

**DANISH FILM INSTITUTE**  
**FILM / SPECIAL ISSUE**

Accused by Jacob Thuesen selected for COMPETITION / *Little Big Mouse* (Jannik Hastrup), *Odin's Eye* (Maria Mac Dalland), *My Dad Is a Champ* (Morten Giese) and *The Shadow in Sara* (Karla Nielsen) in KINDERFILMFEST.

**LITTLE BIG AUDIENCE**

Anything goes in children's films, if you show solidarity with the audience, says *Little Big Mouse* director Jannik Hastrup. Six directors of films for kids on magic, profanity, and witch-burning.

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**DEAR WENDY**

10 years after kickstarting the most influential wave in Danish film, the Dogme brothers Vinterberg and von Trier are back together as director and screenwriter. Interview about guns, methods, music and the US ...

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# FILM

# # 41

FILM IS PUBLISHED BY THE DANISH FILM INSTITUTE / FEBRUARY 2005





**FILM#41 / FEBRUARY 2005**

**PUBLISHED BY** Danish Film Institute **EDITORS** Agnete Dorph Stjernfelt, Susanna Neimann  
**EDITORIAL TEAM** Lars Fil-Jensen, Vicki Synnott  
**TRANSLATIONS** Glen Garner **DESIGN** Koch & Täckman, Anne Hemp, Pernille Volder Lund  
**TYPE** Cendia (e©), Millton (e©), Under-ton (e©)  
**PAPER** Munken Lynx 100 gr. **PRINTED BY** Holmen Center Tryk A/S **CIRCULATION** 10,000  
**ISSN** 1399-2813 **COVER** *Accused* / Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

■ All articles are written by freelance film critics and journalists.

**FILM** is published by the Danish Film Institute (DFI). 8 issues annually, 3 are in English and published prior to the festivals at Cannes, Amsterdam and Berlin.

Subscriptions are free of charge.  
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The Danish Film Institute is the national agency responsible for supporting and encouraging film and cinema culture. The Institute's 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 cinemathèque. The total budget of the DFI is DKK 390.4 m / EURO 52 m.

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**FILM #41** er et engelsk særnummer i anledning af Berlinale i Berlin, februar 2005.



*The Shadow in Sara*

# INSIDE

## ALTHOUGH DANISH CINEMA IS REPRESENTED ANNUALLY AT THE BERLINALE, 2005 IS EXCEPTIONAL WITH FIVE FILMS IN COMPETITION PROGRAMMES HEREOF FOUR FILMS IN KINDERFILMFEST



*My Dad is a Champ*

**Selected for the COMPETITION** is **Jacob Thuesen's *Accused***, a psychological drama following Henrik - a likeable man, a swimming teacher and a father, who one day is arrested and charged with a serious crime. Renowned film editor come director, Thuesen, edited von Trier's *The Kingdom*. **Page 3-5**

**Thomas Vinterberg's and von Trier's *Dear Wendy***, chosen for **SUNDANCE**, is a portrait of a group of gun-loving pacifists, the Dandies, in America, who take great pride in never drawing their weapons. But rules are made to be broken. **Page 14-15**

**KINDERFILMFEST** has selected four films: **Jannik Hastrup's *Little Big Mouse*** about the search for happiness. The elf Circleen and her mouse chums get dragged into new adventures. But every adventure holds a secret! **Page 17**

**The second film is Maria Mac Dalland's *Odin's Eye***, about the Creation, the origin of man, and the struggle between Ases (Aesir) and Giants of Nordic mythology. **Page 18**

**The third film is Morten Giese's *My Dad Is a Champ***, about Stefan, who hasn't seen his father for years. All he knows is that his father is a boxer who travels all over the world. On his tenth birthday, he decides to go find him. **Page 19**

**Also screening in KINDERFILMFEST** is ***The Shadow in Sara***, by Karla Nielsen: Sara is sick of fighting with her mother. Her mother's birthday looks like an opportunity to break the tailspin. But how easy is that? Sara gets upset again, however, fortunately a solution is found. Even on such a rotten day. **Page 20**

Other articles include - amongst others - a script writing theme, an introduction to this year's Danish Berlin Shooting Star as well as an interview with the renowned US-Chinese actress Vivian Wu, who is currently starring in the new Danish feature *Chinaman* by Henrik Ruben Genz.

# FANTASY VERSUS REALITY

**Accused is the first feature directed by Jacob Thuesen, a top Danish film editor. This psychological drama about a man charged with a terrible crime challenges its characters', and the audience's, perceptions of fantasy and reality.**

BY MADRS R. MARIEGAARD

"I would like to discuss the witness' handling of fantasy and reality," Henrik's (Troels Lyby) defence attorney says at his trial, attempting to discredit the main witness, Stine, Henrik's 14-year-old daughter. But who is making what up? That question is the premise of *Accused*, a new Danish film opening in Danish theatres on 28 January.

Jacob Thuesen, the director, is a product of the National Film School's editing programme and has previously directed shorts and documentaries. To make the award-winning documentary, *Under New York*, Thuesen and his crew spent two years tracking

two people who make their home in the New York subway system.

*Accused*, from a screenplay by Kim Fupz Aakeson, is 42-year-old Thuesen's first feature. "I read the screenplay and thought it would be a terrific challenge to take an actuality that everyone finds deplorable and changing it into 100-percent fiction," he says.

## FICTION AND REALISM

Thuesen planned the film a lot like he would have a documentary, setting out to research how arrests, interrogations, custody, and trials are handled, and consulting with psychologists.

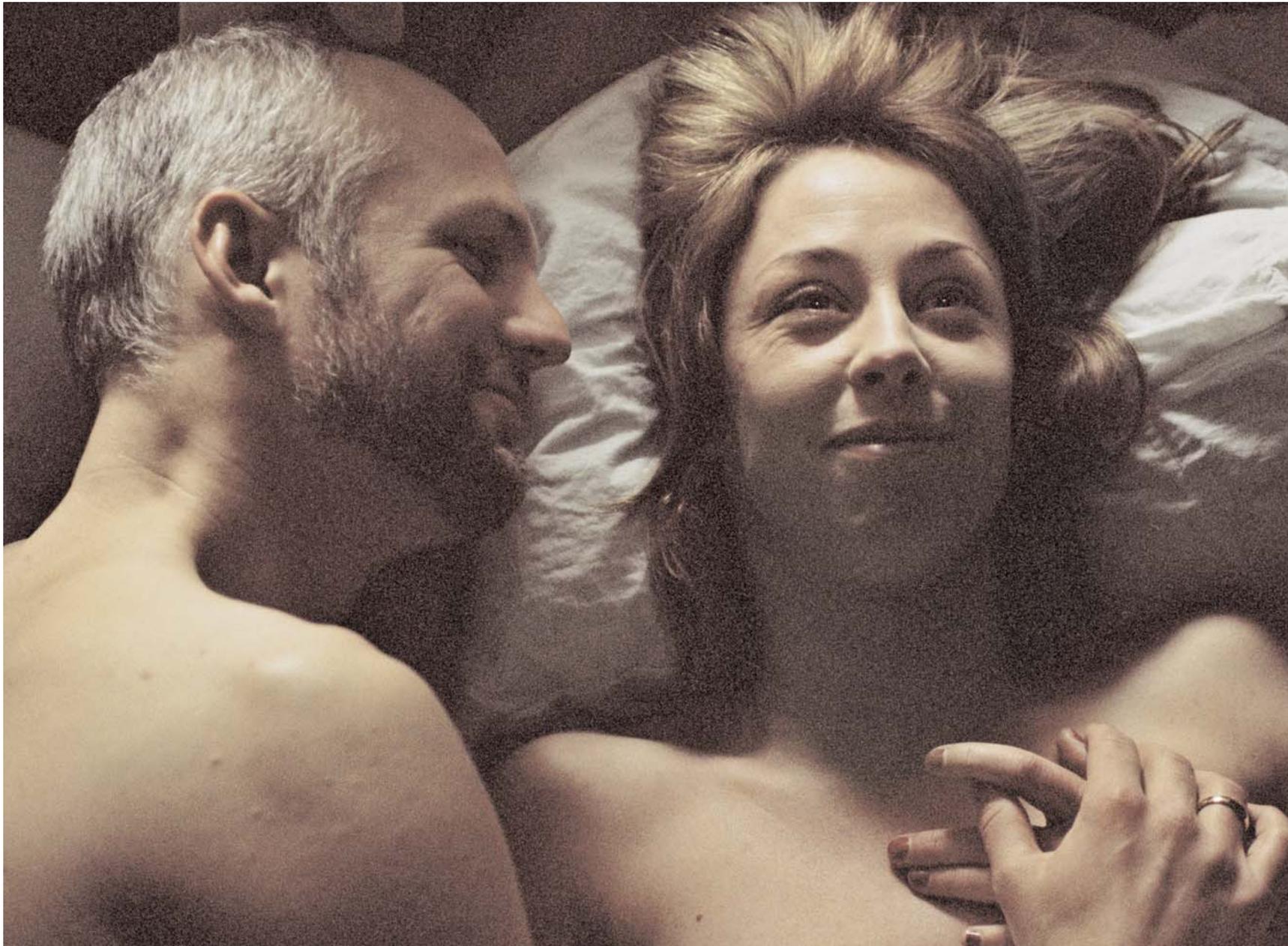
"Fiction jumps off from realism. There is no reason to create a different space than the one that's there in the real world," Thuesen says. "The main character is booked at a real police station. He hands over his keys in the actual basement of the police station. What I'm telling people is: this is the reality you know, but what you see is fiction." In his choice

of effects, Thuesen was strongly inspired by the British master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock. Like Hitchcock's *Psycho* from 1960, *Accused* is out to consciously manipulate the audience.

"I wanted to use the genre to close in on a subject that I essentially knew nothing about. I used crime-genre ploys to deal with something that has nothing to do with the genre. I'm playing with a genre that the audience is familiar with to essentially show them something else. They think they are watching a crime story, but what they are actually seeing is a realistic, dysfunctional family," Thuesen says.

## ONE HUNDRED PERCENT

It is one of the last days before Christmas and I find myself in the Nordisk Film cafeteria in Valby. Skirting thirty-something media people composing buffet lunches on giant plates, Thuesen leads me to a corner table and begins the interview by telling me he is not used to dealing with the media. That aside, his answers are precise and thorough, though



Troels Lyby and Sofie Gråbøl in *Accused*. Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

generally couched in a few, favourite phrases whose meaning he seems to trust. Of these, “one hundred percent” is the most frequently used, often to accentuate a certainty of opinion about the medium he was one hundred percent sure he wanted to work in for the rest of his life, when he first put two shots together 20 years ago in a dark room at Copenhagen University.

All his late-night cutting eventually got Thuesen expelled, but he went on to hone his craft in the National Film School’s editing programme. Later, he became known as Mr. Quick Cut, setting new standards in Denmark for editing films, especially documentaries. Most Danes have seen his handiwork in countless trailers and commercials or in other people’s films, including Lars von Trier’s *The Kingdom*, Jørgen Leth’s *Haiti. Untitled*, and Tómas Gíslason’s *Maximum Penalty*. All along, Thuesen has been developing his career as a director, though he still has a hard time identifying himself as one. “I love editing,” he says. “In the beginning, it was a

way to get my thoughts and my life under control. I was not particularly communicative and for a long time the cutting room was room enough for me. But I’ve developed as a person and, in that process, directing added another level to editing. It was a real eye-opener: ‘Omygod, I can shoot my own footage!’”

#### FILM AS INVESTIGATION

Thuesen’s development will reach a temporary peak with the release of *Accused* in late January. It is an event that means he will have to get used to reviews, an “anxiety-provoking” thing to him, and to more interviews, such as this one, expecting him to provide clear opinions about the medium with which he is so intimately familiar, as an editor, and as a documentarian, and director.

“The ultimate thing filmmakers can do is portray reality. We have the power to make someone take an extra good look at something, even if we have no special knowledge of the subject ourselves,” Thuesen says. This view closely interlocks with his desire to

approach a film as an investigation.

“Calling it an investigation allows me to see that the people in the movie aren’t what I thought they were, and the whole film ends up hinging on that. There have to be points where I discover something new, even in a fiction film.”

#### THE THIRD REALITY

“When I read a book or look at a picture in a museum, I quickly form a ‘third reality’. That’s much harder to do when you are watching a movie, because, in movies, what you see is what you get. It’s a very conscious medium, which is why it resorts to some wacky effects to show ‘the third reality’, such as black and white sequences or blurred images,” he says. *Accused* is free of all such effects. Instead, the method involves a fixed angle on Henrik, the accused.

“Early in the film, I show his way of noticing tiny little things in the room, a glass of water in the courtroom, for instance. It suggests that he is not paying attention. I establish that he, and nobody else,



Thuesen's central gambit is having the audience identify with the protagonist without saying if he is guilty or not. Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

is doing the looking. That's not the same as telling the audience to identify with him, but they do anyway because people cannot stand *not* identifying with their protagonist. They would go through hell and high water for their protagonist," Thuesen says. "Our protagonist perceives the people around him as unpleasant, even though they do exactly what is expected of them. They are simply interested in finding out what has happened, but our protagonist experiences them as unpleasant and because we, the audience, take his side, we experience them as unpleasant, too."

Thuesen's central gambit is having the audience identify with the protagonist without saying if he is guilty or not. He indirectly forces us to accept the possibility that the protagonist may ultimately let us down. Using Stine's accusation as an alibi, we try to probe deeper and deeper into Henrik's mind, until we finally find out which of the two is recklessly juggling fantasy and reality.

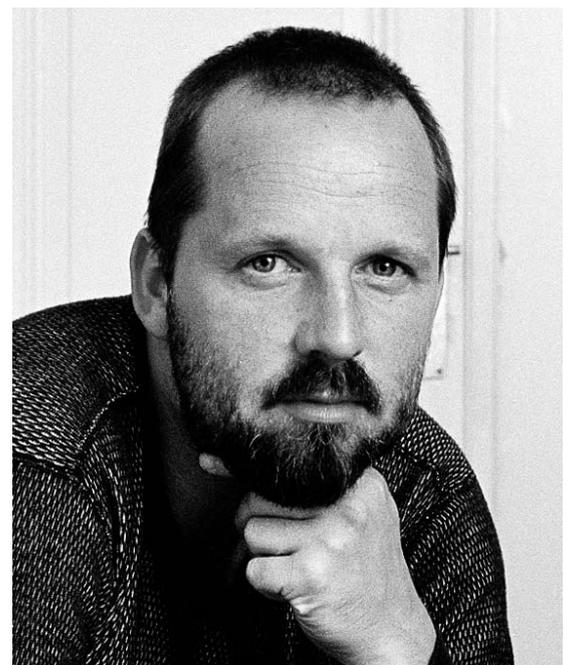
"Don't give away the ending..." the press agent

on the film, Mette Baasch, says, popping into the cafeteria. Jacob Thuesen smiles as Baasch completes the tagline Hitchcock used for *Psycho* more than 40 years ago, "... it's the only one we have" ■

*This interview was originally made for [www.ekkoilm.dk](http://www.ekkoilm.dk) where a longer Danish version of it is still available.*

*For further information see reverse section*

**JACOB THUESEN** Born 1962. Graduated in editing from the National Film School of Denmark in 1991. Thuesen's credits as an editor include the first four episodes of Lars von Trier's *The Kingdom*, as well as Jørgen Leth's *Haiti. Untitled* and Tómas Gislason's *Maximum Penalty*. He is the director of *Life Insurance*, a short film, and the documentaries *Under New York* and *FCK - Last Chance*. Thuesen is also the father of two children with the actress Sofie Gråbøl, who has a major part in *Accused*.



Director Jacob Thuesen. Photo: Jan Buus

# WRITING ON TOP OF SOMEONE ELSE



Director Ole Christian Madsen. Photo: Jan Buus

BY OLE CHRISTIAN MADSEN /  
DIRECTOR AND WRITER OF ANGELS IN FAST MOTION

**It could happen to anyone, getting hit by a book. As you read, a film starts flickering somewhere out there. You read on, and before the book is over you have decided to make a film, an adaptation - you have decided to move from one expression to another, giving a new vision to the visionary. You have begun a love affair with a book.**

For me, it is a bit hard. There are different barriers to overcome. I have always thought that novels already have their form and that films should find their own stories; that there was a huge difference, that a film would suffer by comparison within unfair parameters; that, when the film opened, I would be judged according to every reader's personal conceptions of the characters, the theme, and the mood; that the writer would hate me for the rest of his life, that I would be known as someone who could not

think of anything himself.

There were those who suggested I use the book merely as a jumping-off point and make up my own story. That seemed absurd to me. Surely, it is about the opposite of that. Surely, it is about using as much of the book as possible. Otherwise, why even use the book to begin with? It occurred to me that there are different ideas about originality in Europe and the United States. In the US, it is more prestigious to have your movie designated as an adaptation. At Oscar time, it is better to have your film nominated in the Best Adaptation category than for Best Original Screenplay. Though that may ultimately say more about Americans, I was still rather surprised when I started writing and realised that:

#### **IT IS REALLY, REALLY HARD**

Much harder than I had imagined and much harder than developing your own idea. For several reasons: first, I thought the film should be its own. Like the book, it should have its own identity. Anything else would be disrespectful to the book. Second, I wanted the film to remain loyal to the book and be anchored

in the book's universe, its stream of meaning, and its relationship to reality. Anything else would have been just as disrespectful. Third, novels do not have to have stories that develop. In his particular novel every story ended in the middle of its second act. A mental, internal movement had been completed and, like all good novels, the book stopped there.

I discovered that when writing on top of a book you have to be very aware of why you picked it. You have to know exactly what your points of fascination are. You will always be drawing your nourishment from these points. It is on top of them you are writing. I think *Nordkraft* [Danish title, ed.] is an outstanding book and three characters in particular fascinated me. I felt I had been looking for them, their wealth of feelings, their struggle with life, their relationship to love. It was their story I wanted to tell. Eventually, after trying out a lot of other options, I decided to do an ensemble story with three main characters, a multi-story, with everyone turning on the same axis. They did not know each other, but their stories were basically the same.

A good job of dramatizing, if you ask me.



Signe Egholm Olsen and Farshad Khogli in *Nordkraft*. Photo: Per Arnesen

Specifically, I read the book twice. I, too, have written literature, and I read in detail. Each time I had finished the book, I wrote down all the good parts I could remember. Then I put the book away and did not read in it anymore. I brainstormed, picturing all the scenes that might have been in the book but were not. In a sense, I added my own imagination and eventually I had about a thousand scenes in outline form. It is always painful that a movie cannot be eight hours long. There is always so much to tell, but in this case it was a shame that the movie could not be 18 hours long. I knew I could fit in around 50 scenes for each of the three storylines, no more than that, or the journey would be way too long.

Then began the painstaking work of structuring, theming, and finding hidden connections in the material. It kept getting better. I discovered the American photographer Nan Goldin and her unblinking shots of friends living on the edge of the establishment. She helped me. I wanted each scene to have an image inspired by her. That ruled out certain situations in the film. I did a tight thematic

definition and was getting closer and closer to a finish.

When I finally started writing the actual script, it really did not take that long. It should not, generally. I was convinced I had found the film inside the book. You could probably make other films from the book, but this was my film. Before the final rewrite, I read through the book again. I wish I had never done that.

So many things in the book are not in the film! Would it even make sense to anyone? Had I butchered a fine work of literature? Is it plain impossible to make a good adaptation? I started writing the screenplay just after the book was published and, as I was writing, it grew into a big hit, a bestseller reaping rave reviews.

As I sat down to my final rewrite, I was feeling very small. I figured it could always go straight to video and maybe I should just develop an idea of my own the next time.

Now that the film is finished, I am happy. The writer is happy, most people are happy. Perhaps 15% of the movie has been directly transferred from the book, but the magical thing is that the film

experience is just like the book.

It came into its own, and it stayed loyal to the book.

In the last 15-17 years, there has not been much of a tradition for adaptations in Danish film. I do not know if that is good or bad. Over the last year or so, more and more filmmakers have started working from books. I do not know whether that is good or bad, either.

A book hit me, that is all ■

*For further information see reverse section*

**OLE CHRISTIAN MADSEN** Born 1966, Denmark. Graduated in direction from the National Film School of Denmark, 1993. Awarded for his graduation film *Happy Jim*. Directed the highly acclaimed 6-part drama series *Edderkoppen / The Spider* (1999), and episodes of the TV-series *Taxa* and *Rejseholdet*. Has written and directed a number of short fiction films, including *Sinans bryllup / Sinan's Wedding* (1996). Feature films: *Pizza King* (1999); *En Kærlighedshistorie / Kira's Reason - A Love Story* (2001), awarded at Mannheim-Heidelberg and Viareggio; and *Nordkraft* (2005).

# CHINESE TAKEAWAY STAR



Vivian Wu and Bjarne Henriksen in *Chinaman*. Photo: Robin Skjoldborg

**Her nude scenes in *The Pillow Book* made Vivian Wu famous. Now, the Chinese-American actress is starring in a Danish film set in a Chinese takeaway restaurant posting fading shots of noodle dishes on the storefront. *Chinaman* is directed by award-winning Henrik Ruben Genz, renowned for his children's pics, *Teis and Nico* and *Someone Like Hodder*.**

BY KIM SKOTTE

In the backroom of a Chinese takeaway restaurant ostensibly in a lacklustre Copenhagen suburb, a Hollywood star who was once named one of People Magazine's 50 most beautiful women in the world is giving a backrub to a heavysset Dane named Bjarne.

Replete with goldfish and soy sauce, the Kowloon restaurant looks so authentic it could be anywhere really, though it is only a set in a film studio on Copenhagen's Refshaleøen.

Since her breakthrough in *The Last Emperor*, the Chinese-American actress Vivian Wu has acted in a long list of TV movies and theatrical features, including Oliver Stone's *Heaven & Earth*. She had memorable parts in Peter Greenaway's *8 1/2 Women* and *The Pillow Book*. The latter included her notorious nude scenes with Ewan McGregor.

Her appearing in a Danish takeaway restaurant is thanks to Kim Fupz Aakeson's screenplay, *Chinaman*: the unconventional love story of a Danish plumber and the restaurant proprietor's sister whose only hope of obtaining a residence permit is marrying a Danish national. That Keld (Bjarne Henriksen) and Ling (Vivian Wu) do not understand a word the other is saying does not make the story's appeal any less universal.

### WHERE IS EVERYBODY?

The executive producer, Thomas Gammeltoft, was a very happy man when Vivian Wu agreed to do *Chinaman* even though it implied her working for peanuts. "I guess there are about 4-5 well-known names you could dream about casting for this part," Gammeltoft says. "So it was nothing less than amazing when Vivian accepted."

According to Wu she enjoyed working with what, by American standards, is a very small crew led by director Henrik Ruben Genz. In the beginning, she wondered where everyone was. But by and by she started thinking of it as a counterpart to classic Danish furniture design: there are exactly the number of clean lines required, and nothing else.

That the role of Ling has struck a nerve with Wu is beyond doubt: "I loved the screenplay. It was both funny and sad, and it had an original story. So, even though I didn't know any of the people involved, I picked it over the other projects I was looking at. It's about cultures clashing, but I really like the movie's message: It's a love story, but you need not be able to converse to fall in love.

The backgrounds of the characters almost couldn't be more different. They are from different corners of the world. But love can open your eyes in many ways."

I ask Wu if she realizes that the film is being made at a time when the Danish government is preparing legislation that would make it more difficult for Danes to marry someone from another country. Wu

has to ask me to repeat the question to be sure she got it right. How odd, her facial expression seems to say. For her, this is no abstract political issue.

### CHINESE IN AMERICA

"I was born in China, in Shanghai. I came to America when I was 19 or 20 years old. I was so fortunate that I could apply for a special visa and a green card on the basis of my talent as an actress," Wu says. She entered America as Wu Jun Mei, which is how she was credited in *The Last Emperor*.

"Had I not been able to get a work permit by virtue of my talent, I would have had to marry someone to stay in America.

I eventually married anyway. My husband, Oscar, is Cuban-American. He'll sometimes joke that I only married him for the green card! But, really! I had one already. The long and short of it is that I feel very close to the theme of this film. I don't think the story is far-fetched at all. I understand it very well. I recognize it in many of my friends and relatives. Many of them made phoney marriages to stay in America. The irony of the film is that this couple actually falls in love. I know of several cases from real life where the same thing happened."

*Would you have married to stay in the States?*

"I never really thought about it, because I got my green card early on," she says. "But, yes, perhaps. One cannot rule out the possibility."

The filmmakers put a lot of effort into making the Chinese interiors look as authentic as possible. The Chinese are a closed community of immigrants in Denmark. Silent and industrious, they are traditionally thought of as well adapted. But according to recent newspaper reports, that is a myth. I asked Wu if she had gained some insight into the Chinese community in Denmark or if the Chinese basically live the same way anywhere in the world.

"They very much live the same way. There are a lot of Chinese people all over the world. What they all have in common is that they are a long way from home. In Denmark, unlike California, there are very few Chinese people," Wu says. "However, no matter whether there is a Chinatown or people are more scattered, the Chinese traditionally constitute a closely knit group."

*Do you feel Chinese or American?*

"I feel both Chinese and American. I'm very happy about that. During my first five years in America, it was hard for me to find a precise identity. I tried dropping the Chinese and becoming Americanized. I thought that was the point of my coming to America to study and live. But after five years, I went back to China to make a picture and the moment I stepped off the plane in China I knew that in my heart I would always be Chinese. I'm slowly growing more and more comfortable with my identity as Chinese and American. I am a Chinese woman with an American passport and I feel fortunate for the opportunity to live in two worlds in a way that allows me to make the most of both of them." Meanwhile, Wu keeps an eye on developments in China where she periodically goes to make movies.

### A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

Race is invariably a factor in the parts Wu is offered, and the role of the takeaway owner's sister is no exception.

"My Chinese appearance is a double-edged sword.

It works both for and against me. Most Americans, and most American moviegoers, are white people who want to see white middle-class Americans on the screen. Very few go to see art films.

Naturally, I would never get a role as Barbra Streisand's daughter. I am neither white nor Jewish. Unless, of course, I played her adopted daughter! But at the same time, it's an advantage. I get some really good parts thanks to my Chinese features, and moreover I get to go back to China and tear into some really big, fat, juicy parts. I played Sung Mei Ling in one of the biggest Chinese films ever, *Sung Dynasty*. And I played Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. One of the reasons they wanted me for the part is that I have acquired this aura of Americanized, western refinement that fitted the character."

The role of Ling in *Chinaman* calls for the Chinese side of Wu's double-edged sword. On the set, everyone's glowing about how accomplished and gracious this celebrity has turned out to be. No prima-donna airs whatsoever.

So now, perhaps this reporter can get an answer to the question that has surely plagued any white devil who ever sat down in a Chinese restaurant: Why the goldfish?

"Goldfish symbolize prosperity. Fish, *yü*, are eaten at New Year's, because fish signify that there will be something to eat next year, too. People always put a little something aside," Wu explains. "That's what the goldfish mean and that's why you'll find them in every Chinese home. They are decorative, but they are also a lucky charm." All along, her hands have been discreetly aiding my comprehension by mimicking a goldfish's fins and tail.

A tattered red lantern, sun-faded images of noodle dishes, roasted chickens, and spring rolls – there is little indication that the goldfish did the trick at Feng's restaurant in faraway Denmark ■

*This article was originally made for the daily Politiken.*

*For further information see reverse section*

**HENRIK RUBEN GENZ** Born 1959, Denmark. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 1995. Best Film and Script Award for his film *Cross Roads* at the Film School Festival in Munich, 1995. Has directed a number of short films and documentaries including the Academy Award nominated, Berlin Glass Bear winner, the short fiction film, *Bror, min bror / Teis & Nico* (1999), also a festival hit worldwide. Feature films: *En som Hodder / Someone Like Hodder* (2003), honoured with awards in Chicago, London, Poznan and Zlin; and *Kinamand / Chinaman* (2005).



Director Henrik Ruben Genz. Photo: Jan Buus

Nicolas Winding Refn's *With Blood on my Hands - Pusher II*, now playing in Danish theatres, is the first of two sequels to his seminal 1996 gangster film, *Pusher*. The *Pusher* movies are character-driven dramas in Refn's signature intuitive style.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

"James Whale quit because he had no artistic freedom. James Cagney quit because it wasn't fun anymore." The day he can no longer have it his way, Nicolas Winding Refn is quitting, too.

"If I can't do what I want, what's the point? If you aren't challenging yourself every time you do something, aren't you really at the point where the passion has ended? I once had dinner with Elia Kazan and I asked him if he had any advice for a young filmmaker. His hoarse reply was, 'My advice to you is, do it your way.' Every time I do something, I keep his words in mind. I have to do things the way I think is right, and we'll see what happens. Also, things are a lot less predictable that way."

Hopefully, Jang (as his friends call him) will never have to reconsider his career as a filmmaker, though he was close when his last film, the English-language thriller *Fear X*, bombed at the Danish box office, forcing Refn and his production company to declare bankruptcy. He was short of cash and a lot indicated that the announced sequels to *Pusher*, his first film, were intended to amend that situation.

Fortunately, *Fear X* did well abroad, especially in England and France. So, instead of worrying about money, Jang could be loose and make *Pusher II* and *III* the way he wanted. "Had I made them only to make a buck, I might as well not have. I would have taken a big artistic and personal loss."

I find myself in Jang's office a few days after shooting wrapped on *Pusher III*.

#### TABLEAU TALES

It is eight years ago now that this self-taught filmmaker changed the Danish movie landscape once and for all with *Pusher*, a raw, up-tempo gangster drama. He later expanded his visual talent in *Bleeder* and *Fear X*, and it only seems fair to ask why he is returning to the world of *Pusher*, and with two sequels, at that?

"It's because I'm crazy about TV series," he says.

"The way of telling a story in series has become better and more sophisticated. Every episode of a cop show no longer has to end with the case being solved. They are tableau stories now, with bigger and broader perspectives - you can do spin-offs, pull characters out of drawers and throw them back in."

Why not do that with *Pusher*? Refn thought. He came up with the idea that, while the first film was about Frank (Kim Bodnia), the second film would be about Frank's sidekick, Tonny (Mads Mikkelsen) and the third film would centre on the character of Milo (Zlatko Buric). "Had I made just one sequel, it would have been just a follow-up, and how much fun is that? It was a much bigger challenge to start with a whole new concept and create my own personal body of work that I can develop and use ad infinitum," he says. And if any exciting characters pop up in the two new films, he can use them in *Pusher IV*, *V*, and *VI*.

#### LIVE BY THE SWORD, DIE BY THE SWORD

Writing the screenplays was a breeze. "Some things

WAY

WAY

come easy to me; others I have to search for. I'm a better writer now, and these film stories are very easy for me to tell my way." The narrative style is the same as in the first film. "The story is experienced only through the main character. We only see what he sees, hear what he hears, discover what he discovers."

The *Pusher* films are character-driven. "They are about people in a criminal environment, but they could take place in any kind of environment, really. Gangster pictures only work if they are about people, as the great, classic American gangster films from the thirties and on all are. William Wellman's *Public Enemy* is a case in point. People become what they are because they move in a certain environment."

"The moral is, 'live by the sword and you die by the sword.' Still, there were elements of the first picture that I couldn't use any longer, because that kind of story has been done to death: tough guys owing each other money. It's almost become a cliché in itself. So I had to find other ways to tell the stories. "Moral themes, human conflicts, became a much bigger part of the story. Halfway into *Pusher*, when the movie starts dealing with Frank's relationship

with Vic, the movie becomes more of a character study - about why he is the way he is and why he has ended up in the place he is in. The film sprang from a fascination with gangster films, but because I shot it in sequence, it evolved into something else. These elements are present from the beginning of *Pusher II* and *III*, because that was how I could advance the concept. *Pusher II* is about a guy who would do anything to win his father's love. He never does. It's about a guy who is always losing everything."

#### SHOOTING IN SEQUENCE

Refn's writing process is non-analytically and intuitive. He starts by thinking of scenes he would like to see in a movie. He writes the ideas down on index cards and when he has a thick enough stack, he lays the cards out on the floor to see if they hold a story.

"Starting out, I don't care how it's told. I tell myself, 'I know nothing. I'll just go with what I would like to see and the order I'd like to see it in.' I never read my scripts once they are written, because that would create a distance to the material. I have my index



Director Nicolas Winding Refn. Photo: Jan Buus

cards, which I put in sequence, and I visualize the movie in terms of cuts, acting, rhythm.”

As Refn shoots his films in sequence, they are revealed to him in the shooting. They slowly acquire a life and a narrative form of their own. “In *Pusher II*, Mads Mikkelsen and I talked about Tonny a lot the first week. Then we talked about all sorts of other things, because the Tonny character had started dictating his own development. Shit, I didn’t know *how* he was going to develop.”

According to Refn, shooting in sequence is good for the actors. All they have to do is show up on the set and pick up where they left off the day before.

“Shooting *Pusher II*, there was this one time we switched around the sequence of two shots. It was such a simple thing. All Tonny had to do was cross the street and talk to somebody. To save time, I wanted to shoot the dialogue first and him crossing the street afterwards. But we ended up spending a full hour discussing what emotional state he was in and I had to reshoot the scene with the dialogue. As he was crossing the street, he suddenly knew how he was going to play it. It dictated itself. And that makes it much more real. Shooting in sequence, there is so

much you get free. The crew gets very involved, too, because they see things developing.”

#### IT’S CALLED A MOVIE

It’s all about visualization, Refn says. “I’m not doing radio plays. It’s called a movie. Character-driven films easily become sterile in their imagery. When talkies arrived, everything became stiff and sterile, and a generation of directors later emerged who broke with that and wanted the camera to move. The image is our pen, after all, and you should always keep the movement and energy of the camerawork in mind.

“I use the same DP, Morten Søeborg, who worked on *Pusher*. But our style this time is much more like *Bleeder*. It’s a very intuitive narrative form. I like an natural feel to the photography. It can’t be too perfumed or styled, or style takes over content. That’s why I prefer cinematographers who like to work with available light, whatever is handy. Morten and I like the same things: nighttime, fluorescent lights, film noir, contrast, a lively camera.

“The movies are set in a city that’s a blend of decay and renewal. Amager, Copenhagen, where we shot

*Pusher II*, has locations that are gritty and decaying in a poetic way. I see a city as something big and massive and loud and somehow in decay. The scenery must have personality.”

Refn likes putting himself in either/or situations. “If it doesn’t work this way, it’s not going to work at all. If we can’t save it, too bad. I need that pressure to get things done. Then I am forced to adapt to where I am and what is in front of me. You have to learn to trust your intuition. That’s what art is – intuition. It’s about expressing yourself intuitively.”

The conditions he sets up for himself compel him to be decisive. “Decisiveness is a strength in art,” he says. “Decisiveness promotes clarity” ■

*For further information see reverse section*

**NICOLAS WINDING REFN** Born 1970, Denmark. Lived in New York between the age of eight and eighteen. Studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Art. His feature film debut *Pusher* (1996), the first Danish low-budget film to appeal to a broad audience, was a critical and box-office success. This was followed by *Bleeder* (1999); the English language Danish-Canadian co-production *Fear X* (2003), a triple winner at Malaga, Best Screenplay at Oporto and selected for Sundance; *With Blood on My Hands - Pusher II* (2004); and *Pusher III* (English title to be announced) (2005).



Mads Mikkelsen in *With Blood on my Hands - Pusher II*. Photo: Jens Juncker-Jensen

# TO PERFECTION

Repeatedly named Denmark's sexiest actor, Mads Mikkelsen is one of the most striking young character players in Danish film today. He has one simple ambition: to be in great movies. In 2004 he had his Hollywood debut in the epic *King Arthur*. Mikkelsen is currently starring in Nicolas Winding Refn's *With Blood on my Hands - Pusher II*.

BY MORTEN PIIL

"The essential thing for me is working with directors and writers who have something to say. I don't have to agree with everything they say, but that's what makes the work interesting for me. When I get the feeling that they are dying to get the story out, it inspires me."

The guiding principle for Mads Mikkelsen is to make each film the best film there is. Nothing less will do, although in principle he has nothing against movies that are pure entertainment.

## A WIDE RANGE OF CHARACTERS

Naming Denmark's leading young actor today naturally is a matter of some discussion - three or four names come to mind, among them Mikkelsen's.

However, there is no arguing who has portrayed the widest range of characters and types. When it comes to that, Mikkelsen is in a league of his own.

Oddly enough, some would say. With his angular, almost Asian, features and a distinct Copenhagen accent, he does not strike you as a man of a thousand faces.

While Mikkelsen has a personality actor's sizzle - he has repeatedly been named Denmark's sexiest male actor - he also has the ability to inhabit widely different worlds. He will portray a thug or a charming, gay architect, an inhibited video nerd or an ultra-perfectionist cop with equal conviction. He seamlessly switches between high drama and low comedy. Moreover, he recently had his Hollywood debut in the epic *King Arthur* as Tristan, a major supporting part.

## LEFT-OUT LEAD

Mikkelsen is clearly pleased with Nicolas Winding Refn's *Pusher II*. He previously starred in two of the director's internationally acclaimed pictures, *Pusher* (1996) and *Bleeder* (1999). Packing theatres and garnering rave reviews since its Christmas opening in Denmark, *Pusher II* shows Mikkelsen developing the character of Tonny from the first *Pusher* film. A drug dealer fresh out of prison, Tonny tries to get a job with his father, another criminal, and he learns that he is a father now himself.

"In the first *Pusher* film, Tonny was a classic sidekick. He had no plans himself; he was simply a part of other people's plans. That was the key to the sequel, too. We worked with the paradox that, even though he is now central - *Pusher II* is his movie - Tonny is still a bit of a supporting character in all his

scenes. He is always left out a bit and wants in. He is not particularly conscious of what is happening to him, and he should be played with no major emotional emphasis. He has no real self-image, so he cannot see how sad he really is. He is eager to please and just wants to be loved.

“By making him a supporting character in his own life he became someone we wanted to deal with. After all, a lot of people glide through life without a plan and, unlike a standard leading man, they are not all that conscious of their goals.”

### ALL-IMPORTANT COLLABORATION

Most of Mikkelsen's fellow cast members in *Pusher II* are amateurs – a few are even real-life criminals – but working with untried talent did not faze him.

“I prefer to think of them as actors on their first job. Jang (as Refn is known to his friends, ed.) auditioned a lot of different people for the parts, and he simply did not know which were actors. He just picked the best ones, whether they were professional actors or not.

“I'm not a trained actor myself, in the sense of performing a lot of the classical repertoire at the Royal Theatre. It used to be that stars would intimidate the rest of the cast to make more room for themselves, but movie actors in Denmark today have a much better attitude about working together. We realise that the scenes work best if everyone acts well, and it makes us look good, too. Collaboration is the key.

“It's also about handling your fellow actors differently – you have to handle Paprika Steen one way, Nikolaj Lie Kaas another. After all, they are very different people. My co-actors in *Pusher II* had a natural familiarity with many of the events in the film. They know the environment and these types of characters from their own lives. Of course, they were untrained in a lot of other ways, but that really didn't make much of a difference. They were adept at improvising, though there really isn't a lot of improvisation in the movie. Everything is quite tightly executed. Anne Sørensen, who plays the mother of Tonny's child, did her scenes over and over, and took pointers when something needed changing, but she still managed to maintain her naturalness throughout the shooting. It was impressive.”

### YOU'VE GOT TO FEEL IT

Refn's directorial methods have, at times, been controversial in Denmark. Some of the actors in *Bleeder* (1999) felt personally damaged by what they considered Refn's excessive demands that they identify with the part. Mikkelsen also starred in *Bleeder*, as a lonely daydreaming film nerd, but Refn's methods never bothered him.

“I focus, of course, especially up to a heavy, emotional scene, but I don't stay in character round the clock. Jang likes to work with the concentration in the room when shooting a scene. He works with the mood, but he also gives his actors relative freedom in how they want to underscore that mood. You should be able to break out of the mood in the same way you get into it. If you can do it. It's not always easy. Of course, I would prefer my kids to call me Mads, not Tonny, when I come home at night.”

One of Mikkelsen's biggest, most demanding parts was in Susanne Bier's well-received Dogme film, *Open Hearts* (2002). Mikkelsen played a conscien-

tious doctor and family man who falls madly, but guiltily, in love with the girlfriend of one of his patients.

As Mikkelsen points out, Bier and Refn both work toward a common goal: a psychological realism that is as honest and credible as possible. Only their means are different.

“Jang works the scenes out with the actors. He'll say, When I watch the scene, I want to feel this and that, I want to be shocked or happy or sad, etc. He gives his actors a lot of room to manoeuvre and he is very brave in his timing. He is not afraid to sustain a scene. For example, there is a brothel scene in *Pusher II* where Tonny is impotent. The conventional thing here would be to cut away after 10-15 seconds, because we would have gotten the point by then. But that's not what Jang is after: he wants us to *feel* how embarrassing it is. Another difference between Susanne and Jang is that Susanne usually is a lot more specific about the actors hitting their marks and the different angles to shoot this or that line from, though she certainly gives her actors a lot of elbow room, too.”

### PREFERABLY FILM

Mikkelsen comes from a Copenhagen household of non-theatre-goers. Instead, his father would tape radio plays. As children, Mads and his older brother Lars, a prominent actor in his own right, memorized all of *Mordets melodi / The Melody of Murder*, a classic Danish radio drama.

“We acted out all the parts. The wonderful thing about a radio play is that you generate your own images of the events.”

Later on, Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* pushed his ideas about film's potential. Despite his precocity, Mikkelsen's road to professional acting was relatively long. He was a dancer with various companies for eight years before he was admitted to the Århus Teater acting school in 1991. Early on in his career, he did a lot of theatre, but today he is an infrequent stage performer.

“Film is probably what I do best. At least that's where I want to spend my energy. Credibility is important to me. It doesn't matter whether the film is a drama or a comedy, the acting has to be credible within the context of the piece. Although you can put a different angle on your acting in a comedy, even a grotesque character, such as Svend Sweat in *The Green Butchers*, should have the same emotional resonance as any other kind of role. In a comedy, I find essential not to distance myself from a character's emotions – if you do that, it's less funny.”

### GETTING IN THE DIRECTOR'S FACE

Mikkelsen puts a great deal of importance on discussing a part in depth with the director before shooting begins.

This approach falls squarely within the tradition of collaboration fostered by Mikkelsen and other prominent young Danish actors in the circle around the Dr. Dante theatre company, which energized Danish theatre in the 1990s. It is a practice that essentially blurs the lines between director, actor, and playwright.

“A director's need for discussion will vary, of course, but I like to do it as much as possible. In my generation of actors, we butt in on all sorts of levels. If the script calls for a character to do something that

seems out of character, we'll suggest changes.

“All this preparation is very important to me, also because it's inopportune to have that kind of discussion during the shooting. I may argue a bit more than most people about such things, but I think it's important to have good reasons and motivations for a character's actions. It suggests different ways of playing the character. Otherwise, you just feel like a chess piece someone is moving around. That's uninspiring and I'm not very good at it.”

In answer to the proverbial question of whether he would like to direct, Mikkelsen says, “I won't rule it out. But I would need a story that was close to my heart, and there are none at the moment. Meanwhile, I have a lot of other people's stories to work with, and that's fine for now.”

### MORBID COMEDY REMAINS AN OPTION

Mikkelsen has played many different characters, but they were never steps in a conscious career strategy.

“No. If a director came to me with the right story, I wouldn't mind doing a character that was a lot like Tonny in *Pusher II*, for instance. The challenge of playing a lot of different parts was never the main thing – with each assignment, I have simply wanted to create the realest character I could. However, the fact that the characters were so different has certainly inspired me to become different characters.”

Early on in Mikkelsen's career, no one even considered putting the intense actor in a comedy. That was before director Anders Thomas Jensen spotted Mikkelsen's comedic potential and cast him in *Flickering Lights*, *The Green Butchers*, and *Adam's Apples*.

“Anders Thomas Jensen's comedies are quite dark. He creates a unique universe in each of his films. I personally find dark comedies funnier, and I do better in them. I love morbid humour of the free-wheeling Monty Python variety.”

### HOLLYWOOD PROS AND CONS

Mikkelsen sees both positive and negative aspects about the Hollywood career that is potentially awaiting him after his debut in *King Arthur*.

“It's fun to live out your boyhood fantasy of being in an action film, and lucrative too, of course. In Denmark, you don't get to swing from ropes wielding a sword.

“In the long run, of course, you have to conquer the language barrier or you will forever remain the proverbial Pole who's always holding a cigarette between his ring and middle fingers. Even though people in Hollywood are impressed with all the work you've done when they see your show reel, you still have to go to auditions all over again. They put you in a tiny office and ask you to shoot a machine gun. It's humiliating and unpleasant. I actually got two parts that way, but I had to pass because I was going to be in Anders Thomas Jensen's *Adam's Apples*. If you really want to make it, you probably have to move to Hollywood and stick around for at least six months, and I simply could not ask that of my family. But I'll probably make a few trips over and see what's going on” ■

# VINTERBERG + VON TRIER = DEAR WENDY



Jamie Bell in *Dear Wendy*. Photo: Astrid Wirth

**Ten years after kick-starting the most influential wave in Danish film ever, Thomas Vinterberg and Lars von Trier are back together as director and screenwriter of *Dear Wendy*. FILM met with them for a talk about guns, methods, music, and the US.**

BY JACOB NEIENDAM

Youthful pacifists with a dangerous infatuation with guns are at the heart of *Dear Wendy*, the latest collaboration between Thomas Vinterberg and Lars von Trier, who fathered the Dogme95 movement together. Jamie Bell stars as Dick, a young man growing up in a small mining town in the American Midwest. Despite his pacifist convictions, he finds himself drawn to an old revolver and names it Wendy. He gathers a group of outsiders around him, but they have a hard time keeping their secrets underground in the mines. Working from Trier's script,

Vinterberg shot the film for DKK 50 million (EUR 6.7 million) on the biggest outdoor set ever built in Denmark and in real mines in Nordrehein Westphalen, Germany. Production duties were handled by Sisse Graum (*Wilbur Wants To Kill Himself*, *Brothers*) for Lucky Punch, a joint venture between Zentropa and Nimbus Film.

*Did you have any experience with handguns before you wrote and directed *Dear Wendy*?*

Lars von Trier (LvT): "I didn't hold a real handgun until I was at the National Film School. We weren't allowed to make films with guns there, so of course that's what I did. I have never actually fired one, but I have shot a rifle and a shotgun quite a lot."

Thomas Vinterberg (TV): "I tried my first gun in film school too. They might not fire for real, but they still have quite a kick. I tried hunting once with a shotgun, but I didn't hit anything. There was a bird right over my head, but I had

forgotten to take the safety off, so I didn't get it. I felt the rush, but I never managed to kill anything. I grew up in a commune and didn't even have a toy gun. But I took the actors to a shooting range in preparation for this film and we tried shooting different types of handguns. I also tried an AK47. It was pretty wild. There's a thrill in firing a gun. It's almost a dependency."

LvT: "A dependency?"

TV: "When I had tried that rifle, I wanted to do it again, but the feeling quickly faded. It didn't last very long."

LvT: "Almost no matter what you delve into, you are bound to find some kind of beauty in it. Beauty in the detail. The moral aspect is something else. When you hang around people who are interested in guns, you hear all these terms, 'stopping power' and things like that. It's really a fetish. When you look around the Internet, you come across a thousand websites dedicated to this, with people writing poems to their guns and derailed things like that."

TV: "I have learned a hell of a lot about handguns, and Lars is right when he says that it is an amazing instrument that can be fascinating to study. But there is a clear distinction between that and what it's used for. Where I grew up, weapons were a symbol of something bad, but a gun is just a thing that you can either use rightly or wrongly."

*So you never had any real fascination with guns?*

TV: "Absolutely not."

LvT: "Well, perhaps not a fascination. I had a friend as a child who was very taken with WW2 and had a number of guns which could not shoot. I think we tried to make one of them shoot, though."

TV: "I also had a friend like that. But there are two kinds of fascination. The one you have as a kid admiring guns in history books or in films, and the thrill of actually firing a gun."

*Where did the idea for Dear Wendy come from?*

LvT: "I can't remember, maybe because psychologically I passed the project on to Thomas."

TV: "Initially, it wasn't the story that fascinated me as much as the idea of directing something Lars had written. We had so much fun working and playing together before. Our ways of working are very different, but it was an inspiring premise. Then when I read the screenplay, a number of things about it really appealed to me. Making a group portrait about such a crazy project, this experiment, was extremely inspiring. It has all these great aspects of social behaviour that interest me as a director, and I understood why Lars felt that I could add to the project."

LvT: "I had written the film for myself, but it was important for me that it had a realistic tone. Otherwise, it wouldn't be dangerous. So I asked Thomas to do it. He could add these absurdities of realism. He is very clever in that respect and he is great with details."

TV: "We have fundamentally different approaches to filmmaking. I start with a certain characteristic, a tension between two people, and then slowly find my way to a story. Lars does it the other way around."

LvT: "I really start with music. I have these things I save up and The Zombies was one of them - their sound, the emotions it brings out. I didn't listen to it when it first came out, but I have now for years. You can't see it in the film, but at one point the script was literally built around the songs."

*Did that mean Thomas had to use The Zombies in the film?*

TV: "No, and at first I didn't want to either. But I came to see certain things in the script as rules, building blocks for the film we were making. It's a typical example of the difference between us, because my jumping-off point would be what works on an emotional level, while Lars builds a whole sequence around what is said, the exact words. My way is more intuitive and less mathematical. That might mean something gets lost."

LvT: "And probably a lot has been won."

TV: "What was fun about this experiment was that the script was so tight and well put together. It could bear to be challenged."

LvT: "It could use being broken."

TV: "Perhaps it needed that."

LvT: "I would say that it needed achieve some life."

TV: "Better you say it than I, but I think it needed a less logical, even an irrational, life. But it did take me some time to get the same fascination with The Zombies as Lars had, which I felt I needed to have. I had to have a desire to use it in the film."

LvT: "But you have that now, don't you?"

TV: "Hell yeah, I think they are super-cool."

*Did you ever consider changing other things in the script before making the film, like the ironic voice-over, which is reminiscent of the one in Dogville, which again is inspired by Barry Lyndon?*

TV: "It is part of the film's identity and I really like this kind of voice-over. But I also saw it as my greatest enemy or challenge, because it goes against the kind of filmmaking I advocate. The danger of a voice-over is that it can lift you out of the story instead of holding you to the emotions on display. But I really liked it here. I see the guy in the film as Lars, so it's great that the guy speaks with Lars' voice, so to say. But we did several things that took him away from Lars again. One was to make the main character 12 years younger, the other was getting Jamie Bell. That is what happens when you cast an actor, this new person completely changes your conception of the character by the way he looks and speaks."

LvT: "Making him younger was a great idea. I supported that from the start."

TV: "What we spent the most time on, and probably money, too, was casting the film. We knew we had to get the exact right group together to pull it off."

LvT: "I think the cast works extremely well."

TV: "Yes, they were really great. We had a lot of great talents who were interested in doing it, but I think Jamie was the most vulnerable. His character manipulates a lot of people and ultimately creates quite a horrible situation around him, but he is just this young boy. I had to talk a lot with Jamie about his character to give him an emotional anchor, to explain why he starts talking to a gun and things like that."

LvT: "I never understood why you had a problem with that."

TV: "No, that's because it's something you decided, that's the way you are - here's a guy who's in love with a gun. I can't just accept that and work with that. So we needed to find explanations for it. We talked about loneliness, escapism, and so on. It's too banal to say in the film, but it gave us an emotional sounding board."

LvT: "I love that way of storytelling, probably because they told us in film school never to do that. My first film was only a voice-over. Actually, I think, I have some literary ambitions I can live out by writing these long stories. It gives you the opportunity to explain a lot, which you would otherwise have to spend a lot of screen time on - analyses and suggestions about how to understand certain things. I was mad about Barry Lyndon, especially the voice-over, and I have tried to mimic its tone, because it suits me very well. That sarcastic tone is also very dominant in Manderlay."

*Did the film have to be set in the US?*

LvT: "All my films take place in the US. Thomas is right in saying that the story is about 'Little Lars,' how he would turn out if he grew up in an American mining town, not one I know from personal experience, but how I imagine one. He would still be a thoughtful little fellow who would try to make the most of everything, even guns, which he would be morally opposed to. He would think only mentally inferior people would run around with guns, but he would be fascinated by the forbidden. He would try to control it and make the opposites attract. That's what all the other 'Little Lars' always try to do as well, and it always goes to hell, but he has these big moral ambitions."

TV: "Concerning the story, you once told me that you have always felt you were at the wrong place at the wrong time, that you felt misplaced, and that is definitely the case with the main character. With all his books and moral reflections, he is in the worst possible place, but he still manages to get a few people involved in his project. You can play around with a comparison yourself, but look at Film Town. There's more to it than that, but it's part of it."

LvT: "Because the film takes place in the US, I can put a gun into play without having to explain where it came from. I also have people who are ready to use one. That has nothing to do with morals, because it has nothing to do with what the film is about, but only what kind of elements I can play with."

TV: "If you look at it that way, it's obvious why the story has to be set in the US, because they lead the way, in that respect, too. They lead the way in so many areas, including guns, which have become a very important part of their lives. But I don't really think you can be anti-American, because America is one of the most anarchistic places on earth. It contains everything. You have to be more specific than that" ■

*For further information see reverse section*



Director Carsten Myllerup. Photo: Henrik Ohsten Rasmussen

The heroine must never lose heart, *Oskar & Josefine*. Photo: Jens Juncker-Jensen

# LITTLE BIG AUDIENCE

Anything goes in a children's film, as long as you show solidarity with your audience, says Jannik Hastrup, director of *Little Big Mouse*. The heroine should never lose heart, says Carsten Myllerup, who made *Oskar & Josefine*. According to Peter Flinth, who directed the children's adventure *The Fakir*, children like clear-cut conflicts.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

What makes a good children's movie? What elements should it contain? How far can you go in terms of language and content? How do you avoid patronizing your audience? These are some important questions that all filmmakers who tell stories for children must eventually consider.

The answers you get depend on whom you are asking, of course, but they invariably touch on some of the same things. I talked with three Danish directors about their new children's movies: Jannik Hastrup is the director of the animated feature, *Little Big Mouse*; Peter Flinth made the adventure film *The Fakir*; and Carsten Myllerup directed *Oskar & Josefine*, a follow-up to the popular 2003 advent series *Jesus & Josefine*.

## OSKAR & JOSEFINE

Nikolaj Scherfig and Bo hr. Hansen, who wrote *Jesus & Josefine*, completed the screenplay for *Oskar & Josefine*, targeting children aged 7-13, before TV2 in Denmark had even broadcast the advent series. *Jesus & Josefine* is about two kids who travel back in time and meet a very special boy, named Jesus.

"We knew that we were onto something really cool," says Carsten Myllerup, who directed both the film and the advent series. "The basic concept of time travel and changing the course of history is so strong. *Jesus & Josefine* tells stories from the Bible. *Oskar & Josefine* is about Danish history."

In *Oskar & Josefine*, a demon named Thorsen (Kjeld Nørgaard) sends Josefine (Pernille Kaae Høier) back in time to 17th-century Denmark. When she cures a young girl with medicine she has carried with her from the present, she is accused of witchcraft. "*Oskar & Josefine* shows us some of the other uses faith can be put to," Myllerup says. "The pastor

learns that Josefine has healing powers and immediately he concludes that she is a witch. It's fear of the unknown, and none of her arguments will help her. A theme of the movie is faith versus science. Josefine knows, but the pastor believes, and every child watching the movie knows she's right."

Myllerup, who is 33, has one other feature to his credit, the teen horror movie *Midsummer* (2002). The educational potential of travelling back in time to depict life in the time of Christ or 17th-century Denmark was not his reason for making *Oskar & Josefine*, he says. But it is a reason why the film was so cool to make.

A filmmaker has an obligation to make quality entertainment for children. As Myllerup sees it, "There is no point in making a film unless it has real content, something you want to deal with and communicate. It's cool to do action and suspense, and it can hold up a long way, but ultimately you lose something if the audience doesn't feel you have something to say that matters to them.

"Had we been unable to make a film with a historical perspective, it would just have been a good movie. But we had the opportunity, so of course we seized it." Early on in the development of *Jesus & Josefine*, Myllerup and his screenwriters made a



Director Peter Flinth. Photo: Rolf Konow

Dark humor and bizarre going-on, *The Fakir*. Photo: Jens Juncker-Jensen

decision not to proselytize or preach.

"And we don't, I think. But we have to relate to the historical period we are dealing with. We shouldn't lie to the children and present a world that never existed. It's a terrific story and afterwards people can discuss what they saw: 'Did they really burn women at the stake back then?'"

Myllerup thinks you can expose children to a lot in a film, but you always have to give them hope. "In *Jesus & Josefine* and *Oskar & Josefine*, it's crucial that, no matter what happens, Josefine never loses heart. If she threw in the towel, that would really be scary. But she doesn't. She grits her teeth and forges ahead trying to save everything and everybody."

Although the movie has more violence than the advent series, Myllerup says, "We are not out to frighten children senseless or keep them awake at night. Sure, we could have made *Oskar & Josefine* so it wasn't scary at all. But then we would not have been taking history or witch-burning very seriously. Then it would have been just an amusing story with a lot of cutesy characters goofing around."

## THE FAKIR

Peter Flinth's *The Fakir* is based on a book by the bestselling Danish writer Bjarne Reuter. Like *Oskar & Josefine*, it targets children age 7-13. The 40-year-old director of the acclaimed children's adventure film *Eye of the Eagle* (1997) was brought into the development process at a late date, but when reading the book for the first time he knew it was perfect movie material.

"Its dark humour and bizarre events appealed to me," he says. "The world it describes is completely

warped, but it's still about two ordinary kids who just lost their father and are left with a flaky mother. In a comedy as grotesque as *The Fakir*, it's important to start with a realistic premise that the audience can relate to. In the movie, we deal with basic emotions, with loss, family, and the search for security."

*The Fakir* is an adventure film bursting with magic and wonder. Two twins, Tom and Emma (Aksel Leth and Julie Zangenberg), and their mother (Sidse Babett Knudsen) move into a rambling old ghost house. In the cellar, they find a fakir genie (Moritz Belibtreu) trapped inside a ballpoint pen, who comes to their aid when two crooks break into the house looking for the loot from their last heist.

"Adapting the book into a movie was an enormous effort. Bjarne Reuter throws so many little stories, intrigues, and conflicts into the mix, without bothering to tie up all the loose ends – the movie does the same," Flinth says.

"Books are more forgiving about leaving loose ends, but in movies everything is so specific and concentrated that it raises a lot of questions. We test-screened the film to children who said, 'If all it takes is a certain word to release the fakir from the pen, can't the girl just do it again?' Well, now, don't you worry your little head about that!"

In Flinth's opinion, adventure films like *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* have pushed the limits of movie violence. "I tell the children the story the way I would like to hear it myself," he says. "It's up to me, the director, to draw the line – how far can I go? You have to ask yourself whether you are exposing the children to something they cannot handle."

The character of an undertaker appears in the film and two scenes show a coffin burning in a furnace. "That's taboo: death, an undertaker's work. It's not something you really talk about," Flinth says. "In the first of these scenes, all you see is a coffin and it's not

established whether there is a body inside. The next time we see it, Tom, our protagonist, is inside it, and you know it's dangerous because he might get cremated. Many children think that's the scariest scene in the movie, but we take them through it in stages to explain what is going on."

Flinth gladly confesses that *The Fakir* is mostly fun and games. However, he maintains, clear-cut conflict is a strength in children's films. "Kids like to relate to clear, universal conflicts. 'Should I help my friend or leave him in the lurch? Should I steal or not steal?' Kids know right from wrong."

Moreover, Flinth says, such conflicts give European children's films international legs. It is a question of recognisability and identification. Then, it does not matter if the film is set in an African village or in a haunted house somewhere in Northern Europe.

## LITTLE BIG MOUSE

### KINDERFILMFEST

Jannik Hastrup caught some flak in the Danish press after the opening of *Little Big Mouse*, because one of the mice in this animated feature for preschoolers uses quite colourful language. No one expected that kind of language in a movie about Circleen, the little elf with the round head (hence the name), and her friends, the mice, who have been a fixture in the cultural upbringing of Danish children for close to 40 years.

At age 63, Hastrup is a veteran of Danish film with more than 60 animated shorts and features to



One character has to stay pure, *Little Big Mouse* in KINDERFILMFEST. Framegrab

his name. In his view, there is not much to say about the profanity issue. “We wrote it exactly the way we hear kids talk. Özlem’s brother uses the phrase ‘psycho spaz’ because his sister, whom he has been teasing, accidentally slams a door in his face. When something like that happens, you use strong language. No one would say, ‘Golly gee, you’re mean.’”

Moreover, Hastrup says, the slur is not left unprocessed. “The phrase is spoken three times. Özlem is really upset that someone would call her that, and she doesn’t want to come home because her brothers think she is just a ‘psycho spaz.’ We aren’t out to educate, of course, but the message clearly is that using that kind of language is not okay.”

Hastrup, who co-wrote the screenplay with Kit Goetz, was surprised that his movie provoked such a strong reaction. The two screenwriters went over a lot of swearwords and they talked with kids aged 8-12 about the curses they use. “They know some pretty strong words,” he says. “But I think some people get up in arms about this partly because of all the puritanical cartoons shown on TV on the weekend. The cartoons may be violent, but you never hear a single word of the kind that gets people upset. It’s okay to melt each other with plasma rays,

but the language is proper and clean.”

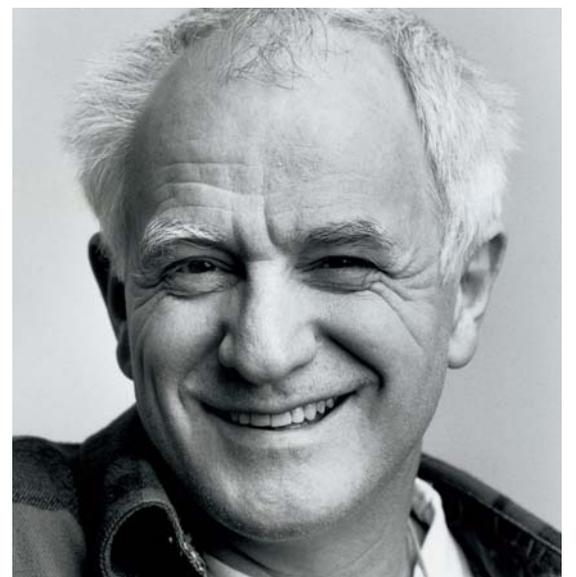
In Hastrup’s view, we all have two languages. “One you use with your parents, your grandparents, and the authorities. Then there’s the language you use with the other kids in the neighbourhood and your close friends. The issue is not the words themselves, but the values you assign to them and how they are used. Words like ‘four-eyes’ or ‘fatso’ are a lot more personal and can hurt a lot more.”

It was always important for Hastrup to have the Circleen character stay the same over the years. “This is the first time I worked with Kit Goetz, and of course she thought we should update Circleen. However, she quickly realised that wouldn’t work, because Circleen is our yardstick. She may be a bit cheekier now than she used to be and she may hold back a bit on the moralising. But she is the one who has to maintain the morals, and it is against her that we measure the sassiness of the others. It’s no good if everyone misbehaves. There has to be one pure character.”

The profanity issue leads into a more general discussion about what to tell children and how to tell it. According to Jannik Hastrup, “Anything goes, as long as you show solidarity with the children, as long as you’re able to explain what’s going on.

Certain subjects can be difficult to explain, of course, and you don’t want to get into them, such as adult sexuality” ■

*For further information see reverse section*



Director Jannik Hastrup. Photo: Rolf Konow

# FUNKY NORSE MYTHOLOGY

**Maria Mac Dalland's *Odin's Eye* is an animated take on ancient Viking myths.**

*Odin's Eye* is about birth and life, death and rebirth. It illustrates the epic struggle between the Aesir and the giants of vibrant, rough-and-tumble Norse mythology. The god Odin has created the world and tries to put it in order by ousting the giants. When his son Balder has some horrible dreams, Odin starts wondering whether he might have created the wrong kind of world. To learn the truth, he drinks from the Well of Mimir. The deceitful giant Loke appears in the water, addressing Odin, "I am you. I am all your thoughts." Visiting the Well of Mimir makes Odin wiser, but it costs him an eye.

*Odin's Eye* offers children aged seven and up an opportunity to become acquainted with the myths and sagas of the Viking Age.

The film has a distinct visual style combining live action and animation.

**MARIA MAC DALLAND, DIRECTOR:**

*Odin's Eye* was a long time in the making. For one, I have had three children since I started working on the film in 2000.

Second, the film was an opportunity to make a film on the

computer. In particular, I was tempted by the idea of mixing real footage and animated sequences. I have always thought that was great fun, but it is incredibly difficult and costly to do on film.

It is quite a change to go from pencil sketches, hand-painted celluloid, and single-frame exposures in a special effects camera to suddenly being able to do practically anything yourself in front of a monitor. I realized that the most difficult part was to be selective and choose among the unlimited possibilities that were opening up before my eyes.

I have aimed to create a 2D universe that retains some of the grainy texture of film and animation by hand. I have tried to avoid the typical smooth, bland computer look. After a lot of experimenting, I found a method for animating using Flash software.

The software makes it possible to preserve high-definition graphics. Live dancers were shot as silhouettes and put through Flash. The animations were then treated as individual frames in Photoshop and, finally, they were placed in layers in After Effects where the figures were kind of colour graded with other layers of film or painted backgrounds ■

*For further information see reverse section*

**MARIA MAC DALLAND** Born 1965, Denmark. Mac Dalland began her career in 1981 in the studio of the Danish animator Jannik Hastrup. In 1983-85, she helped set up an animation department in Nicaragua for the Nicaraguan Film Institute and in 1990-91 she helped establish an animation workshop in Uruguay. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Mac Dalland directed her own films and worked for a number of other directors. Her titles include: *A Journey Towards Birth* (1989); *The Garden - A Fairy Tale* (1991); *The Nest* (1992), which won the Best Animated Film award at Festival Internacional de Cine para Niños in Montevideo, 1993; *Tangueria* (1995); and *Völuspa - The Creation* (1996).



Photo: Maria Mac Dalland



Framegrab

# ANOTHER ROTTEN DAY

**KARLA NIELSEN** Born 1975, Denmark. *The Shadow in Sara* (2004) is Nielsen's graduation film from the Animation Director programme at the National Film School of Denmark. Her student film, *Conny og hendes brødre*, was another children's animation. Nielsen has been working as an animator since 1994 on various TV series, commercials, and shorts in Denmark and London. Her illustrations have appeared in children's books and trade magazines. She is the director of *Goodypals* (2003), a pilot for a TV series.

**Karla Nielsen's animated film *The Shadow in Sara* is a young person's view of how wrong things can go on any given day.**

Twelve-year-old Sara is having a rotten day. Nothing new about that. Most of her days are rotten. When she is feeling bad, she daydreams. She has been sent home from school. Again. And once again she is stuck with walking her annoying younger brother home. Of course, they start fighting. No one understands her. She feels all alone in the world. What she really needs is a hug. She is sick of fighting, especially with her mother. Today is her mother's birthday and Sara has made her a nice drawing. It looks like a good opportunity to break the tailspin she is in. But how easy is that when your little brother gets all the attention and your mother is more interested in her new red dress and everything else but you? Sara gets upset again, but fortunately a solution is found. Even on such a rotten day.

*The Shadow in Sara* is by and large a traditional cartoon, though its hand-drawn universe comes with added 3D effects and real-film footage of clouds perfectly meshing with the film's tight graphic design.

**DIRECTOR KARLA NIELSEN:**

I'm from a traditional animation environment of classical hand-drawn cartoons. *Skyggen i Sara* is the product of a really

good collaboration with the designer Rasmus Meisler, who created Sara and the film's visual environment based on our conversations. There are 3D effects, such as clouds and wind blowing through grass, shot on film, next to a conventionally drawn world kept in a limited colour scheme of blue and yellow, in addition to white and black, of course.

I wanted the film to have its own style that was different from traditional animation. Working with just two colours was an enormous challenge. For instance, when I want to show Sara spilling a glass of chocolate milk in an all-yellow kitchen, the chocolate milk is yellow, too. Using only two colours was difficult but exciting. Moreover, the cloud and wind 3D-effects grow more forbidding as Sara's mood darkens.

Sara is upset because she feels lonely, even among other people. That's a very typical way for a person to feel who is in between childhood and adulthood. Sara's reactions are completely irrational. What sets her off is feeling that she doesn't belong anywhere and no one understands her. Sara and her problems are not particularly unique. She is a normal 12-year-old girl with problems like most girls her age. I felt that way when I was a teenager. Adults may get the feeling that they don't belong anywhere, either, but they generally handle it better and are better at putting it into words ■

*For further information see reverse section*

# MISSING DAD

**Morten Giese's new short film *My Dad is a Champ*, like his last film, *The Boy Below*, charts the experience of a boy who misses his father.**

Stefan has not seen his father for years. All he knows is that his father is a boxer who travels all over the world. He treasures the postcards his father has sent him from all over and he misses him a lot. Like his father, Stefan too is a boxer. On his tenth birthday, Stefan does not get the usual package in the mail from his father and he decides to go find him. With his five-year-old brother Tobias tagging along, he sets out for the city. The boys eventually find their father, but he is not at all what Stefan had imagined. Still, Stefan gets a well-earned apology, and the boys and their father form a bond. Maybe his father is not such a big disappointment after all. Maybe, just maybe, his father really can box.

*My Dad is a Champ* is in many ways an accessible, easy-to-understand film that will appeal to both kids and adults. The story is fluently told in a visual style that is high on contrast and full of movement.

**MORTEN GIESE, DIRECTOR:**

*My Dad is a Champ* is a story about identity. It is about children needing both a father and a mother to become complete

persons. They cannot settle for just one parent, regardless of that parent's background.

The two brothers in the film have not seen their father for several years. They have developed an unreal image of their father as a great boxing champ. They set out for Copenhagen to find him, against their mother's instructions. Her way of explaining adult arguments, disagreements, and divorce is not enough for the boys. They want answers. They need a dad to look up to, someone to mirror themselves in, so they can become real boys and make sense of their emotions.

In an age of divorce and replaceable lovers, it is important for parents to remember their children's needs. Children need both masculine and feminine nurture to shape an identity. As *My Dad is a Champ* shows, if a mother does not provide answers, the children will act on their own to find an explanation and make a connection.

The boys' fantastic notion of their father as a great fighter is a perfect image of how a child's mind works. If they do not know the truth, their feelings feed their imagination. Reality should not be hidden from them. They can handle the truth - it is a lot easier to handle than a lie ■

*For further information see reverse section*

**MORTEN GIESE** Born 1964. Graduated in editing from the National Film School of Denmark, 1993. He edited the feature films, *The Bench / Bænken* (2000), *Okay* (2002), and *Inheritance / Arven* (2002). Giese has directed 14 episodes of the popular drama series *The Hotel / Hotellet* produced by TV2/Denmark.



Photo: Erik Aavatsmark



Sensitive and tough, Jakob Cedergren has charisma to burn. Photo: Rolf Konow

# SHOOTING STAR

**Sensitivity is an essential asset for any serious actor. Indeed, it seems to be rather widespread in the business. Much rarer is finding that sensitivity combined with a knack for playing a no-nonsense tough guy. Jakob Cedergren possesses that talent, in spades, as his standout performances in a string of Danish crime movies have effectively demonstrated.**

BY MORTEN PIIL

Preparing for his breakthrough performance as the lowlife bodybuilder Tom in the popular and critical favourite *Stealing Rembrandt* (2003), Cedergren packed on eight kilograms of muscle over five to eight months. Tom, the damaged product of a family of criminals (his father and grandfather are both thieves), doing his best to carry on the family tradition, steals a Rembrandt from a museum. His problems only really begin when he realizes how much the painting is worth.

Though tall and lanky in real life, Cedergren is in all respects believable as a small-time crook hitting the jackpot from hell. He nails his character's thick shell and loose fists, his narrow crack of enlightenment slowly widening into a fuller understanding of the hopeless predicament he is in. The performance earned Cedergren a nomination for the Bodil, the Danish critics' award. Earlier, critics had raved about his commanding performance in the sophisticated, historical drama series *Edderkoppen / The Spider* (2000). Cedergren played an inexperienced but ambitious reporter on the track of a far-reaching corruption scandal in post-war Copenhagen. From greenhorn to dogged professional, Cedergren's character is drawn in sure, deft strokes.

Jakob Cedergren was born 1973 in Sweden. He came to Denmark as a small child and grew up in Copenhagen. As a teenager, he played in a rock band with his friend Nicolas Bro, himself a talented character actor. Early on Cedergren was torn between pursuing music or acting.

Cedergren trained at the Danish National School of Theatre 1993-1997 and has played a wide range of roles on stage, from Greek tragedy to Michelangelo in a historical play. He recently played Christian in the stage version of Thomas Vinterberg's Dogme film *The Celebration*.

## POLAR EXPLORER IN CANADIAN FILM

These days, film is exerting the stronger draw on Cedergren. Last autumn, he was released from a theatre contract so he could play the title role in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, a Canadian-Danish co-production, depicting the culture clash between a small company of explorers trekking across North America by dog sled in the 1920s and a small Inuit community exposed to Western civilisation for the first time in the figures of Rasmussen, a legendary Danish polar explorer, and his two fellow travellers.

The director is Norman Cohn, best known for *The Fast Runner*, a Camera d'Or winner. *Knud Rasmussen*, co-produced by Igloodik Isuma Productions and Barok Film, has a budget of DKK 30 million (EUR 4.5 million) and starts shooting in the spring.

## THREE BIG PARTS IN 2005

A few months from now, there will be a chance to catch Cedergren in two new pictures. He has a leading part in *Dark Horse*, a comedy by the young Danish-Icelandic director Dagur Kári, as a graffiti artist who sprays declarations of love on public walls on assignment. His other leading role is in Martin Schmidt's psychological thriller *Bag det stille ydre* (english title to be announced).

Despite all the attention focused on him, Jakob Cedergren is taking his career advancement in stride. When *The Spider* made him a household name in Denmark, he withdrew from the spotlight to work as a stage director. As he said just last year, he has no intention of becoming a bread-and-butter actor, "I will go on acting as long as the work is varied and I'm having fun, and as long as I keep getting better. What's important is growing with each new part, not just making a living" ■



Photo: Erik Aavatsmark

**The 200th anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen's birth year is cause for celebration, in Denmark and in the rest of world. Rumle Hammerich's *Young Andersen* is a sharply focused historical drama about the Danish writer's formative years. Educated with soul-crushing discipline, the youthful dreamer discovers the gift of fairytales.**

# PORTRAIT OF HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AS A YOUNG MAN

BY JESPER VESTERGAARD

"A distasteful gypsy soup!" goes headmaster Meisling's blunt dismissal of young Hans Christian Andersen's poem, *The Dying Child*, in Rumle Hammerich's new film about the famous Danish fairytale writer. Andersen wrote the poem, about a

child on his deathbed comforting his grieving mother, in 1826, while a student at Meisling's boarding school in. It made him famous across most of Europe and still has the power to make people cry. The last line reads, "Look, mother, look! the angel kisseth me!" The poem illustrates Andersen's innovation of adopting the perspective of the poor and suffering.

## THE GIFT OF FAIRYTALES

Rather than taking on Andersen's entire life story, Hammerich early on decided to go directly into the story of the writer's four formative years under the stern headmaster Meisling. Collaborating on the script with Ulf Stark, a Swedish screenwriter, Hammerich condensed the story to a single year. Mirroring the liberties Andersen took with his autobiography, the two co-writers adapted and dramatized events to further the story.

In 1822, after a series of failed attempts to make it in Copenhagen as a singer, dancer, and actor, the flighty 17-year old found himself a student at Meisling's boarding school in the provincial town of Slagelse. There is a meeting of two diametrically opposite natures. Young Andersen lives in a fantasy world that is difficult to conform to the discipline of the classroom. Meisling, for his part, is a stern control freak who, citing reason as the highest virtue, makes every effort to mould Andersen into "a whole person," uniting his imagination and his reason.

"Persecuting Andersen, Meisling pushes the young man to the point where he finds what he has been missing. He discovers the gift of fairytales," Hammerich says. "He realizes that a teller of fairytales can be a literary aspirin for the poor and suffering, perhaps even cure them or at least offer them a moment's respite by making them identify with, and cry over, someone other than themselves."

"I try to explore some of the conflicts a young person goes through when he has to find himself and figure out what he has to offer the world. Andersen was a wannabe. Given the chance, he would have tried out for Popstars or Star Search, and he never would have understood why he was passed over.

"He is a lot like young people today who think they can do everything, plunging into things according to the notion that 'the world is your playground' and lacking the understanding that a lot of hard work is required.

"Andersen is a self-obsessed and self-aggrandizing young man. He tremendously desires fame. He pictures himself as a bird about to unfold its wings. He has something inside of him, almost like an *Alien*, that he has to get out and he needs someone to help with the midwifing. In that sense also, his story still matters today."

## POETRY AND TRUTH

There has been only one previous Danish biographical feature about the writer's life, Jannik Hastrup's 1998 animated film, *H. C. Andersen and the Long Shadow*.

"In Denmark, we have probably been a bit apprehensive about taking on our national icon. Partly, because he has always been wrapped in myths and theories – about his sexuality, his origin, and so forth," Hammerich says. Taking the author at his word enabled the filmmaker to break free of the biographical straightjacket.

"My thesis jumps off from his own way of writing fairytales and, not least, how he wrote the fairytale of his own life. Three times he wrote his memoirs and each time he improved on the story. Some things he glamourized, others he made worse. Likewise, we felt free to invent the boy Tuk and put him in the story. Tuk comes to stand between Andersen and Meisling. He is a realistic character, but also a symbol of innocence and openness moving the story along, as in an Andersen fairytale.

"We tried to do a free interpretation of the Hans Christian Andersen story and, we hope, in a way so that he would have thought it was a good story, too" ■

*Young Andersen* is co-produced by Nordisk Film and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation at a budget of DKK 39 million (EUR 5.24 million). The production is financially supported by the specially appointed H. C. Andersen 2005 jubilee fund and the Danish Film Institute. The film will be released in Danish cinemas in March, and later in the form of a two-part television broadcast.

**RUMLE HAMMERICH** Born 1954, Denmark. A film student in the US, and later at the National Film School of Denmark. Hammerich has directed several TV dramas and series in Sweden and Denmark. His first feature, *Otto is a Rhino / Otto er et næsehorn* (1983) is generally considered the best Danish children's film of the decade and was honoured in Hollywood, London, and Gijon. His 1992 Swedish feature, *The Premonition / Sort Lucia*, won an award in Montreal for best direction. His short film, *Kan du vissla Johanna?* (1994), was named Best Children's Film of the Year in Sweden and also won awards at the Golden Globes, Hollywood, and in Berlin. Hammerich was an executive at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation in the 1990s. Former CEO of Nordisk Film Productions now creative director. *Young Andersen / Unge Andersen* is Rumle Hammerich's third feature film.

# IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

BY VINCA WIEDEMANN / HEAD OF THE NEW DANISH SCREEN

Back at the time in the early eighties, when I started out as assistant editor, a common misconception in Danish film involved “the immaculate conception of ideas.”

The act of getting an idea for a movie was shrouded in mystique and pretence. It was thought of as an alchemistic process that could not be pinned down or put into words, much less taught or developed as a method. This divine calling was the province of Artists, who would closet themselves, plumbing their mental depths as they waited to be struck by inspiration and come forth bearing an ingenious idea.

Then, as now, there were those who were sceptical about this divine relationship. Our professor cruelly greeted us hopeful sorcerer’s apprentices, recently matriculated at the National Film School, with the words, “Many are called; few are chosen!” In any event, this much was sure: only very few students were bursting with unstoppable ideas just pouring out of them. Most languished in painful idleness for days or weeks, waiting for the lightning bolt of inspiration to strike them.

But the chosen few were visited by the muse and returned carrying stone tablets on which the idea was chiselled. Then followed a long period of waiting for the producer to get the money together, while the Artist for his part had to guard the sacred writ against the producers dancing around the golden calf.

If things panned out, the film crew set out trying to interpret the Artist’s idea. When the finished film was finally released, the filmmakers were often surprised that so few people went to see it – audiences back then were not crazy about Danish films – undoubtedly, because they did not understand Art. Once the director had licked his wounds, he could start coming up with a new idea. Only, at this rate, careers rarely gained momentum, and the filmmakers were old men and women before they had passed through their artistic teething troubles.

## THE NATURAL STORY

For the young hopefuls at the National Film School, real change came in the late eighties when the script writing department headed by Mogens Rukov launched the concept of *The Natural Story*. The concept, in its utter banality, states that the physical contexts, plots, and rituals that make up every moment of every day for us are the basic building blocks of film drama. Now, sparking your imagination seemed a bit easier, since the idea for a plot did not have to be plucked out of an ethereal void, but could jump off from events that are familiar to all of us. If you could not figure out where to take the characters or the plot, you could always fall back on the established fact that the main course is followed by dessert, then coffee, then dancing, then late-night nibbles.

That such familiar everyday rituals could lead to films that were far from predictable was brilliantly demonstrated by Thomas Vinterberg and Mogens Rukov in *The Celebration*, which raised the bar for Danish films in general and Danish screenwriting in particular.

## RULES OF THE GAME

Another element that was cultivated at the Film School, as inspired by the veteran filmmaker Jørgen Leth (director of *The Five Obstructions* with Lars von Trier), was the theory that rules and restrictions do not handicap imagination, but fuel it. Not having every option available at all times can lend direction to the process of working with the imagination and help you pick a path through the idea-development maze.

Financial conditions are an inevitable rule of the game in filmmaking, not just in Denmark. Many of the best screenplays of the last 10 years came into being because directors, screenwriters, and producers were collaborating from the outset, so they knew what financial boundaries they were operating within, and because they were capable of creatively bouncing up

against those boundaries in developing their films.

Outsiders often voice the opinion that *The Celebration* would have been a different, perhaps a better film, had it not been made under the Dogme rules. But anyone making that statement is really flaunting his or her ignorance about the basic conditions of any kind of idea development. Plainly, *The Celebration* would never have been made, had the idea for it not been developed within the framework of *Dogme 95*. Rules and conditions are factors that shape the basic idea, they matter in the development of it, and it really makes no sense to regard the finished film as a product that is separate from the factors that helped shape it.

## IDEA DEVELOPMENT AS METHOD

That is another important element: creating a film does not simply consist in filming a fully-fledged idea. It involves developing, shaping, and refining the idea through the entire process. Also, learning that we could work with an idea actually made the whole thing a lot less tragic and angst-ridden.

Meanwhile, we became aware of the relationship between getting an idea and editing it. If you are apprehensive about the process of working up material, you may tend to start editing an idea way too early. If, on the other hand, your forte is working up material in one intuitive swoop, it can seem utterly insurmountable to have to further develop an idea once you have already rendered it in a certain form. Many have been helped by learning to develop an idea into a finished story by proceeding from outline to treatment, to step outline and screenplay. To the dogma stating that every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, Godard appended: ... *but not necessarily in that order*. This tricksterish comment is valid also in terms of the general idea-development process, which is so often hampered by conventional thinking. There is no ready recipe for developing ideas, of course, but useful, passed-down experience and valuable knowledge about

Mogens Rukov is one of the main forces behind the current success of Danish film. Rukov co-wrote Thomas Vinterberg's award-winning Dogme film, *The Celebration*, but his biggest influence has come through his long tenure as head of the National Film School's two-year screenwriting programme. A key concept of the programme is The natural story.

**“NATURAL STORIES are the foundation of any dramatic narrative. This is such an obvious fact that you almost lose sight of it. In fact, a lot of writers lose their way on this point. We think we have to make something special, something original. And we do. But what is original is just a small change in the deeply familiar. And what is deeply familiar? All that is deeply familiar to us is a series of stories, not archetypical stories, but stories we are involved in every day, stories whose mechanics we understand completely. It is a prerequisite for creating something surprising or interesting that the foundation for it is something we know the mechanics of. These are the stories that interest me. A natural story could be going to the bathroom. That is a natural story. Taking an elevator is a natural story. Getting into a car. Getting into a car and driving away. You could extend it a bit and say that a party is a natural story. Arriving at a hotel. We are all familiar with the events unfolding in such stories. You could extend it further and say that a weekend in the country is a natural story. Travelling. Travelling and arriving at a house in the country. Those are two natural stories. Falling in love and getting the one you love is a natural story that contains a good number of other natural stories. Arriving at a hotel and spotting the one you love in the lobby. Answering the telephone. Making a call but not getting through. Buying flowers. These are all likely steps in a natural story. The love story could continue into an engagement story, then into a wedding story. Now we reach the level where the natural story becomes a ritual story. Weddings, funerals, parties. Such things interest me.”**

***The National Film School of Denmark is a state school subsidised by the Danish Ministry of Cultural Affairs. There are four study programmes available: Film, TV, Screenwriting, and Animation Directing. Enrolment numbers 96 students: 60 film students, 6 scriptwriters, 18 TV students, and 12 animation directors. The programmes last four years, except Scriptwriting which is a three-year programme.***

certain basic laws are available, and it is in the collision between these and individual quirks that a personal artistic method develops.

#### UP THE PACE

Another factor in imagination is the pace at which a person imagines. Every filmmaker has a natural fear that his ideas will one day run out, that he will never get a new idea, or that the idea he just had will be his last.

Here, experience proves the value of simply picking up the pace, according to the old saw that one idea leads to another. Still, you also have to be able to let an idea go, since the next one you get may prove to be better. In the film editing process, I have witnessed directors and editors arguing for or against an editing idea for hours instead of simply trying it out for five minutes; the idea may turn out to be no good, but often the mere act of trying it out will trigger a new idea, which would never have occurred just by talking about it.

#### PICKING THE RIGHT IDEA

In my job as head of New Danish Screen, I meet many teams of relatively inexperienced filmmakers. Typically, they are unsure about which of their ideas to follow. There is much speculation about which ideas be accepted by the Film Institute. Such projects, however, rarely possess the nerve you look for as a reader. Far more important is getting a sense that the story matters to the person who is telling it, and that talent and imagination have been invested in the manner in which it is told. A producer has to be every bit as unsparing as a commissioning editor, insisting that, if the filmmakers have come up with one idea, they will, in all likelihood, be able to come up with another.

All along, however, respect and patience are necessary as well, for creative individuals are vulnerable and insecure of their progress, and they may get a lot of lousy ideas underway, too, so trust from people they have to open up to is essential. Moreover, filmmakers need both the stamina and the

humility to keep at it, over and over again, until they have a clear sense that now they have got it, here is an idea that is clear and simple, that they absolutely have to work with.

One aspect of the development process that is familiar to the point of nausea is filmmakers' opposition to dramaturges, producers, and script editors. It is easy enough for outsiders to criticize an idea and tear it to shreds, but how do you move on from there?

Bystanders tend to forget that a development project is underway and that editing can often be undertaken more successfully by generating a new idea that better holds the desired elements than the first idea they had.

In getting a new idea and surrendering to the flow of associations lies the germ of any artistic and creative process: the artist has no (predefined) goal other than the goal he finally reaches. Perhaps a work of art is not created until you have travelled so far from your original idea that you lose sight of it ■

## MORE RUKOV

**BAROK FILM** of Denmark recently released *Rukov*. This documentary by Flemming Lynge is really more with, than about, Mogens Rukov.

The film touches on storytelling, film, women, art, people, "the natural story," Berlin, life and death, but mainly it revolves around Rukov, a man who deserves so much credit for so many successful Danish films of the last decade. Now, he finally has his own film. Not a portrait film in the classical sense, it is a film with Rukov in the lead. We see Rukov as a man on the go, teaching, or sitting in cafés, a man reflecting on his own situation. Rukov as protagonist, actor, genius, demon.

**MOGENS RUKOV** is the highly gifted head of the scriptwriting programme at the National Film School of Denmark, but he is also a man whose inner demons sometimes threaten to destroy him. The film follows Rukov at home and in Berlin, and we are on hand when he receives the Nordic Film Prize, but at the heart of the film is a lecture by Rukov sharing his insights about storytelling.

[www.barokfilm.dk](http://www.barokfilm.dk)



Mogens Rukov. Framegrab from the documentary *Rukov*.

## JØRGEN RAMSKOV NEW CEO OF PRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT AT THE DFI

Jørgen Ramskov left his job as Director of Television at Danish broadcaster DR TV 1 December to take on new challenges at the Danish Film Institute, where he has been appointed CEO of Production and Development.

Reaching back to 1988, Ramskov's track record with DR TV includes being International Editor of the station's radio news broadcasts, Head of the Documentary Film Section, Programme Chief of DR1, and Project Manager for the European Song Contest 2001.

He played an important role in the implementation of the Media Agreement's regulations of economical and qualitative collaboration on Danish films. He will now enter the negotiations with the Danish broadcasters on the new Media Agreement from the other side of the table.



Photo: Jan Buus

## DANISH FILMS DRAW CROWDS FOR THE FOURTH YEAR RUNNING

2004 marks another successful year for Danish cinemas. Some 12.5 million tickets have been sold - approximately 3.1 million of these for Danish films. According to an estimate by the Danish Film Institute, numbers will be on a par with those of the last three years. Thus, the trend among the film-going public seems clear. Cinema as entertainment is increasingly popular, and Danish filmgoers choose indigenous films to a higher degree than earlier. By comparison, in the 1990s the average annual box office was 9.9 million admissions, of which Danish films accounted for 1.8 million.

In 2003, when 24 Danish films were released, the average number of tickets sold for each film was 132,000, a much higher figure than that for American films which had an average of 74,000 per film. In 2004, 18 Danish films in all will be released giving an average of

172,000 tickets sold for each film.

*King's Game* by Nicolai Arcel tops the chart of Danish films, with more than half a million tickets sold. Coming in at a close second is *My Sister's Kids in Egypt* (450,000 tickets), followed by *Brothers* (430,000). *Terkel in Trouble*, a groundbreaking animated film by Stefan Fjeldmark, Thorbjørn Christoffersen, and Kresten Vestbjerg Andersen, holds fourth place with 390,000 tickets.

For further information and current figures: [www.dfi.dk](http://www.dfi.dk)

[WWW.DFI.DK](http://WWW.DFI.DK)

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**THE ORESUND FILM COMMISSION** facilitates access to film locations in Greater Copenhagen and Southern Sweden.

**THE ORESUND FILM COMMISSION's** services are free of charge. International companies use the film commission as a sparring partner in selecting service providers and co-producers in the region. Moreover, the film commission administers a large digital image archive of film locations as well as the comprehensive Production Guide. Both are available free of charge at the Oresund Film Commission website.

[www.oresundfilm.com](http://www.oresundfilm.com)

ORESUND  FILM COMMISSION



## NEW HEAD OF PROGRAMMING AT THE CIFF COPENHAGEN FILM FESTIVAL



Screen International's Nordic correspondent, Jacob Neiiendam is the new head of programming at the Copenhagen International Film Festival from January 1, 2005.

Neiiendam has worked exclusively in film journalism and criticism since 1997, and has been the Screen International Nordic Correspondent since 1999. He has a BA in Film- and Media from the University of Copenhagen, and has been a regular contributor to a number of national publications and newspapers.