers. I had to say goodbye to my family and my girlfriend, too, basically without knowing if I would ever come back again.”



EMBEDDED DIRECTOR. Janus Metz spent six months with the Danish soldiers in Afghanistan **Photo:** Robin Skjoldborg

Metz throws in that the tagline of Oscar-winner *The Hurt Locker* is “War is a drug”. “That film is a really good portrait of the dependence that can emerge when you get out where you are at the centre of everything and everything is thrown back at you. That’s enormously powerful. Sure, the soldiers in *The Hurt Locker* get a kick out of it, too, but they also have to shut off their humanity and that desensitises them. As an embedded filmmaker, I had to juggle a difficult dual role. I couldn’t shut off when things got rough. I had to maintain my openness to be able to record and report.”

At the same time, Metz experienced a new kind of clarity in Afghanistan. “Everything becomes so loaded with meaning. Whether it’s the way you’re drinking coffee with your buddy in the field or something an officer says or the chaplain’s speech. It comes from being in such a basic situation. It’s about basic needs and ultimate choices. What does

it mean to do the right thing? What does it mean to be a real man? What does it mean to fight for what you believe in? When you get down to those basic pillars of our humanity, you experience the world as abysmally big. As one soldier put it, ‘Nothing could be more boring than waiting in the checkout line at the local supermarket back home.’”

“Also, there’s an interesting intensity about everyone being afraid of losing you and you being afraid of losing them. That you’re risking your life. Every phone call suddenly becomes important.”

“And, no, I’m not going back,” Metz says.

That would mean writing a new farewell letter. Very few people want to die. Or even act like they do ■

This article is an abbreviated version of the original article published in the film magazine Ekko, #48, 2010, see ekkofilm.dk. For further information on Armadillo, see reverse section.

WHEN FRIENDSHIP COMES KNOCKING

"The film takes place in Semey, close to the primary nuclear testing station of the Soviet Union, where more than 450 explosions were conducted between 1949 and 1989."

For the second year running New Zealand born, Danish director Daniel Joseph Borgman has a short fiction film selected in Cannes, this year in the Critics' Week programme. *Berik* is a story about friendship and lonesomeness in one of the world's most remote regions.

BY ANDERS BUDTZ-JØRGENSEN

Berik was born blind and deformed. His disability has been caused by radioactive pollution. He spends his days at home - in Semey, Eastern Kazakhstan - alone waiting for his brother to come home from work. That is, until Adil, the smallest and least popular of the kids in the apartment block, comes knocking on his door.

UNIVERSES BEYOND OUR OWN

"Both myself and my producer Katja Adomeit are interested in universes outside of our own and in working with real people - and trying to construct a fiction which exists in a kind of reality. Berik is a real person who has had a tragic life, but he still seems so positive and he is a great character."

The film takes place in Semey, close to the primary nuclear testing station of the Soviet Union, where more than 450 explosions were conducted between 1949 and 1989. Today, Semey is a town with a population exceeding 300,000 and has a large expatriate scientific community attached to the university and the testing site labs.

CLOSE TO REALITY

In his preparations for *Berik*, Borgman was very clear that there could be difficulties in making a fictional film that sticks very close to reality. All the characters are non-actors using their real names in the film.

It was essential for Borgman that his film should not be passed off as a documentary. While the story remains close to reality, the viewer has no doubt that he is watching fiction.

"It is dangerous to blend fact and fiction if the reality being portrayed is not your own. A lot of people have actually suggested that we should make a documentary about Berik. But I am a fictional director."

"We tried to take as many elements out of Berik's life as we could and find a narrative that would fit

together with reality. We didn't, for instance, shoot in his home. We had to shift for artistic reasons. We had to change some things, but we tried to stay true to what the city was like and what the people were like. When you have a universal narrative you can go anywhere and use as many elements as possible from reality and still tell a story that is compelling for a broad audience."

And to Borgman the story has a clear and universal message.

"You can find friendship in places where you would least expect. Adil wants to be a part of the group of kids, but in the end he finds out that it is more important to be happy with a real friend, than to fit in".

MARGINALISED AND INNOCENT

Last year Borgman participated in the official short film programme at Cannes with *Lars and Peter*, a film which described the relationship between a father and son after the mother's death. *Berik* also examines the relationship between a grown-up and a child. According to Borgman, the feelings of children are often marginalised in an adult world. This is one of the reasons children so often play a



BONDS. Adil and Berik, playing themselves in *Berik*, strike up an unexpected friendship. Framegrabs

significant role in his films. However, the setting in *Berik* is somewhat different from his former films.

“Everything about Kazakhstan is hard to explain and different from life in Denmark or New Zealand, but childhood is exactly the same. The first day we worked with 12 children and they had the same interaction, same dramas and same conflicts as children everywhere else. They have the same wants and needs, but obviously their environments are quite different – but the kids themselves are the same.”

THE WEIGHT OF ELEPHANTS

In Paris this spring, Borgman is preparing his first feature *The Weight of Elephants*, which is also about childhood. He was selected, together with five other young filmmakers from around the world, to participate in the Cannes Film Festival's 20th Cinéfondation Residence development programme. The 20-week residence offers filmmakers accommodation and 800 euros a month to work on their projects, with directors and producers offering advice on writing and development through to production.

The Weight of Elephants is a coming-of-age drama about Jess, 14, a paperboy, whose life is changed

irreversibly when he witnesses a murder in the street where he delivers newspapers. The film will be the first ever Danish-New Zealand feature film coproduction. Shooting is set to commence in July 2011 in New Zealand ■

For further information on Berik, see reverse section.

DANIEL JOSEPH BORGMAN

Born 1981, New Zealand. Studied Film Science at Otago University before moving to Copenhagen, where he has worked as a visual effects artist and film colourist. His first short, *The Man & the Albatross* (2007), premiered at Locarno Film Festival. *Lars and Peter* (2009) was in competition in Cannes. In 2009 completed production on additionally three shorts: *Behaviour*, *Kaleidoscope* and *Berik*. *Berik*, selected for Critics' Week in Cannes, is produced by Zentropa (**see page 19**) and Super16 with support from the DFI Film Workshop and Film i Väst.

SUPER16

A Copenhagen-based alternative film school that is both a training programme and a creative film community. The three-year course is sponsored by Nordisk Film. super16.dk

DFI FILM WORKSHOP

The Danish Film Institute's talent development scheme for promoting experimental film art, focusing mainly on young directors.

“Berik is a real person who has had a tragic life, but he still seems so positive and he is a great character.”

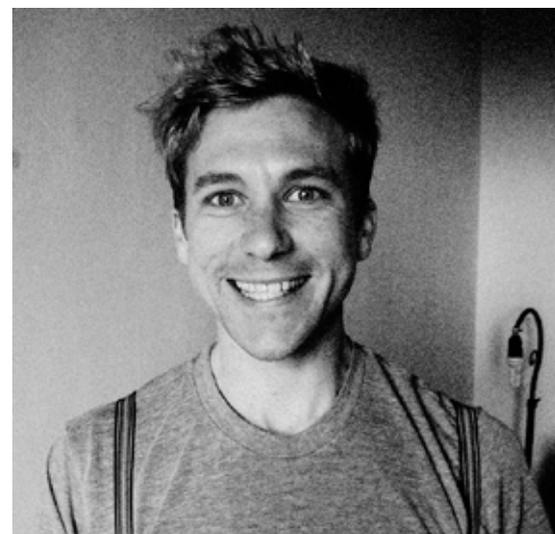


Photo: Katja Adomeit

BACK TO BASICS

REINVENTING THE BEST FILM ACT IN THE WORLD

I'm not completely sure of the origin of the statement "the best film act in the world", nor whether it's absolutely true, but the fact remains that people ask us all the time: What's the secret behind the success of Danish film? How do you do it? How can so many interesting films and skilled filmmakers come out of a country of such insignificant size?

BY HENRIK BO NIELSEN / CEO OF THE DANISH FILM INSTITUTE

The reasons are many: a substantial talent pool, a sustained film policy, dedicated private players and a significant societal investment. The achievements of Danish films are very much made in interplay between the government and the market and by targeted educational efforts. The opportunities for unfolding film art and doing film business are dependent on the government's film policy and its engagement in film.

In 2010, the Danish Parliament will pass a new Film Policy Accord for the 2011-2014 period. As we move towards this new accord, there is continued reason to celebrate strong artistic results, but there is also reason to heed the warning lights that have started flashing: The success of Danish film might peter out unless we make an effort to develop and renew.

DRAWING UP THE LINES

Prior to the negotiations on the new Film Policy Accord, the Danish Film Institute published a proposal of what is needed to ensure a diverse, sustainable and strong film culture in Denmark in the future.

As the proposal's imperative title, "Set Film Free", suggests, the Film Institute considers it a major

problem that "the best film act in the world" has gradually become mired in micro-management and increased regulation. The focus has shifted from the results to the process. The Film Institute today has the appearance of an institution with numerous, too narrowly defined boxes, locked-in budgets and a lack of opportunities for quickly reacting to changes and developments in film art or the film market.

A cornerstone of Danish cultural policy is the arm's length principle, implying that politicians should refrain from micromanaging funds for the arts and culture. As I see it, the most important task for the Danish Film Institute, a government agency under the Ministry of Culture, is to draw up the lines. It is not for us to play in the actual game, so to speak. We need to provide the best possible framework for creative talent and competent merchants to unfold their play. We need to make sure that the playing field is big, healthy, well tended and open.

To ensure open dialogue concerning the Film Institute's proposal for a Film Policy Accord, we conducted a major project in 2009 called "Ask & Listen", involving 250 stakeholders from the film industry. Dialogue meetings pointed out a number of conditions regarding film policy that, taken together with the considerable structural and technological changes in the market, require new thinking if the current success and diversity are to continue and the onset of "metal fatigue" is to be reversed.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Three themes dominated "Ask & Listen" with regard to the current Film Policy Accord: insufficient economy in individual films, excessive micro-regulation and excessive TV influence on Danish film production.

These three issues must be addressed to answer future public film funding. If not, we risk ending up with insufficient room for development, increasing uniformity and a reduced willingness to take risks. These problem areas especially involve film production and film development, the Film Institute's biggest subsidy areas.

Moreover, international exchange should be strengthened and intensified. In a global development, it is essential for the Danish film industry to have strong international partnerships in developing, funding, producing and co-producing films. Consequently, the proposal calls for establishing a department at the Film Institute for international funding and co-production.

Another big subsidy area is distribution and dissemination. Changing consumer behaviour and technological breakthroughs present new opportunities and new challenges for disseminating Danish films. It is the Film Institute's goal that films should come to citizens where they live, and the Film Institute's many subsidy schemes for various dissemination purposes need to be revised accordingly.

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

The Danish Film Institute's proposal for a new Film Policy Accord also embraces ideas and plans for digitising and publishing the film heritage, teaching activities for children and youth, ambitions for the Cinematheque and much more.

A time of global recession and prospects of public budget cuts is not an ideal context for voicing big ambitions and desires for public support of the arts. Still, the Film Institute's proposal for a new Film Policy Accord has been well received, both by the film industry and by politicians. In the coming months, we will be following up on the "Ask & Listen" process, and it is our hope that Denmark's new Film Policy Accord will be created in a dialogue between Parliament, the Danish Film Institute and the film industry, so that Danish films may continue to benefit from a government film policy that truly reflects the wide framework of that which has been coined "the best film act in the world" ■

Read Henrik Bo Nielsen's foreword for "Set Film Free" at dfi.dk/English/News

FILM POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Danish Film Institute operates under the Ministry of Culture (Film Act, 1997). Since 1999, the financial framework and the political objectives behind Danish film policy have been laid down in four-year Film Policy Accords by the Danish Parliament. Next period will be 2011-2014.



The Danish Film Institute's proposal for a new Film Policy Accord includes suggestions for new efforts and initiatives in film development, production, distribution and preservation. The photos show Lars von Trier and his actors on the red carpet in Cannes, 2009, and Syrian children in the Film Institute's mobile film studio for children, which visited Damascus in 2009. Photo: Stephane Reix (left) and DFI

ART MEETING THE MARKET



Photo: Per Arnesen

Christian Rank, Danish Producer on the Move, loves quirky films. He believes that small films can learn from the market orientation of big productions. No matter how specialised a film is, it's still the producer's task to find an audience for it.

BY FREJA DAM

Frequent trips to the movies with his film-buff dad laid the ground for Christian Rank's love of film. When his dream of making a career as a drummer fell through, he found the perfect niche as a film producer. "Like a drummer you're sitting behind everyone else, but you're a totally crucial factor that keeps the engine running," Rank says.

Rank is a 2005 producing graduate of the National Film School and has worked at Miso Film since 2008. While his inspiration comes from films such as the American indie films, he also appreciates working on the broad Scandinavian crime series that are Miso Film's backbone and leave room for taking the occasional risk or two.

"I started at Miso out of a desire to learn how to produce high-quality films with healthy finances and I'm gaining huge experience working with big market-oriented projects. It gives you an insight that's valuable when working with smaller films, in terms of financing, market and audience. Merging art and the market is an interesting thing to do," Rank says.

DON'T GET TOO CARRIED AWAY BY ART

"It's crucial to finance small as well as big projects soundly and to be aware of your audience in both cases. You should be careful not to forget the market and not get too carried away by art. An art film can only survive if the producer makes sure to communicate it to an audience – not necessarily the widest audience but the *right* audience – and adjust the financing and production accordingly."

Communication is key to all good film producing, as Rank sees it, in terms of the audience as well as the film crew and the financial partners.

"One of the most important tasks for a producer is defining a clear vision and making sure to communicate it to all parties, so that everyone – creatives and investors alike

– are working to create the same film," he says. "You should support the filmmakers in their ambitions but also respect the investors' risk. In case of conflict, it's important to have a clearly defined vision from the outset, so you can make your decisions accordingly."

FILMFORUM TO HELP YOUNG WRITERS

As an example of the kind of innovative projects he burns to do, Rank mentions the FilmForum initiative, which he launched with his colleague Caroline Blanco. Putting original screenplays front and centre, the project lets a group of young writers develop their own ideas. The Danish film community has been discussing the lack of skilled young screenwriters with the desire and the time to write feature films – since so many young writers have been too busy writing TV dramas or been hired by established film directors.

In Rank's experience, young writers have lots of original ideas for films, if only they get space to unfold them.

"I hear writers saying how they really want to put their own ideas out there. But they're looking for more companies and producers with the willingness and desire to take their projects and their ideas seriously. As a young producer I really want to help promote such projects and help our generation of filmmakers make their mark. I'm delighted that FilmForum has received support from the Danish Film Institute, as well as from both the national TV stations. It's a sign that the established system wants to hear young voices, too."

Rank sees FilmForum as an extension of the dialogue that happens in film school but all too easily dies out later.

"In Denmark, we need to get better at meeting and discussing our craft. That's part of what I hope to get out of being Producer on the Move in Cannes: meeting other filmmakers and establishing dialogue in a bigger forum, while forging new relationships and partnerships across national borders" ■

"Like a drummer you're sitting behind everyone else, but you're a totally crucial factor that keeps the engine running."

CHRISTIAN RANK

Born 1978, Denmark. Graduated in production at the National Film School of Denmark, 2005. Produced Martin de Thurah's short *Young Man Falling* (2007), selected for Critics' Week in Cannes, the feature documentaries *Gambler* (Phie Ambo, 2006) and *Everything is Relative* (Mikala Krogh, 2008), and *Moving Up* (Christian Dyekjær, 2008), Rank's first feature. In 2008 teamed up with Miso Film, who produced the six-film franchise *Varg Veum* (2008) based on Gunnar Staalesen's successful private-eye novels. Rank is on the producing team for the crime series *Those Who Kill*.

FILMFORUM

A network of screenwriter talents initiated by producers Caroline Blanco and Christian Rank. The idea is to produce original feature films with strong artistic intent by giving the writers elbow room to hatch original stories. Over the next six months, six writers will, in close dialogue with the producers, each develop a feature film eventually to be produced by Miso Film. Among the participating writers are Tobias Lindholm (*Submarino, R*) and Jannik Tai Mosholt (*Hold Me Tight, The Great Bear*). Financed by Miso Film, the Danish Film Institute, the national broadcasters DR and TV 2, and Scandinavian distributor Svensk Filmindustri.

"An art film can only survive if the producer makes sure to communicate it to an audience – not necessarily the widest audience but the right audience."

“QUOTAS ARE FOR FISH”

Winning awards, making headlines, gaining international recognition – Danish women directors are doing exceptionally well right now. But is gender really still an issue?

BY LOUISE SKOV ANDERSEN

The Dogme Brothers in the late 1990s catapulted Danish cinema into the international stratosphere. Now, little more than a decade later, their younger sisters are stealing the headlines and gaining international recognition.

Susanne Bier is making it in Hollywood, Lone Scherfig's recent Oscar and Bafta nominated *An Education* has maintained the success she achieved with her 2000 Dogme film *Italian for Beginners*, and Pernille Fischer Christensen, who rocketed into international orbit in 2006 with her Silver Bear winner *A Soap*, has cemented her position with *A Family*, which ran off with the critics' award in Berlin.

“Danish film always featured strong women, but right now they are simply doing exceptionally well,” says Ib Bondebjerg, professor of Film and Media Studies at Copenhagen University. “We have women directors making headlines at home and internationally. Directors like Susanne Bier and Lone Scherfig long since proved that they have the stature and stamina as artists that enables them to move in the international market.”

UNDERGROWTH OF TALENT

It is not only at the top of Danish film that women are proving their ability to send critics, award committees and audiences leaping from their seats with applause. The pool of new, young talent is greater than ever before. One reason for that is the enhanced focus on talent development in the Danish film industry in recent years, Christina Rosendahl says. A film director, Rosendahl also heads the Danish Film Institute's Feature Film Council and is vice chairman of Danish Film Directors.

“I don't know the exact figures, but I get the clear impression that the talent pool is singularly large right now as compared to ten years ago. Support schemes like New Danish Screen have heightened

the focus on talent. And the more talents that emerge, naturally, the more women directors we will be seeing,” she says.

Rosendahl is convinced that the international success enjoyed by Scherfig, Bier, Christensen and others is extremely important to young women directors currently coming out of the Danish film underground.

“It's hugely important! They are role models for other women. Pernille Fischer Christensen on the red carpet in Berlin with a baby on her arm – that kicks ass! Being a film director is an insanely tough job. We have to manage a set and deliver a film, while dealing with all manner of tortured souls, so it's a tough field to navigate,” she says.

“Everyone who has a normal 9 to 4 job knows how hard it is to keep it all together when you're raising a family. So when you want to be a *filmmaker*, having a child can seem completely impossible. As directors, we're still expected to work without a salary for long periods and when we're on set, we have 70- or 80-hour workweeks. While that's going on, you're deeply dependent on having a supportive and understanding network. So when we see women being successful, we realise that we, too, can demand the same kind of support they're getting,” Rosendahl says.

“Pernille Fischer Christensen on the red carpet in Berlin with a baby on her arm – that kicks ass!” Christina Rosendahl

‘DIRECTOR’ WILL SUFFICE

Katrina Schelin, a director and board member of the Women in Film and Television network, runs a workshop about women and film at the European Film College in Ebeltoft. She agrees with Rosendahl that powerful role models are worth their weight in gold to new generations of filmmakers.

“It means the world to see that there are others like us. It makes you go, ‘I can do that, too.’ I'm

convinced that the slew of powerful directors we have seen in recent years will bring a lot more women into film over the long term.”

Pernille Fischer Christensen is one of the positive role models whose success is benefiting young women directors. Personally, she never saw it as her mission to bring more women into Danish film.

“I was never interested in that,” she says. “When I do interviews, I often ask the journalist to leave out ‘woman director’, because it always bothered me to be pigeonholed like that.”

In the 1990s, when she was attending the National Film School, she did occasionally feel like a minority because of her gender. But it's not like that anymore.

“There's been a sea change. I don't think the young generation of women directors consider their gender an issue. Successful women directors already exist. My older sisters in film, like Susanne Bier and Lone Scherfig, already fought that battle for us.”

QUALITY, NOT GENDER

While Danish cinema today is marked by powerful films made by women directors, full equality is still a ways off. A 2009 report by Danish Film Directors shows that women constitute just 20 percent of directors at the highest end of the income scale.

That's not good enough, Rosendahl says. But, unlike

Women in Film and Television, she does not think gender quotas are the way to go.

“Personally, I think introducing quotas into the area of film would be a complete disaster. Quotas are for fish, not film directors. And I think it would keep us in the role of victims. We have to fend for ourselves and start acting like the role models we have. I would be furious if I suddenly had to get my funds from a special quota. It should be a question of quality” ■

“I don’t think the young generation of women directors consider their gender an issue. My older sisters in film, like Susanne Bier and Lone Scherfig, already fought that battle for us.” Pernille Fischer Christensen



ROLE MODEL. Pernille Fischer Christensen’s success is rubbing off on young women directors, although she never saw it her mission. **Photo:** Stine Larsen

Some women directors

SUSANNE BIER

Breakthrough *The One and Only* (1999), one of Danish cinema’s greatest boxoffice hits – international breakthrough came with *Brothers* (2004), recipient of awards in Sundance and San Sebastian, and was cemented with the Oscar nominated *After the Wedding* (2006) and the US-produced *Things We Lost in the Fire* (2007).

Next film *In a Better World*, featuring Mikael Persbrandt, Trine Dyrholm and Ulrich Thomsen in a drama that traces elements from a refugee camp in Africa to the grey humdrum of everyday life in a Danish provincial town.

LONE SCHERFIG

Breakthrough *Italian for Beginners* (2000), one of Danish cinema’s greatest boxoffice hits ever and recipient of numerous Danish and international awards, among these four in Berlin. With her Oscar and Bafta nominated *An Education*, Lone Scherfig has, more than ever, made her name internationally.

Next film The comedy *One Day*, based on a novel by David Nicholls about Dexter and Emma who first meet during their graduation in 1988 and proceed to reunite one day each year for the next 20 years.

ANNETTE K. OLESEN

Breakthrough *Minor Mishaps* (2002), winner of the Blue Angel Award in Berlin and also in the run for a Golden Bear like two of her following films, *In Your Hands* and *Little Soldier*.

Next film An adaptation of Suzanne Brøgger’s family saga *The Jade Cat*.

PERNILLE FISCHER CHRISTENSEN

Breakthrough *A Soap* (2006), winner of the Silver Bear in Berlin. At this year’s Berlinale, Pernille Fischer Christensen received a Special Mention for her latest feature *A Family*.

HEIDI MARIA FAISST

Breakthrough *The Blessing* (2009), recipient of two awards at Göteborg Film Festival.

Next film The youth film *Den der hvisker* (English title to be announced) about teenager Louise who throws herself into a world of partying, drugs, fast cash and men to win her mother’s love.

BIRGITTE STÆRMOSE

Breakthrough The short film *Out of Love*, honoured with a Special Mention in Berlin and the Prix EFA in Rotterdam.

Next film Feature film debut *The Morning After*, a multi-plot drama that takes place in a hotel during three days following a gunshot.



TENDERNESS FOR THE CHARACTERS

Why doesn't Marjorie, Jenny's mother in *An Education*, have a sewing machine? And why does Olympia from *Italian for Beginners* drop so many scones? There is always a story behind the story when Lone Scherfig creates her characters.

BY LOUISE SKOV ANDERSEN

There's Jenny's flinty yet gracious father in the Oscar-nominated *An Education*. There's the butter-fingered baker girl in *Italian for Beginners* who's always sending baking sheets clattering to the floor, and the hotel clerk in the same film who is in love with the local Italian belladonna, though he barely knows enough to order a Coke in her native language.

And there's all the rest. If there's one thing that endears Lone Scherfig to audiences and critics alike, it's the ability of even the most minor of her characters to instantly get under the audience's skin, where they linger long after the credits have rolled.

NEVER BLACK AND AND WHITE

"*Italian for Beginners* is a comedy where you don't just laugh at the characters but live and feel with them", is how one reviewer described Scherfig's breakthrough film in 2000.

Personally, Scherfig thinks she picked up that ability early in her career, when she was a writer on a Danish drama series about a taxi company.

"It trained me to tell stories with a large cast, while making sure to give everyone their own story that furthers the main plot," Scherfig explains.

"What often makes a lot of mainstream films rather boring," says Ebbe Iversen, film critic and keen admirer of Scherfig's ability to build credible characters, "is that they divide the world into black and white, bad people and good people. That's not how it works with Lone Scherfig. There are all sorts of nuances, and nobody is either one thing or the other. We're all human for better or for worse, and that's also how it works with her characters."

If Ebbe Iversen were to describe Lone Scherfig with one single word, it would be "generous". "She's always incredibly generous and tender toward her characters. And she's always on their side - she's never mean and never makes cheap jokes on their behalf."

Ann Eleonora Jørgensen, who has worked with Lone Scherfig on several films and who played the sensuous hairdresser Karen in *Italian for Beginners*, says that one of Scherfig's strongest points as director is that she's extremely skilled at sensing what goes on around her.

"That's why her characters always have this extra layer compared to ordinary comedies. Lone has an offbeat way of thinking and sees the world askew. And she's an extremely good listener. She can listen to your inner 'tune', so to speak, and then let it simmer and marinate, until she ends up with a concentrated flavour that she uses to create the character."

"FINALLY A GANGSTER FILM"

Today, Scherfig is known the world over for her ability to make films about people. But for a while now, she has actually wanted to make a film that was governed by the plot instead of the characters. "I've been putting that out there for so long now that I finally managed to get a gangster film," she laughs, referring to the upcoming *Mob Girl*, set in New York's criminal underworld.

Scherfig is also involved in four other projects, including a musical, a romantic comedy and the adaptation of Nick Hornby's *Juliet, Naked*. Potentially very different films. But, she says, all the projects she's juggling have one thing in common, "They all have a singular tenderness for their characters" ■

"Italian for Beginners is a comedy where you don't just laugh at the characters but live and feel with them."

One reviewer on Lone Scherfig's breakthrough film

THREE FAVOURITE SCHERFIG CHARACTERS



MARJORIE IN AN EDUCATION (CARA SEYMOUR):

She's a good example of a supporting character that, in her own special way, helps to tell the big story. The script hardly had any lines for the character, so Lone Scherfig and Cara Seymour had to create the role together.

"We know a lot of things about Marjorie that no one else knows. Down to the pearl necklace she's wearing and why. That's not something you need to know when you go to the cinema, but it makes the character consistent. You see the tip of a greater context."

"Everybody asked all the time, 'Shouldn't she have a sewing machine, knitting wear, or a cat she can cuddle with?'. No, she shouldn't, because we wanted her to expose the emptiness that makes it possible for David to enter the family's life. She has loads of time on her hands. And maybe a 'mother's little helper' in the medicine cabinet."



ALICE IN WILBUR WANTS TO KILL HIMSELF (SHIRLEY HENDERSON):

She leads a quiet, invisible life as a cleaning lady of hospital operating rooms. Her fortunes turn when she discovers a pile of old books.

"Like Olympia, Alice is a loser who ends up winning. She has no friends, no family, no father for her child, and she works nights mopping up after surgery."

"But over the course of the film, she gets everything: a wonderful man, a big bookstore, a happy life. She's almost like something out of an old girls' adventure book."



OLYMPIA IN ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS (ANETTE STØVELBÆK):

She drops one sheet of baked goods after another on the floor. When she slices a cucumber, the slices are as thick as a Bible. She has the handwriting of a five-year-old.

"The whole character is built around dropping or losing. Olympia drops everything because she is so clumsy and she loses first her mother, then her father. She's an invisible person who ends up being seen. I was clumsy as a child myself and I can't count the number of times I got a concussion."

"So there are autobiographical elements in Olympia, and that's probably why the character seems believable - because I used something I know."



A TENDER MOMENT. Sebastian Jessen and Bodil Jørgensen briefly counter the feeling of loneliness that permeates all the characters in *Nothing's All Bad* **Photo:** Christian Geisnæs

FINDING LOVE IN UNLIKELY PLACES

Mikkel Munch-Fals, known to Danes as a two-fisted film critic from TV, is making his debut as a feature film director with the ensemble drama *Nothing's All Bad*, a warts-and-all look at engulfing loneliness.

BY KATRINE SOMMER BOYSEN

Film buffs in Denmark could never overlook Mikkel Munch-Fals as a TV personality. His insistent voice, clear-cut opinions and slightly demonic aura made it impossible to doubt his love of film in general and art cinema in particular. Meanwhile, Munch-Fals always wanted to direct. The 38-year-old cineaste previously won critical acclaim and several awards for his two short films, *Partus* and *First Flush*, both

from 2006. Now he is putting the finishing touches on his first feature, *Nothing's All Bad*.

Tight as a chamber play, *Nothing's All Bad* is the story of four variously lonely and emotionally crippled people. Ingeborg (Bodil Jørgensen – Munch-Fals wrote the role for her) is about to retire from the job she has given everything, even though no one ever cared enough to find out who she was. She is lonely after her husband's death. Her daughter Anna (Mille Lehfeldt), who just had one breast removed after a tumour was discovered and is undergoing a deep identity crisis, is unable to accept her mother's outstretched hand.

Anders (Henrik Prip) is fundamentally unable to feel happiness. Exposing himself and masturbating in front of strange women is the only way he can

feel any kind of closeness. His son Jonas (Sebastian Jessen) sells himself “because he can”. Their paths cross, although they are fundamentally alone.

LONELINESS A BASIC CONDITION

Why did you choose to thematise loneliness so overtly?

“Loneliness is the problem I struggle with most myself. To me, it's the toughest human condition after basic physical needs like hunger and thirst. It has so many faces and no one can guard against it. Loneliness can come out of the blue. It can be a choice or self-caused. Personally, I'm haunted by a basic fear of loneliness catching up with me, and I wanted to try and put that into film.”

Loneliness is, in truth, not an easy thing to shake: “In *Nothing's All Bad*, it spreads like ripples

“Personally, I’m haunted by a basic fear of loneliness catching up with me, and I wanted to try and put that into film.”

in water, because loneliness by definition begets loneliness. The characters in the film don’t have the wherewithal to deal with each other, or even themselves for that matter, and there’s no one to catch them when they fall.”

Taking loneliness as the basic condition for his four characters, Munch-Fals faced the challenge of giving an individual expression to each character’s loneliness. Hence the controversial linking of loneliness, body and sexuality.

“In the case of Anders, I deliberately strove to externalise the reason for his loneliness. Anders’ penchant for public masturbation is a very concrete act that makes his relationship to his surroundings deeply problematic. Essentially it’s harmless, but the consequences for him could be disastrous. His emotional stuntedness makes it vital for him to expose himself or he wouldn’t be able to feel himself or the joy or life that actually exists around him. Paradoxically, his yearning for closeness erects an even greater barrier between him and the rest of the world.”

Because of their loneliness, the characters put themselves at stake in various sexual transactions.

Why make that connection?

“I don’t know how much it shows through in the film, but this is really a very amoral story of sorts, since their various ways of commodifying themselves ultimately work out to their benefit. They end up in a state of potential companionship and community. They are deeply flawed and they do things they shouldn’t be doing.”

“I definitely had my mind set on telling a story that’s amoral but still makes sense. Although they express their sense of community in ways that are shady at best, theirs is still a community. They have bonded. Whether that bond holds is less certain.

It’s enormously appealing to me that people can connect despite all kinds of obstacles, that love and realness can be found in the most unlikely places. There’s something lovely and appealing in how a person has to change in order to connect with other people. That others can love you despite your flaws.”

AMERICAN ENSEMBLE HEAVYWEIGHTS

Nothing’s All Bad takes the form of an ensemble film, as we know it particularly from the American tradition and heavyweights like Robert Altman and Paul Thomas Anderson. As the term implies, we’re dealing with a narrative structure that isn’t linearly or sequentially organised and doesn’t focus on a single protagonist but branches out and draws in a larger group of characters whose fates are given equal weight.

What narrative advantages did you find in the ensemble genre?

“Tight as a chamber play, *Nothing’s All Bad* is the story of four variously lonely and emotionally crippled people.”

“It was a deliberate and necessary choice for the film. I find that conventionally told films often fall back on highly simplified explanatory models where everything fits into a given causality: ‘My mom and dad drank, and dad was always working, which is why I’m alone.’ It’s never that simple, if you ask me. I didn’t set out to find any big, gold-plated answers or solutions to why the characters are in the place they are in. It’s the process that’s interesting.”

Apart from interweaving the characters in the ensemble film format, Munch-Fals also lets the film thematise itself as fiction, employing devices like a framework story and chapter titles. “I never tried to make the film a slice of life. My film insists on being fiction, but even though it doesn’t mimic reality, it’s far from unrealistic. People like this really exist. I’m one of them myself, and all four at once.”

In their blend of deeply vulnerable and deeply troubled, your characters seem to be a nod to Todd Solondz’ Happiness. Is that a conscious inspiration?

“I love that man to death, and *Happiness* is one of my absolute favourites, so it’s hard to say how much of it was conscious. Solondz has an inimitable ability to write stuff that really shouldn’t work and then translate it into film in a completely effortless way. In his hands we accept madness. And we keep feeling for his characters, no matter how much they screw up.”

FORGIVE

Is Munch-Fals anxious about exchanging the role of critic for the far more self-revealing role of director?

“If I hadn’t directed anything before turning up on TV as critic, I’d probably be extremely nervous, but this, now, is what I do. *Nothing’s All Bad* is a very personal story and it was imperative for me to tell it. I think that’s sometimes missing from films. A personal imprint and intention. I’ve been indescribably happy about my collaboration with New Danish Screen, where I think my film got the best imaginable conditions for coming into being.”

Naturally, there is a certain anxiety about putting such a personal film out there to critics and audiences. Munch-Fals, a former painter and illustrator, has a big control gene when it comes to his films. Every shot is precisely storyboarded and written out in advance, so the film turns out the way he wants it.

“If for just one moment the audience think they maybe could be a little bit better about forgiving themselves and others, that’s all I ask” ■

For further information on Nothing’s All Bad, see reverse section.

MIKKEL MUNCH-FALS

Born 1972, Denmark. Artist, illustrator, writer and film critic. Made his directorial debut in 2006 with *First Flush*, followed by *Partus*, both winning several awards. *Nothing’s All Bad*, made with support from the talent scheme New Danish Screen, is Munch-Fals’ feature film debut.

ZENTROPA

Founded 1992 by director Lars von Trier and producer Peter Aalbæk Jensen. Acknowledged for having reinvigorated the industry with *Dogme 95*. International breakthrough came with Lars von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves* (1996). Renown continued with Lone Scherfig’s Berlin winner *Italian for Beginners* (2000). Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) received the Palme d’Or, and also selected for Cannes were *Dogville* (2003), *Manderlay* (2005), and *Antichrist* (2009). Launched several films by Oscar nominee Susanne Bier, Per Fly and Annette K. Olesen. Recent achievements include Niels Arden Oplev’s Crystal Bear winner *We Shall Overcome* (2006), Omar Shargawi’s Rotterdam- and Göteborg-winner *Go with Peace Jamil* (2008), Heidi Maria Faisst’s Göteborg-winner *The Blessing*, and Pernille Fischer Christensen’s *A Family*, selected for Berlin. Films in the pipeline include Susanne Bier’s *In a Better World*, Mikkel Munch-Fals’ *Nothing’s All Bad*, and Jørgen Leth’s *The Erotic Human*. zentropa.dk



AT WORK. Mikkel Munch-Fals during the shoot of *Nothing’s All Bad* Photo: Christian Geisnæs



DREAMING OF A CHILD. Shot in Brazil, *Rosa Morena* is told from the perspective of the Danish protagonist Thomas (Anders W. Berthelsen) who badly wants to become a father **Photo:** Philippe Kress



BY KARL ERIK SCHÖLLHAMMER

AN UNEQUAL BARGAIN

What's really at issue when Angelina Jolie, Mia Farrow or Madonna adopt a baby from a Third World country? Are they helping children or just exploiting them all over again? Carlos Oliveira's debut feature *Rosa Morena* explores what we're looking for in foreign cultures and where these wishful cross-border images lead us.

In our globalised reality, stories originate from small, local meetings across great geographical distances and cultural differences.

Rosa Morena is a film about such a meeting. More than that, it's the product of one. The film is directed by the Brazilian director Carlos Oliveira, who is a graduate of the alternative Danish film school Super16. He wrote the outline and screenplay with the Danish playwright Morten Kirkskov, repeating their collaboration on *Three Summers*, Oliveira's 2006 graduation film at Super16.

CROSS-PERSPECTIVE VITAL

The groundwork for the film was laid in a pioneering partnership between the Danish production company Fine & Mellow and Brazil's Ginga 11. *Rosa Morena* was shot on Brazilian locations and – with the exception of producer Astrid Hytten, DP Philippe Kress and the two leads, Anders W. Berthelsen and David Dencik – the cast and crew are Brazilian.

Still, Oliveira stresses, the film is Danish. The story is told from the perspective of the Danish protagonist, and that cross-perspective is exactly what gives the film its edge. Oliveira, a long-time resident of Denmark, prepared for the film by doing months of research among mothers who have given up one or more children for adoption, in a *favela* district on the outskirts of Sao Paulo, a social environment that is alien to most Brazilians as well.

SÃO PAULO HOLDS THE DREAM

It is no accident that the story is about a Dane, a

CARLOS OLIVEIRA

Born 1974, Brazil. Brazilian director living in Denmark since 2000. Worked with short and feature films since 1992 – as assistant director, script supervisor and writer. Studied architecture in Rio de Janeiro and film and media in Copenhagen. Was a member of the Copenhagen-based film network and alternative film school Super16, 2003-06, graduating with *Three Summers*. *Rosa Morena* is Oliveira's first feature film.

FINE & MELLOW

Founded 2002 by producer Thomas Gammeltoft. The company's first feature film was the drama-comedy *Stealing Rembrandt* (Jannik Johansen, 2003). Hella Joof's *Oh Happy Day* (2004) sold to Disney for a US remake. *Chinaman* (2005), starring Bjarne Henriksen and US-Chinese diva Vivian Wu (*The Last Emperor*, *Pillow Book*), was awardwinning director Henrik Ruben Genz' second feature film. Another Jannik Johansen feature is *Murk* (2005), a psychological thriller co-written with Oscar-winner Anders Thomas Jensen. *Terribly Happy* (Henrik Ruben Genz, 2008), which is up for an American remake, was awardwinner in Karlovy Vary. Three feature film debuts in 2010: *Rosa Morena* (Carlos Oliveira), *Skyscraper* (Rune Schjøtt, see page 32) and *10 Hours to Paradise* (Mads Matthiesen). www.finemellow.dk

THE BRAZILIAN INSPIRATION

Orphans and abandoned children have been a regular and recurring theme in Brazilian films dating back to such classics as Hector Babenco's *Pixote* (1981), Walter Salles' *Central Station* (1998) and Fernando Meirelles' *City of God* (2002). Recently, it was the theme of José Padilha's documentary *Ônibus 174* (2002), Paulo Morelli's *City of Men* (2007) and Bruno Barreto's *Last Stop 174* (2008). Sandra Werneck treated the predicament of young mothers in her 2006 documentary *Meninas* (Girls) about four teenage girls who become mothers at age 13-15.



CROSS-CULTURAL. Carlos Oliveira is inspired by Brazilian and Danish film traditions **Photo:** Thomas Leth

“But does that desperate situation justify the buying and selling of children? The film explicitly asks that question.”

40-year-old architect, Thomas, who goes to Sao Paulo, Brazil, to realise his big dream of becoming a father. Thomas' problem is that, as a single gay man, he is legally unable to adopt in Denmark.

Instead, he looks up his old Brazilian friend Jakob, who has settled in Sao Paulo and opened a bar with his wife Tereza and their son. Tereza works for a local NGO, helping poor, broken families in the city's slums. Thomas decides to become a volunteer, too, as a way to get closer to families and single mothers motivated to give up their new-born children for adoption.

The meeting between cultures also becomes a meeting between rich and poor, dramatising the question of the legitimacy of wealthy, childless people offering poor families with many children to get out of deeper poverty by selling a child.

80,000 CHILDREN WAITING FOR HOMES

It's an urgent question in many developing countries, including Brazil. With a population of 190 million, Brazil still suffers from vast social inequality despite its economic progress. The consequences – wretched living conditions, crime, substance abuse, broken homes and abandoned or exploited children – are all too familiar. In Brazilian child-care institutions, 80,000 or so children are continually waiting for homes.

Despite modern laws, the system is too slow and bureaucratic. Only 10% of these children ever find a home, while families hoping to adopt sometimes have to wait years for an answer.

But does that desperate situation justify the buying and selling of children? The film explicitly asks that question, while Thomas, trying to buy a baby from a single mother, ends up taking a beating and waking up in a rubbish dump.

Thomas doesn't give up. Ignoring Jakob's warnings, he insists on finding a child to adopt, without once considering the possible costs to his job and career, not to mention the costs to others. Thomas doesn't have time to wait for the bureaucratic system to run its course, and when Jakob leads him to Maria, a single, pregnant mother with little chance of feeding another child, they make a deal that also requires them to spend a certain amount of time together during and after her pregnancy.

Essentially rudderless in life, Maria struggles to survive without giving up partying and casual hook-ups. Thomas is a typical single European man

“Rosa Morena combines the social and documentary realism of Brazilian films of the last few decades with the solid, convincing storytelling of Danish films about ‘real’, ordinary people.”

who puts his work ahead of everything else and is starting to feel the existential void in his life. Both are looking for something to fill their lives and that brings them closer together. Maria's unborn child is an impediment to her, but for Thomas it is an opportunity to find new meaning in life. When Thomas moves in with Maria to follow the last period of her pregnancy, they make an odd and paradox-ridden nuclear family.

DANISH-BRAZILIAN HYBRID

The apparent cynicism of the commercial transaction between the rich *gringo* and the poor young uneducated *favelada* with no prospects in life here yields to a questioning of the motives underlying their actions. Why does Thomas really want a child? To give his life meaning? And how can Maria even consent to selling her newborn child to a perfect stranger?

Rosa Morena combines the social and documentary realism of Brazilian films of the last few decades with the solid, convincing storytelling of Danish films about “real”, ordinary people. Like other recent Brazilian films, *Rosa Morena* draws in the visual wealth of the urban underbelly and the intensity of the social and moral conflicts originating there. The film builds on documentary material staged in its own environment which again is dramatically expanded by Oliveira and Kirkskov's convincing narrative treatment ■

For further information on Rosa Morena, see reverse section.

MAKE IT AGAIN

SAMM

Hollywood in recent years has acquired the rights to remake a number of Danish films. Is Hollywood running out of stories? And how do the Danish filmmakers relate to American versions of their films?

BY EVA NOVRUP REDVALL

Jim Sheridan's remake of Susanne Bier's *Brødre* is the latest example of a Danish film getting a second life in Hollywood. Tobey Maguire, Jake Gyllenhaal and Natalie Portman are the star cast of this intense family drama, replacing Nikolaj Lie Kaas, Ulrich Thomsen and Connie Nielsen who originally made the film a Danish-language hit. The story was adapted to American conditions. In Denmark the new film triggered a flurry of articles about the effects of the Hollywood remakes.

With more American versions of Danish titles in the pipeline, the question is what strategy Danish filmmakers find most fruitful when their films are remade.

From a Danish perspective, there are three basic approaches to remakes: selling the rights without getting involved in the details of how the foreign buyers intend to realise their version; getting actively involved in the remake, with the Danish director maybe even directing the new film as well; or simply doing the whole remake of your popular Danish film yourself.



Photo: Jan Buus

The last approach is not common, though Regner Grasten's *Love at First Hiccup* is such an example of a Danish producer independently doing an English-language remake of his own film.

PACKAGED SELL

Kasper Barfoed's *The Candidate* is among the titles that are currently being remade. Peter Bose produced, with Jonas Allen of Miso Film. Bose says American interest was aroused when *The Candidate* was packaged and pitched in a form that spoke to them.

"We want to steer the film away from cynicism and bring in more emotion. It's looking very promising."

Thomas Gammeltoft, producer, on remaking Terribly Happy

"Of course, it sometimes happens that you meet foreign filmmakers who love your film so much that they purposefully strive to do a remake. But in general, it pays to do a package that makes it easier for people to envision how a remake might look. The remake of *The Candidate* builds on a broad partnership where a creative package was made to spark interest in the film," Bose says.

Sam Worthington of *Avatar* has signed on to play the lead and the screenplay is being reworked. As Bose sees it, there is interest in the film because it's



2 X BROTHERS. Tobey Maguire is the successful military man and Jake Gyllenhaal the black sheep in Jim Sheridan's remake of Susanne Bier's 2004 original that featured Ulrich Thomsen and Nikolaj Lie Kaas. **Photo:** Lorey Sebastian and Erik Aavatsmark



TERRIBLY PROMISING

Fine & Mellow producer Thomas Gammeltoft agrees that a remake should bring something new to the table. He previously sold the rights to Hella Joof's *Oh Happy Day* to Disney in what was primarily a financial arrangement, and he's currently taking a different tack in the partnership involving an American remake of Henrik Ruben Genz' Karlovy Vary winner *Terribly Happy*. The film attracted interest from its first screening in Karlovy Vary, and Gammeltoft subsequently got in touch with the American producer Carol Polakoff. Together they hired the screenwriter Howard Rodman to write a new screenplay to be directed by Genz.

"In *Terribly Happy* we had faith that we could drive the project ourselves," Gammeltoft says,

describing the remake development as very successful.

"It's not a one-to-one version, but the basic tone will be the same. We want to steer the film away from cynicism a little and bring in more emotion. It's looking very promising."

FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIPS

As director, Genz was onboard from the get-go. He describes the possibility of doing the film all over as a wonderful challenge.

"I don't feel that I'm done with the story," he says. "When we did the Danish version, it all went so fast. I now see that there is more to the characters and the story. They could be taken much further, and I really want to take another look at the material. Not because I'm not satisfied

"When we did the Danish version, it all went so fast. I now see that there is more to the characters and the story."

*Henrik Ruben Genz, director, on remaking *Terribly Happy**



Photo: Thomas Marott

an effective thriller in the American vein and several producers saw franchise potential in it.

As a Danish producer, he's involved in the process. But, he says, you need to recognise right away that your influence is going to be pretty limited. "It's generally better to have a good financial deal than to try and get influence. Of course, we want the remake to be successful. Otherwise, a remake can do more harm than good. But it should have its own life. There has to be something new there to make it interesting," Bose says.

with the film we made, but because it's interesting to turn over new aspects. When you do something for the first time, you tend to stick to the main track and when you've made it through and you know the terrain, then you dare to push things. You simply have more nerve," Genz says.

Meanwhile, he reserves the right to pull out, if the project doesn't turn out the way he would like.

"It was never my dream to make a film in America, and so I'm pretty free in my approach. If it turns out to be no fun, it's not a big loss for me,"

Genz says, pointing out that he's only had positive experiences with the project so far, putting to shame his preconceived notions about the American film business and everyone's warnings about it. Discussing the script with Rodman was a blast for Genz, and Rodman is enthusiastic about the script, too. As he tells FILM from Los Angeles, it's a huge advantage for a screenwriter to have a thoroughly worked-out universe to explore with a director who knows its every nook and cranny.

STUDIOS MORE CAUTIOUS

Nikolaj Arcel is also involved in the remake of his 2007 adventure romp *Island of Lost Souls*, keeping tabs on the screenplay, by Jennifer O'Kieffe, now in its third draft. The concept behind the project was to do something new in an American context, Arcel says.

"While the Danish film is its own little adventure, we have generally been working to ground the story in American mythology and history," he says, and so far he's pleased with how the development has been going. With new Danish films on the way, he has many balls in the air. That's how it should be, he says. There's a long way from planning a remake to actually realising it and, as a Danish director, it's important not to get carried away and to keep working on your other projects.

Arcel wrote the screenplay for *Catch That Girl*, which was remade in Hollywood in 2004 as *Catch That Kid*. In the years since, he has noticed a higher level of cautiousness at American studios concerning remakes.

"It's not my impression that Hollywood is more interested in remakes now. They were always on the lookout for good stories, but I find that the studios are more cautious now. Back in the day, *Catch That Kid* was made almost right off the bat. Now it takes a long time to reach the point where films actually get made."

A COMMON VISION

Mikkel Bondesen, a Danish producer at Fuse Entertainment, Hollywood, was involved in the remakes of *Catch That Girl* and *Midsummer*. He is not seeing significantly greater interest in remakes at the moment. But there is an awareness of Danish films and Danish producers have many ways to go.

Fuse Entertainment is currently shooting an American pilot of the Emmy-award-winning Danish TV series *The Killing*. As Kristen Campo, another Fuse producer, says, it's a major strength, especially in television, if there's a clear sense of what you're getting, not just in a pilot of the first episode but also in the continuing evolution of the series. She also finds that it's easier to get several co-production partners to agree on a vision when there is a strong model to follow.

The question of a common vision is crucial in terms of realising a Danish film internationally, Bondesen says. You need to pick your strategy and your partners carefully. Questions of creative control and the planned timeline will always be central, but he sees no reason not to continue turning good Danish films into American titles.

This much is clear: *Brothers* will be followed by many new, exciting remakes in the years to come ■

GROWTH SPURT



UNLIKELY HERO. An first sketch of *Ronal the Barbarian*, one of the promising new animation features in the pipeline **Photo:** Einstein Film

Danish animation studios are on fire these days. Never before have so many Danish animated features been in production at one time.

BY MARIANN NEDERBY MADSEN

The Danish animation industry is in a growth spurt. For several years now, new production companies specialising in animation have been springing up all over the place. Small companies in a small nation have proved they can compete on quality and embrace international audiences.

“The key to success for Danish animation seems to lie in a combination of diverse and original storylines, youthful graphic cockiness and the implementation of cutting-edge technology,” says Thomas Krag, DFI Feature Film Commissioner for children’s films.

“In recent years, there has been a revolution in animation production methods. Faster and cheaper technology has made it possible for Danish production companies to gamble on more and bigger animation projects. In that respect, animation has become *less* of a risky business.”

A NEW ANIMATION GENERATION?

But technology alone is not enough to explain it. Another reason for the activity and creativity on the Danish animation scene right now is the huge talent pool that the industry can draw on, a new generation of young, talented animators chomping at the bit.

Talent is nurtured mainly at the National Film School’s animation programme and the Animation Workshop. Separately and in collaboration, the two schools have developed specialised courses that more than measure up to international standards and give graduates an excellent launching point for a career in animation.

As Gunnar Wille, head of the National Film School’s animation programme, sees it, a goal-oriented strategy for the programme and a good

feel for the industry's future needs and challenges are now bearing fruit. "Very early on, we decided to work with low-budget computer systems. And that's how the development has been going. Consequently, our animation directors resemble the industry the Film School is sending them into, and the industry resembles us. It's been a mutual development."

Wille certainly appears to have set the right strategy. A glance at the list of Danish animated features now in development or production reveals several first-time feature-film directors.

"It's a whole new thing to have so many new directors on the scene," Wille says. "Veterans like Jannik Hastrup (*A Tale of Two Mozzies*, *The Boy Who Wanted to be a Bear*, *Cirkeline*) and Stefan Fjeldmark (*Help, I'm a Fish*, *Terkel in Trouble*, *Asterix et les vikings*) have been dominating the scene for years – right up til when Anders Morgenthaler as the first

Film School animation graduate directed a feature (*Princess*). Since then, there has been a complete and massive change. Now, four directors are working on their first features, and all are graduates of the last two classes at the Film School. That's never happened before" ■

THE NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL OF DENMARK

The National Film School's 4½-year animation programme trains students as both animation and video game directors, the latter in partnership with DADIU (the National Academy of Digital Interactive Entertainment), which teaches video game design. filmskolen.dk and dadiu.dk/english

THE ANIMATION WORKSHOP

The Animation Workshop in Viborg offers 3½-year BA programmes in Character Animation and Computer Graphics Arts. The character animator is the animation director's digital actor and the computer graphics artist is the digital set designer. animwork.dk

ANIMATION INITIATIVE 2010

The Danish Film Institute in partnership with the Danish national broadcaster DR has set up a new fund to promote the positive development of Danish animation.

In 2010 the fund will support four to eight original animated children's films in two short formats of 25 or 45 minutes. The aim is to enable a number of younger directors, who either have animation degrees or work professionally in animation but have not yet made their first feature or longer TV series, to realise short-format films, which are usually hard to get funded.

"The fund is particularly intended as a shot in the arm to new talent. It can be really hard to go from a seven-minute thesis film at the National Film School or the Animation Workshop to an animated feature. Hence, the focus is to boost the 'undergrowth' of short-format storytellers we know are out there and allow them to grow," DFI commissioner Thomas Krag says.

The Danish Film Institute is contributing 10 million kroner (approx. 1.34 million euros) to the fund, and DR is putting in 5 million kroner. The films will be broadcast on DR.

ANIMATED FEATURE FILMS IN PRODUCTION / A SELECTION



OLSEN GANG GETS POLISHED

The Olsen Gang, the legendary trio of small-time crooks with big-money dreams, have lent their name to more than a dozen films since 1968. Now for the first time the three lovable antiheroes will be appearing in animated stereoscopic 3D. Being no exception to the series' inclination for poking fun at authorities, the story involves the Prime Minister, Hans Christian Andersen's quill and the Queen's guards.

Director Jørgen Lerdam **Production** Nordisk Film, A. Film **Release** 14 October 2010



FREDDY FROGFACE

Nina Crone, successful producer of the smash hit *Sunshine Barry & The Disco Worms*, has plunged into a new project, an animated stereoscopic 3D feature from a classic Danish children's book, Ole Lund Kirkegaard's *Freddy Frogface*. The creative team is collaborating with an animation studio located in Beijing.

Directors Peter Dodd, Gert Fredholm **Production** Crone Film **Release** 3 February 2011
See article page 26



THE GREAT BEAR

The team behind this ambitious low-budget project have scrounged up enough funds to make a stereoscopic 3D version of their film, a visually striking tale of a giant, millennium-old bear roaming a cool, mythical Nordic woodland. *The Great Bear* is the first feature film by director Esben Toft Jacobsen, who graduated in animation directing from the National Film School of Denmark in 2006.

Director Esben Toft Jacobsen **Production** Copenhagen Bombay **Release** 10 February 2011



JENSEN & JENSEN

Craig Frank, one of three co-directors of *Journey to Saturn*, is working on his new animated satire *Jensen & Jensen*. We're in the year 2019. In a world where money is everything and debt can get you the death penalty, the Jensen brothers, Bjarne and Jimmy, are feeling the squeeze. Orbit Studio, part of the animation team that brought us the smash hits *Terkel in Trouble* and *Journey to Saturn*, are doing the animation of *Jensen & Jensen*.

Director Craig Frank **Production** Miso Film **Release** 2011



RONALD THE BARBARIAN

Thorbjørn Christoffersen and Kresten Vestbjerg Andersen, two of the co-directors on *Journey to Saturn*, are embarking on their 3D-animated feature, *Ronald the Barbarian*. Produced by Einstein Film, an animation start-up founded by the two directors with producers Philip Einstein Lipski and Trine Heidegaard. Christoffersen and Vestbjerg Andersen made their debut as feature directors with *Terkel in Trouble*, a festival and domestic hit.

Directors Thorbjørn Christoffersen, Kresten Vestbjerg Andersen **Production** Einstein Film **Release** 2011



CARLO'S CASINO

Since graduating in animation directing from the National Film School in 2008, Jan Rahbek has been working on his first animated feature, *Carlo's Casino*. The film is produced by Nice Ninja, a new company founded by Thomas Borch Nielsen and the award-winning team behind the successful animated feature *Sunshine Barry & The Disco Worms*. Nice Ninja is exclusively in the business of producing animated fiction films.

Director Jan Rahbek **Production** Nice Ninja **Release** 2012
See article page 27



Freddy Frogface Photo: Crone Film

TEAMING UP WITH BEIJING

Veteran producer Nina Crone is making *Freddy Frogface*, a stereoscopic 3D-animated feature from the children's book classic by Ole Lund Kirkegaard, in partnership with animation studios in Beijing.

BY MARIANN NEDERBY MADSEN

Following the Danish and international success of the animated feature *Sunshine Barry & The Disco Worms* (2008), producer Nina Crone is plunging into a new, ambitious animation project.

"When I produced *Sunshine Barry & The Disco Worms*, animation was a brand new field to me. But that went well and I'm putting that experience to work in the new project," says Crone, who by now has grown very fond of working with animation.

Besides *Freddy Frogface*, her production company Crone Film is planning two more 3D-animated features from the popular children's books by the Danish writer Ole Lund Kirkegaard. The screenplay for one, *Rubber Tarzan*, is already finished and the first tests are in full swing. The third film in the series will be *Otto is a Rhino*.

EXPECT A LOT FROM THE PARTNERSHIP

The initial processes – design, 3D-layout, editing, sound and voices – will be done in Denmark, while the later processes, like animation and compositing, will be done on the other side of the planet – in the Xing-Xing Digital Corporation animation studio in Beijing.

"Obviously, that comes with its own set of problems, but the advantages are huge. A lot more people can work on the project at one time without busting the budget. We'll be producing faster, and speed is of the essence considering that the premiere is scheduled for next winter," Crone says.

"We're expecting a lot from this partnership. The people at the Chinese animation studio are super skilled and incredibly enthusiastic," the producer says. A possible tie-in project might also be in the works.

"The Chinese are so excited about the project that not only the films but also Ole Lund Kirkegaard's books might be coming out in China. It would be really great if this partnership could lead to a whole wave of Danish cultural exports to China."

STORIES WITHOUT BORDERS

Crone sees no problem in transposing *Freddy Frogface* for Chinese audiences or any other audience for that matter. Ole Lund Kirkegaard's stories are very Danish, but they are also very universal.

"They are all about being small in a world where everyone else is big – and the trouble it can lead to. Also, a lot of the stories are about acting right as opposed to bullying. The stories are universal that way, which makes them relevant across borders and cultures."

Sunshine Barry & The Disco Worms was sold to more than 60 territories, and Crone has equally big ambitions for *Freddy Frogface*.

"We have an international sales agent from Sola Media on the film – the same person who handled

Sunshine Barry. It's still too early to say, but *Freddy Frogface* certainly has the potential to get out there," she says ■

For further information on *Freddy Frogface*, see reverse section.

CRONE FILM

Founded 1976 by producer Nina Crone. Holds a strong card in children's films. An early classic is *The World of Buster* (Bille August, 1984), widely recognized as one of Danish cinema's best children's drama. Among the company's well-known features is *Peter Von Scholten* (Palle Kjørulff-Schmidt, 1987) and the Swedish-Danish coproduction *Freud leaving home* (Susanne Bier, 1991). A major venture into 3D animation is *Sunshine Barry & the Disco Worms* (Thomas Borch Nielsen, 2008), including cover versions of famous disco hits. 2011: *Freddy Frogface (Orla the Frogsnatcher)*, a 3D animated feature, directed by Gert Fredholm and Peter Dodd. cronefilm.dk

THE CREATIVE TEAM

The film is co-directed by animation director Peter Dodd, who previously worked on Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride* and Sam Fell's *The Tale of Despereaux*, and Gert Fredholm, who directed the live-action feature *Lille Virgil og Freddy Frogface*. The creative producer is Erik Wilstrup who has wide experience in 3D animation.

OLE LUND KIRKEGAARD

The first children's book by the Danish writer Ole Lund Kirkegaard (1940-1979), *Lille Virgil*, came out in 1967 and was an overnight success. Kirkegaard's knack for writing in solidarity with his readers plus his own cheerful, naïve illustrations quickly gave him a wide readership. Several of Kirkegaard's books have been adapted into live-action feature films.

NO MONKEY BUSINESS

Shortly after graduating from the National Film School of Denmark in 2008, animation director Jan Rahbek pitched an idea at the Nordisk Film & TV Fond's Talent Pitch and won. Suddenly, Rahbek was knee deep in his first feature, a simian romp inspired by kitschy B-movies featuring giant robots and cool exotica music. *FILM* spoke with the talented young director and Thomas Borch Nielsen, the film's producer, about tight budgets, creativity and Dogme rules.

BY MARIANN NEDERBY MADSEN

In the 3D-animated musical action-comedy *Carlo's Casino*, Mani the monkey is a beach officer on an exotic monkey island trying to win the heart of beautiful Lulu, while investigating his rival Carlo's plans to build a giant casino on his beach.

"The idea for *Carlo's Casino* springs from my own love of kitschy B-movies, with giant robots and cool exotica music, and musicals, where music and choreography come together in a dizzying high of joy and magic," Rahbek says. "The film is set in an old-school exotica universe peopled with dancing and singing monkeys in colourful suits and imbued with quirky humour."

ONE-AND-A-HALF PERCENT OF A PIXAR FILM

Thomas Borch Nielsen, the producer of *Carlo's Casino*, has gathered some of the creative people from the successful animated feature *Sunshine Barry & The Disco Worms* (2008) in a new production

company, Nice Ninja. The experienced team is now buckling down to make *Carlo's Casino* on what is an extremely modest budget for an animated feature.

"*Carlo's Casino* has a budget of just two million euros - that's roughly one-and-a-half percent of what it costs to make a Pixar film," Nielsen laughs. He and Rahbek recently pitched the project to a bowled-over industry at the Cartoon Movie co-production forum in Lyon and at BUFF in Malmo.

"When we mentioned our budget to people there, they almost fell out of their chairs. A lot of them can't wrap their head around how we can even make a film on such a low budget, but we have become really skilled at doing inexpensive animation in Denmark," Nielsen says.

"Pitching *Carlo's Casino* was an overwhelming success," he says. "It gives you a lot of confidence to have the whole theatre laughing and praising your project. Then you really believe in it! Also, it was a good way to test the film. It has become abundantly clear that *Carlo's Casino* is not just a small, inside

Danish project but a film with major international appeal."

DOGME-STYLE ANIMATION

A lot of potential co-production partners and distributors have signalled their interest. Although they could do a Danish-Swedish-Norwegian-Finnish-German-Italian-French-Dutch-Belgian-and-Hungarian co-production, Nielsen says, Nice Ninja has decided to decline all the many offers.

"You could pull in a lot of money that way, obviously, but spreading a film out across a lot of animation studios in different countries, you risk making the process really complicated," Nielsen says.

Rahbek agrees, "The bigger something gets, the more out of control it tends to get. I want to stay close to the project and follow exactly what's happening - I think that makes for a better creative process."

The director is not feeling constricted by the tight budget.

"On the contrary, I see it as creating more artistic freedom. I could probably do something even more low-budget and still maintain the project's originality and creativity," he says.

"Think of it as a kind of Dogme rules for animation. There are certain limitations and we have to use our creativity within them," Nielsen says. "Some things we can't do and other things we have to do differently. That proved profitable artistically in the Dogme 95 films. The key is to pick your battles, and for us it was important to tell a good, funny story, putting our energy into the timing and the character animation, because that's where the comedy comes from.

"Obviously, we can't have the same massive production values as Dreamworks or Pixar, but with Jan's quirky humour hopefully we can make a film that's at least as funny" ■

For further information on *Carlo's Casino*, see reverse section.



Carlo's Casino Photo: Nice Ninja

JAN RAHBEK

Born 1980, Denmark. Graduated in animation directing from the National Film School of Denmark, 2008. The director's penchant for monkeys as characters in a personal universe is also seen in his student films *Mambo Grillen* and *Space Monkeys*, which won international acclaim, taking home the 2009 award for Best Nordic-Baltic Student Film and the 2008 Odense Talent Award. *Carlo's Casino* is Jan Rahbek's feature film debut.

THOMAS BORCH NIELSEN / NICE NINJA

Born 1963, Denmark. Working in 3D-animation and special effects after studying in France and the US, Nielsen won Danish Robert Awards for Best Visual Effects in 2001 and 2005. Nielsen made numerous music videos and commercials before directing the science-fiction feature *Webmaster* in 1998. The film sold worldwide and won the Best Actor and Best Special Effects Awards at the Fanta Festival in Rome. This was followed by the children's feature *Jewel of the Nile* (2000) and Nielsen's first animated feature, *Sunshine Barry & The Disco Worms* (2008). niceninja.com

WAS DREYER A SADIST?

On 25 May the Danish Film Institute launches a new website on the great Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968), maker of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, *Ordet*, *Gertrud* and other immortal classics. The website invites scholars and laymen alike to explore the full extent of Dreyer's ingenious art through a rich collection of original material – stills, posters, film clips, manuscripts and personal letters – and fresh perspectives contributed by the finest Danish and international advocates of the filmmaker's undoubted legacy.

What is, in fact, Dreyer's uniqueness? On the following pages we bring a mosaic of voices and look forward to seeing you on site at:

carlthdreyer.dk



DREYER'S MANY FACES. While the general image of Carl Th. Dreyer is that of a grave, elderly gentleman, his youthful years tell an entirely different story. Prior to his film career young Dreyer was both a wreckless tabloid journalist and an adventurous pilot **Photo:** DFI

A PASSION FOR BULLFIGHT

On more than one occasion, Dreyer was labeled a sadistic director, because he caused his female leads to suffer in his tireless search of the sublime. One of the gems from the Dreyer archives is an unpublished article on bullfight where Dreyer fervently defends the beauty of the matador's fight with the noble bull. The art of the bullfight exists in an ethical gray zone – like the one Dreyer explored throughout his career.

BY AMANDA ELAINE DOXTATER

Carl Th. Dreyer has been called everything from misunderstood genius, to reserved bourgeois director, to "The Tyrannical Dane" as one critic put it in an article from 1951 – in which, consequently, Dreyer's sadistic inclinations were mentioned. Maria Falconetti's breakdown after filming *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* likely sparked these rumors.

Not surprisingly, Dreyer adamantly objected to the notion that he used sadistic means to produce the realistic scenes of human torture and abuse, which remain some of the most compelling of his oeuvre. In 1954, for example, Dreyer sent a letter to a newspaper with the pithy title, "I am no sadist".

Labeling Dreyer a sadist does little to help understand his artistic process, but neither does it help to assert that he never did anything ethically questionable in making art. In one interview Dreyer states that Falconetti's tears came "of her own free will – from her heart". While Falconetti's willing collaboration may reduce Dreyer's culpability for causing discomfort on set, it does not eradicate it. The statement betrays instead Dreyer's admiration for the tears that she *did* shed, and raises the question of how he actually imagined art related to suffering.

THE FILMMAKER AS MATADOR

"My Article on Bullfighting", an unpublished article

Maria Falconetti's tears

Maria Falconetti's portrayal of Jeanne d'Arc is widely considered one of the most astonishing performances on film. It would remain her final cinematic role. She filmed during nine months and endured some very tough and demanding work conditions but poured everything she had into her performance. The emotional highlight of the shoot was the scene that required Falconetti to cut her hair. Many technicians are said to have cried with her during that scene.

Dreyer wrote toward the end of his career, offers an intriguing glimpse into his conception of art as beautiful, collaborative, and potentially dangerous. The art of the bullfight exists in an ethical gray zone - like the one Dreyer inhabited and explored throughout his career - in which pathos envisioned as serving a higher aesthetic purpose or illuminating some shade of the human predicament verges on gratuitous cruelty.

In the article, Dreyer describes the aesthetics of the bullfight, using a vocabulary drawn from the various fine arts and relating its form to Greek tragedy. He is interested less in tragedy *per se* than in how aesthetic effect elevates the killing of the bull from mundane sport to a veritable art form.

"While toying with death, which crouches on the bull's sharp horns, he creates a work of art, for the consummate matador goes out of his way to ensure that all of his movements are graceful and that his posture displays dignity."

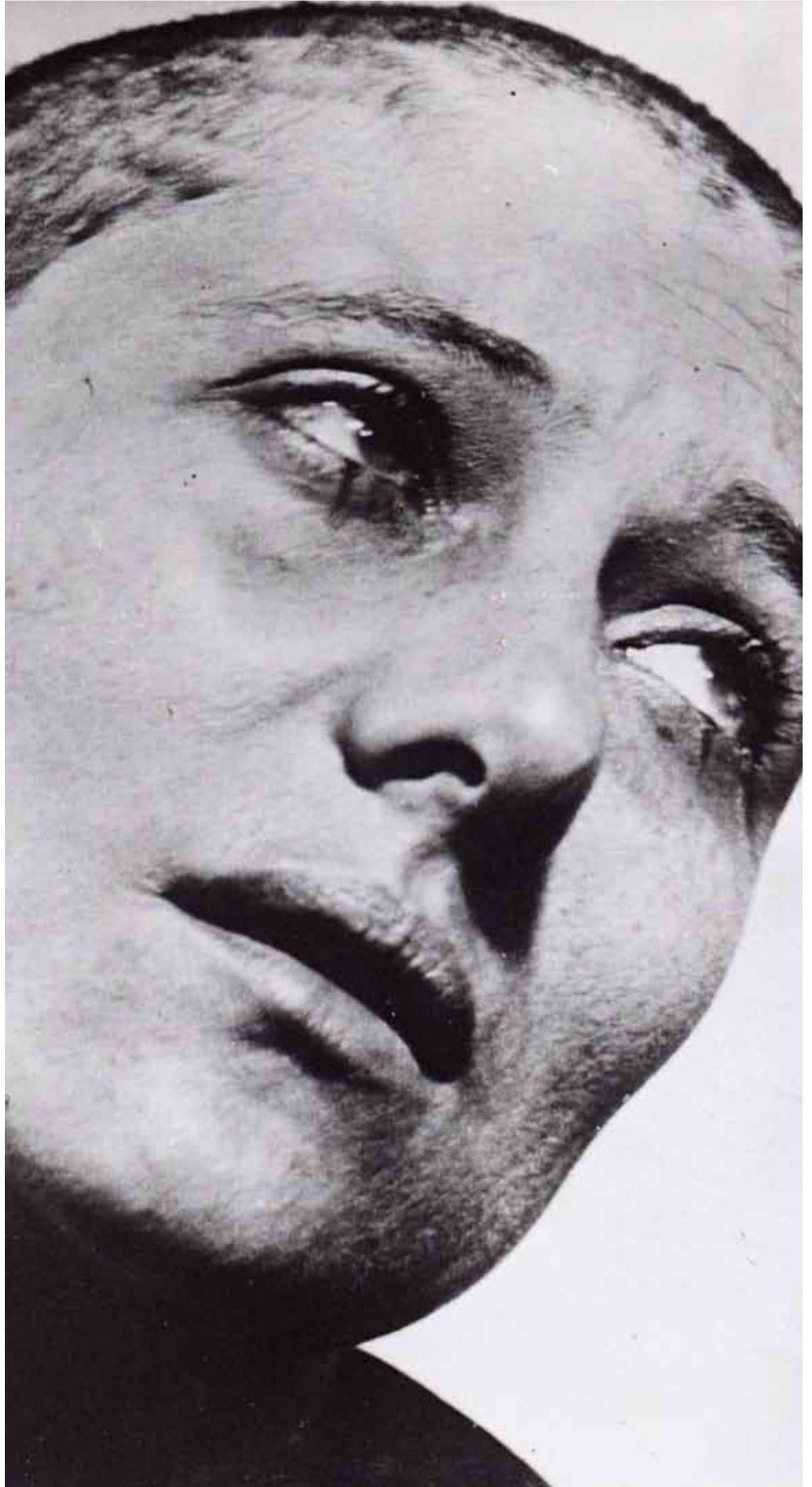
At one point he compares the bullfighter's movements and extensive training to a dancer's, as if to emphasise astonishing choreography as a defense against what might otherwise be misconstrued as cruelty. Dreyer carefully delineates the often-underestimated psychological and physical risks that bullfighters undertake in pursuing their profession, showing that his sympathies lie with the truly professional bullfighter who overcomes these fears.

"The majority of matadors are courageous by nature, but all nevertheless feel fear creep over them immediately before the fight. But as soon as they stand face to face with the bull, fear couldn't be farther from their minds. The courageous matador doesn't fear the bull."

Dreyer's identification with the matador makes sense when read as the brave filmmaker, a consummate professional who, undeterred by the perpetual lack of funding and the constant pounding by faithless critics, overcomes his fears to step into the ring once again.

THE BULL'S BEAUTIFUL SACRIFICE

However, the most artful bullfighting performance is nothing without a spectacular bull to complete it, and the emotional heft of Dreyer's article resides



MASTERPIECE. *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* is #1 on TIFF's The Essential 100, a tribute to the 100 most influential films of all time that is to kick off the opening of the Bell Lightbox in Toronto this fall **Photo:** DFI

with the bull that chooses, against all odds, to fight. The bull's "choice" to participate is clearly not a false choice for Dreyer, as opponents of bullfighting may claim that it is. A bull may refuse to charge, but he imbues the ones that *do* devote themselves to the fight with a doggedness and courage worthy of admiration.

"Just as one demands 'honor' of the matador one demands 'nobility' of the bull. It is not just the matadors whose names are mentioned with reverence. The bulls are also remembered. (...) In the ring, sympathy lies just as often on the bull's side as on the matador's, and the spectators shed genuine tears when an otherwise valiant bull must finally concede and give up the ghost."

Dreyer's repeated praise of the bull's beautiful sacrifice might suggest that he found suffering for the sake of aesthetic pleasure unproblematic

or easily admirable. But the ethical risks of the perilous combination of beauty and danger clearly unnerved Dreyer. He believed in film as a humanist endeavor. The urgency with which he attempted to dispel rumors of sadism must be understood in part as an uncomfortable admission that using actual suffering – even if consensual – to create effective representations of it risks violating the larger humanist goal of alleviating suffering in the first place.

NO SIMPLE NOTIONS OF VICTIMHOOD

Dreyer's desire to make art out of the ethical ambiguity of victim and sacrifice – with its accompanying notions of free will and collaboration – might provoke an ethical queasiness in a contemporary spectator, not unlike the bullfight. It also points to Dreyer's conviction

that any honest depiction of life must address its arduous injustices.

Dreyer's remarkable reluctance to cast the bull as the helpless victim of forces beyond its control also cautions against the attribution of simple notions of victimhood, whether to an actress contributing her full artistic potential to a difficult project, or to a bull fighting nobly and beautifully, against all odds.

Whether or not he took pleasure *per se* in the suffering of his collaborators, "My Article on Bullfighting" offers evidence that Dreyer lived to make art that treated not only life's triumphs, but also the potential beauty in its cruelties ■

An extended version of the article is available on the new Dreyer website carlthdreier.dk. Amanda Elaine Doxtater is Ph.D at the Department of Scandinavian Studies, UC Berkeley, USA.



WITH PEERS. Reception on the occasion of the premiere of Dreyer's *Gertrud* in Paris 1964: Henri-Georges Clouzot, René Clément, Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut and Dreyer **Photo:** DFI

Dreyer is insanely old-fashioned and insanely modern at the same time, and that's how he's always been. His movies are like churches, an ideal and a standard that is so grotesquely high that you can just look up there or go into them, and you can scream and hear your own echo, and then go out again and make your own crap.

Christoffer Boe, director



IN PRIVATE. Dreyer in a relaxed moment **Photo:** DFI

One of the great things about Dreyer is his complete and utter lack of relevance to the film industry and the film culture in general. He's someone who managed to create great works of art without ever being head of a movement or a new wave or dogma. He just did it.

James Schamus, producer on several Ang Lee films and author of 'Carl Theodor Dreyer's Gertrud – The Moving Word'



ON SET. The director overseeing *Jeanne d'Arc* **Photo:** DFI

He set an example, daring to be extremely simple, crisp and courageous, in a way that makes the big important issues stand out extremely clear. He can make the intimate abstract.

Lone Scherfig, director

Will Gregory and Adrian Utley **Photo:** Crush Images

MUSIC FOR A SAINT

The raw power of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* have inspired Portishead and Goldfrapp members Adrian Utley and Will Gregory to create a brand new score for Dreyer's silent masterpiece.

The unique collaboration between the two renowned musicians was set off by their desire to score a silent film.

"Out of an exhaustive list, *Jeanne d'Arc* was by far the best. No creaky plot, no melodrama, no weak moments or dated gestures," the artists explain to FILM. "It's unbelievable the amount of care expended on all aspects of the production: casting, lighting design and script. Plus, the text is taken verbatim from the trial records ... a really serious aesthetic position for the foundation of a film about Joan of Arc."

As the two musicians explain, the film's long takes have their own advantage.

"The film is presented in long scenes that allow the momentum of set musical pieces to build up and follow their own logic, without being perpetually shackled to jerky editing and plot inter-cutting that make so many silent films an unrewarding

undertaking for a composer," Utley and Gregory say.

The new score premiered at a one-off event at Colston Hall in Bristol on 7 May, where the film was accompanied live by a group of musicians counting Utley and Gregory, six electric guitars, a choir, percussion, horns and keyboards.

"Our aim is to provide a narrative that supports the film but also has a life of its own and can stand back from a distance as well as get right inside the moment. In short, engage the audience in an emotional conversation that hopefully mirrors their own inner dialogue as they watch."

Adrian Utley and Will Gregory's score is a singular addition to an already vast list of musical pieces created for Dreyer's final silent film. Celebrating the opening of the new website on the Danish auteur, the Cinematheque in Copenhagen launched in May a series with ten *Jeanne d'Arc* screenings, each accompanied by live music ranging from classical piano over folk jazz to cool electronica.

Read more on the new Dreyer website carlthdreyer.dk on the previous pages.

MOZART ON FILM BY KASPER HOLTEN

Kasper Holten, the director of the Royal Danish Opera since 2000, will be premiering his take on Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, *Juan*, in Danish cinemas in the fall.

Juan is the result of a close collaboration between Holten and screenwriter Mogens Rukov focusing on creating an exciting opera film rather than a filmed opera.

As Holten has explained, *Don Giovanni* was chosen not only for its dramatic 24-hour plot and wonderful music, but very much for its main

character who in Holten's opinion provides an interesting take on a modern, manipulative man as well as a haunting perspective on drowning in one's desires.

The film is set in a big city in the present and the singing has been recorded live on set to achieve a high level of intimacy and authenticity. Having directed more than 50 stage productions all over the world, Holten is directing his first feature film with *Juan*.

Film producer Malene Blenkov of Blenkov & Schønnemann convinced him to try to transfer his remarkable

*Juan* **Photo:** Steffen Aarfang

talent on stage to the screen after having been blown away by his production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. Holten has described the process of shooting the film in Hungary as a great

experience even though filmmaking has surprised him by basically being like having an opening night every day.

See more in reverse section.

GLOBETROTTING



Ole Christian Madsen Photo: Jan Buus

Presently in Argentina shooting his next film *Superclásico*, Ole Christian Madsen is juggling three demanding film projects simultaneously that also take him to India and Afghanistan.

The buzzing city of Buenos Aires is for nearly two months home to the cast and crew of *Superclásico*, Ole Christian Madsen's first film to release since his hugely successful *Flame & Citron* from 2008.

Superclásico is a comedy with strong dramatic touches. The film follows up on the theme explored in both *Kira's Reason* and *Prague* – stories about a man and a woman, love and relationships, about the loss of love and holding on to your dignity.

FOOTBALL IS PASSION

Superclásico's protagonist Christian (Anders W. Berthelsen) is losing his grip, after his wife Anna (Paprika Steen) left him and their teenage son a year back to become a football agent in Argentina. She's now about to marry Juan Diaz, the star of Boca Juniors, but instead of just sending the divorce papers Christian decides to travel to the other side of the world to find out if love still exists between him and Anna.

"After *Flame & Citron*, I wanted to make something completely different, a different setup. That's how

Superclásico came about," says Ole Christian Madsen. "It's a much lighter film, and we intend it to be insanely funny."

Superclásico borrows its title from the legendary clash of titans between the Buenos Aires rivals Boca Juniors and River Plate. The film is not about football, even though Ole Christian Madsen is a great fan himself. "Football reflects some of the things about love that I want the film to show," says the director. "Football in South America is explosive, it's passion, life and death, total energy."

"And Buenos Aires itself is a fantastic city. This huge, gentle, poetic, beautiful and chaotic megacity with 15 million people is one of the most complex places I've ever visited. I want to put all that into my film as well."

TELL THE WHOLE STORY

Besides *Superclásico*, Ole Christian Madsen has two more films in the pipeline: *Eik* and *War*. *Eik* tells the story of Danish beat poet Eik Skaløe who committed suicide in 1968 in India. Making this biopic has stood close to Ole Christian Madsen's heart ever since he made a documentary on Skaløe more than two decades ago.

War consists of two films on the war in Afghanistan, one directed by Ole Christian Madsen and the other by Per Fly.

"I want to get behind the official stories that we tell about ourselves and our country. With *Flame & Citron* I crashed full frontal into the official narrative about Denmark during the German occupation. The film was – and still is – under violent attack from people who only want to hear the heroic version about the brave Danes and leave out all the painful, dark sides of the Danish resistance. I think it's extremely important to tell the whole story and to cast the events in a new light. That's what I did in *Flame & Citron*, and that's what we intend to do in *War*," says Ole Christian Madsen.

Superclásico is expected to release late 2010 or early 2011. Shooting for *Eik* starts in the spring of 2011, and *War*, currently in development, later that same year. Nimbus Film is producing all three films – *War* in coproduction with Zentropa.

For further information on *Superclásico*, see reverse section.

MUSIC ATTACKS!

Denmark and Sweden enjoy a strong partnership in coproduction funding. One outcome is the outrageously musical *Sound of Noise* selected for Critics' Week in Cannes 2010.

A Swedish film backed by Danish funding, *Sound of Noise* by Ola Simonsson and Johannes Stjärne Nilsson is a musical raid based on the directors' widely celebrated short film *Music for One Apartment and Six Drummers*: Police officer Amadeus Warnebring

was born into a musical family with a long history of famous musicians. He hates music. Now, Warnebring is about to face his worst case ever. A gang of eccentric drummers enacts a musical assault on the city, playing on anything but common instruments. But Warnebring's chase of the serial musical terrorists will soon turn into a more personal vendetta.

Sound of Noise is Simonsson and Stjärne Nilsson's feature film debut. Though, the two directors are no novices to the Cannes arena. *Music for One Apartment and Six Drummers* was in the run for a Palme d'Or in 2001, and two other short films have been showcased at the festival.

Sound of Noise is produced by Swedish dfm fiktion in cooperation with the French company Bliss.

INNOCENCE LOST

Rune Schjøtt's first feature *Skyscraper* is a quirky teen film about guilt, shame and performance anxiety.

Jon is a 17-year-old kid in a claustrophobically small provincial town. At age nine he was unfairly blamed for causing a traffic accident, and ever since, his dad has kept his son on a tight leash to keep him out of further trouble, to the point of preventing his son from growing up.

When Jon meets Edith, a blind girl, she brings out new and unknown feelings in him. But how do you deal with your first infatuation when you're racked with guilt and low self-esteem – and suffering from constriction of the foreskin to boot? *Skyscraper* is a coming-of-age story about loneliness, dreams and ultimate redemption. About cutting ties and going your own way, taking the

first tender steps into the world of love and sexuality. The film's tone is uniquely poetic, depth and empathy walking hand in hand with underplayed black humour. Director Rune Schjøtt says he was inspired by films like *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, *Happiness* and *Juno*. Visually, the film blends Edward Hopper and Fellini.

Schjøtt comes from a background as a writer of radio drama on the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR, and of films, including Martin de Thurah's short *Young Man Falling*, Dagur Kari's *Dark Horse* and Schjøtt's own short *The Panda Syndrome*. He also wrote the screenplay for *Skyscraper*, his first feature as director. He is supported by veteran hands: Henrik Ruben Genz, who was behind the hit film *Terribly Happy*, was Schjøtt's screenplay consultant and creative producer; Marcel Zyskind, who has shot several films for Michael Winterbottom, was his DP; and Jonas Bjerre, lead singer of the Danish band Mew, did the music.

For more information, see reverse section.



Skyscraper Photo: Kristian Ridder-Nielsen

GETTING NORDIC FILMS OUT THERE

For international distributors, Nordic films have always been risky business. Now Nordisk Film & TV Fond has staged a plan to support the hard-pressed market with a programme granting 500,000 euros over the next two years to distributors willing to take that risk.

When Nordisk Film & TV Fond first tried out their initiative at Toronto International Film Festival in September 2009, they met with great enthusiasm. The pilot launch of their distribution programme that aims at backing international buyers of Nordic films lead to 32 closed deals on 11 titles and a total grant sum of 300,000 euros. Top of the list was Erik Gandini's *Videocracy* with nine sales.



Deliver Us From Evil Photo: Per Anders Jørgensen

Of the Danish titles, *Deliver Us From Evil* closed the most deals, and others to receive grants were *Antichrist* which sold to Ukraine, *Applause* to Hungarian Cirko Film, and *Valhalla Rising* that was picked up by US buyer IFC Films.

WIDER SCOPE

Now the success of the High Five Toronto is followed up by a permanent programme, High Five International

Cinema Distribution Support, targeting 500,000 euros over the next two years to distributors world-wide.

"We're thrilled that the one-off experiment from Toronto will be able to continue until 2012," says Hanne Palmquist, CEO of Nordisk Film & TV Fond. "We learnt a couple of things that has made us fine-tune the original guidelines. Unlike the Toronto set-up, where we presented a curated selection of films, we've now widened the scope so that *all* Nordic feature films and documentaries with a release date after 1 October 2009 are eligible for support. Also, we've clarified the application process to make it easier for sales agents and distributors to get on board."

But the main ambition remains the same: to get the Nordic films out there and in reach of global audiences.

In an international marketplace that is growing increasingly tougher, the financial backing is vital to the Nordic films' chances of being sold to foreign territories.

"In Toronto we saw how our support programme really did make a difference for buyers when it came to putting down the final signature," Palmquist says. "If you have a choice

between a, say, Spanish film and a Nordic film, then the grants coming from us may be the last incentive that the buyer needs to dare close the deal."

STRONG TITLES IN CANNES

Like other major festivals, Cannes is an important starting point for steering a film's commercial afterlife in the right direction.

"The exhibition in Cannes is essential in a film's future sales," says Palmquist, "and at an event like this we're ready to back the distributors who might be interested in buying Nordic films, represented by some pretty strong titles this year. With a grant from us, the distributor can afford the risk of buying a film outside the Hollywood mainstream and back it with a bigger promotion budget than they normally would."

Nordisk Film & TV Fond coined up the High Five label to indicate quality, enthusiasm and the five countries "up North". The label is also parent to a handful of other initiatives, for example Nordic High Five and the recent High Five Cross Media Content for Kids.

See more at www.nordicfilmantvfund.com

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