

CANNES 2005

PALME D'OR COMPETITION *Manderlay* (Lars von Trier)
CINÉFONDATION *Exit* (Robert DePuis)
UN CERTAIN REGARD *Dark Horse* (Dagur Kári)

Manderlay BY LARS VON TRIER

Running for the **PALME D'OR** is Lars von Trier's *Manderlay*, the second film in his USA trilogy. The cast includes, among others, Bryce Dallas Howard, Isaach De Bankolé, Willem Dafoe and Danny Glover.

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Dark Horse BY DAGUR KÁRI

The graffiti artist, Daniel, is being tracked down by parking attendants, landlords, accountants and the police. One day he falls in love and his easy-going days are over.

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FOUR DANISH FILMS ARE SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN COMPETITION PROGRAMMES AT THE 58TH CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

INSIDE

Running for the **PALME D'OR** *Manderlay* by Lars von Trier. Grace (Bryce Dallas Howard) continues her journey from Dogville to the Manderlay plantation, and witnesses the horror and injustice of a system abolished decades earlier. **Page 3-8**

UN CERTAIN REGARD *Dark Horse* by Dagur Kári is about Daniel, an irresponsible, charming graffiti artist who is being tracked down by parking attendants, landlords, accountants and the police. One day he falls in love and his easy-going days are over. **Page 12-14**

CINÉFONDATION *Exit* by Robert Dupuis is a short film thriller that mixes puppet animation with live action. **Page 24**

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DFI KEY CONTACTS IN CANNES

The Danish Film Institute has published a special Cannes website, which is updated continually. Go to www.cannes.dfi.dk for information on the Danish films, DFI key contacts in Cannes, press material and more.



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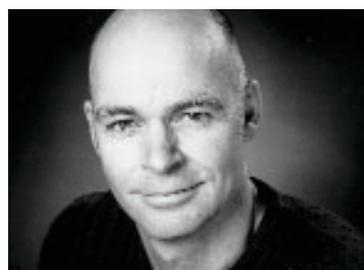


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Bryce Dallas Howard as Grace in *Manderlay*. Photo: Astrid Wirth

IT IS MY DUTY TO PROVOKE

***Manderlay* is the second part of Lars von Trier's American trilogy. The setting this time is Alabama, Bryce Dallas Howard is playing Grace and the provocations are new, but von Trier is the same as he ever was. As the orchestrator of all this weirdness contends, "you only respond strongly to a provocation if there is something to it".**

BY JACOB WENDT JENSEN

"What is provocative?" Lars von Trier asks. "Only in our time has provocation become a negative term. I personally have a hard time seeing what is so bad

about being provocative. After all, a provocation only works the moment someone has something to hide - that's when people take offence. If someone asks you if you killed your aunt, you are only provoked if, at least at some point, you have toyed with the

idea of putting a bullet in her head," says the Danish filmmaker who is sick of always being accused of being provocative for its own sake.

"A successful provocation makes a good film. Films you feel provoke only for the sake of provocation are



Willem Dafoe and Bryce Dallas Howard. Photo: Astrid Wirth

simply failures. I hope my films have some qualities beyond provocation. In a democracy, any kind of provocation can only be a benefit – democracy lives and evolves as a result of discussion.”

Do you think people in the United States would agree?
 “I don’t think I’m anti-American at all – it would be stupid to be anti any nationality. There might be some uproar over the racial issues in *Manderlay*, but hopefully not about me personally. I hope the film will foster debate because, for a film, it takes an unconventional standpoint on the issue of race.

THE STORY

What is *Manderlay* about? It is probably better not to know too much before seeing it. Suffice it to reveal that Grace (Bryce Dallas Howard) has left the Midwest for the deep South where she witnesses a black man (Isaach De Bankolé) getting whipped.

Despite the warnings of her father (Willem Dafoe), Grace settles in the small town of Manderlay, Alabama, hoping to improve life for its black population. The time is the 1930s, but slavery appears never to have been abolished there.

“Slavery is a good universal theme to discuss, although, on the surface of things, slavery has been abolished. Slavery entailed problems that are still more or less open in various parts of the world today. As soon as you start dividing people into superhuman and subhuman, something will start hurting somewhere.”

In your view, is Grace a heroine – or the opposite?
 “When you work on the kind of mythic scale I do, almost anything can be projected into the film. Grace reflects what all my protagonists reflect. She wants for the best, but everything ends up going to hell anyway. That’s standard in my films.

THE CAST

When it finally became clear that Nicole Kidman was unavailable to play Grace in *Manderlay*, as originally planned, the hunt for a replacement began.

“The part of Grace was written for Nicole Kidman and we waited a long time for her, but at some point we had to acknowledge that it couldn’t go on. The Zentropa machine is not geared to wait months for American film plans that keep dragging out. It’s a shame, but I still think so highly of myself that I

don’t think Nicole should be dictating my film productions,” von Trier says, adding that he and Nicole remain on speaking terms.

“We auditioned a lot of people and Bryce just burned a hole in the screen. It’s that simple. It’s not an easy part because she has to have something naïve about her and still have the power to carry the film’s project, which is controlling other people. Bryce is extremely good at a lot of things considering she is so young.”

To bring the cast together, von Trier showed them a series of slides by the Danish photographer Jacob Holdt, who has been documenting the underside of American life since the 1970s. His images run during the closing credits of both *Dogville* and *Manderlay*.

“Most of the actors are British and come from television or the theatre. Part of that has to do with the film’s funding, but I generally get along marvellously with Brits. We had a great time. They walked around making jokes and calling me ‘massa.’ In general, they had a lot of humour about the subject, whereas the Americans tended to take it more seriously. Of course, the race issue is much more serious in the US than in Britain, so that’s only natural. I had a lot of good talks with Danny Glover, who is politically active himself. He is very well spoken on these subjects – so much, in fact, that he left me far behind.”

ZENTROPA

Upward of 100 people work at Filmbyen, the movie village in Hvidovre outside Copenhagen, where Zentropa is the main operator. Does it put pressure on von Trier to know that every film he makes, more than any other Zentropa film, is expected to make its money back?

“Film companies go belly-up every day,” he says. “As long as I know we will be here tomorrow, I’m satisfied. That be said, sure I’m proud of Zentropa. The company was created so I could control my films. Our film-subsidy opportunities and the fact that we own some of our equipment are the key. Tarkovsky could only have made his films in the Soviet Union and *Dogville* could only have been made here with us. Any other producer would have told us to get the fuck out. It’s incredible, really, that

we have created a machine that has been able to turn out such a weird product. I like weirdness, especially in a medium as broad as film by definition has to be.”

Von Trier usually stays away from the financial operations of the company, which are overseen by co-owner Peter Aalbæk Jensen. Even so, as an artist, he is distrustful of high earnings.

“As long as we can finance my films, I don’t care how many people see them. As long as my films break more or less even, I’m satisfied. I believe that a film should carry its own weight financially, roughly speaking. Let’s say earnings of 10 percent – then you can go on working without being called a speculator. If a film makes a lot of money, is probably way too mass-market,” von Trier says.

CANNES

Lars von Trier is travelling to Cannes in a motor home because he is not happy about flying. How does he view the circus in this film Mecca that has always been so good to him?

“Gilles Jacob has always been very kind to me and has kept including my films at Cannes. It’s pure nepotism, I must confess,” Von Trier says, and for a moment he looks almost humble.

“The advantage of the Cannes Festival is that I can go there and get a lot of work done. We want to present *Manderlay* somewhere, of course, since the audiences for the film are found in smaller numbers in countries all over the world. Unfortunately. The whole thing about being in competition or not does not mean that much to me anymore, but it does mean a lot in terms of the amount of attention the film gets.

“The deal in our company is that, in return for the interviews I give in Cannes, for the rest of the year I get to concentrate on making my films. I personally get nothing out of doing roundtable interviews, when they are in English, because I repeat myself endlessly.

“If I were Kubrick, I would probably stay at home, but I don’t feel I can do that. Zentropa is not a company that can afford to just keep on producing. We rely on distributors and co-producers and we owe it to them to promote the film” ■

For further information see reverse section.



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN JØRGEN LETH AND LARS VON TRIER ABOUT MANDERLAY



(AND MUCH MORE ...)

To mark the premiere of *Manderlay*, FILM organised a conversation between Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth, the filmmaker who inspired the young von Trier. Together, they made the documentary *The Five Obstructions* in 2003.

Jørgen Leth (JL): There's the condition that I haven't actually seen *Manderlay* yet, but FILM really wanted me to do this and personally I'm happy to get together again and pick up our exchange from *The Five Obstructions*. So, let's begin. *Manderlay* is the second part of a trilogy?

Lars von Trier (LvT): It is. The story is perhaps most of all a continuation of the Grace character. In the trilogy's first part, *Dogville*, Grace has run away from her gangster dad and is plunging into the real world – apparently, because she feared for her life or, more accurately, because she was afraid of becoming like him. She settled in Dogville, which turned out to be far too overwhelming in its reception of the gift that she was. They used her more and more until her father appeared and slaughtered everybody. That was the first part.

It was a long film with many small stories about different people strung on a thread. In *Manderlay*, Grace is off with her father. She wants to use her share of the power – her father has promised to share his power with her – to make the world a better place. They pass a plantation way out in the country, in Alabama, called Manderlay, where, it turns out, slavery is still practiced – even though slavery was actually abolished 70 years before. She decides to free the slaves and introduce democracy. She does not repeat the mistake she made in *Dogville* – that is, she does not reveal her good intentions right off. She has the gangsters introduce democracy at the barrel of a gun, somewhat along the lines of the current American model, and, of course, everything ends up going to hell. How, I'm not revealing here.

JT: It's a misanthropic vision?

LvT: You could say that. She is always running into problems with the victims she wants to help. That's why, in the third part, which I'm writing now, she is on her way to Washington.

JL: In the first part, she's a victim herself and in *Manderlay* she wants to help other victims?

LvT: Yes, she wants to help the victims, of course. And in the third film she is moving on. She abandons her missions because all she gets is ingratitude. So, in the third film, she decides to become a photographer. She wants to record instead of educate. She feels that is her path.

JL: It's interesting how you made a concept in *Dogville* that you carry through in all three films: empty space – which is very interesting and, in its premise, destructive to a lot of conventions.

LvT: You have been there yourself, I'd say.

JL: Yes, I'm very interested in working in empty spaces. It's stimulating because it forces you to make something that will leave a mark in it.

LvT: Exactly, everything reveals itself much more.

JL: Indeed, everything is more exposed – it stands out.

LvT: So you can tell, for instance, whether the actor has something to say.

JL: Yes, you take everything away from them, almost. You give them a hat, or a suit of clothes in your case, a time and some names, but basically they are really naked. Some actors can handle it and some cannot.

Another exciting thing is that you are willing, or have a desire, to continue with the same characters while replacing the actors that portray them. That's interesting. I've toyed with that idea myself now and then.

LvT: I only did it out of necessity. But, in principle, I find it interesting, too. Now, I got someone else to play Grace, but only because Nicole Kidman couldn't do it at the time. We would have had to wait a whole year to get her, and we couldn't do that. Meanwhile, we quite consciously use many of the same players, only in new

parts. The supporting actors switch around and act the parts of other characters.

I AM CLIMBING A MOUNTAIN

JL: It seems as if you consider this safe territory now, although you were really on an experimental errand when you first created it?

LvT: I don't like the term 'experimental film,' because it's not an experiment when you're doing it. You believe in it. Others may see it as an experiment, but I sure as hell do not make experiments, I make films. I'm climbing a mountain every time I make a film. That's a better way of putting it. Then, you can choose – you do this, too – to make it harder or easier for yourself. You can bring ropes, you can be several people on the climb, you can carry oxygen. People might consider it an experiment if you went at it alone without oxygen, but it's not an experiment if it succeeds. To me, an experiment is more like mixing together a lot of coloured liquids and seeing what happens. That's not the way I work. I only work with the things that succeed. Because I ...

JL: ... know in advance?

LvT: Yes, otherwise I couldn't do it. I cannot do the thing where you say, 'Let's see what happens as we go along.' It might be a gorgeous way of working and maybe I should start doing that, but I simply cannot. I never have.

ACTUALLY, I WOULD RATHER BE A BOOKKEEPER

LvT: A psychiatrist I see, Bolvig, tells me that most brain activity is about limiting our impressions. We receive so many impressions and the brain is tasked with putting a damper on everything.

The problem, then, with 'people like you,' as he puts it – and by that, I'm sure he means people like you and me – is that we have a 'poor filter.' In other words, our brains don't filter well, too many impressions get in. Say our impressions are a hole in a piece of paper you can look through. There are a number of perforations around the hole, and we can look through to some places that are rather unpleasant to ourselves but, then again, are places that people with good filters do not see. These may be the places we show in our films, which will seem experimental to other people. But it's 'only' that we have a poor filter. We can look through it. We have been looking through it a long time. That's also why you can create things that are interesting to look at, because they are connected to what the world can see – the innermost hole, the wholesome world. It's like giving the audience a small glimpse out at more fantastic things. I'm not just making this up, because it's something you can sense around the hole if you have a poor filter, like we do.

JL: You sometimes have an altruistic way of looking at things as something you *have* to do, something we can give or something we see which other people don't see. Would you care to elaborate on that?

LvT: It's merely a hope that the suffering you go through in life can be of some use. There was a French reporter up here who talked with my wife, Bente, and she said, 'Well, Lars would really have preferred to be a bookkeeper – and avoid the aggravation,' and he says, 'Really? But we're talking about *film!*' Anyway, I like to hold onto that. Imagine being a bookkeeper, coming home to your row-house, trimming the hedge, putting your feet up with a magazine, switching off the light and falling asleep!

WELCOME TO MY WORLD

JL: Your stories have become less decadent over time. They are more connected to a political view of the world. In other words, it's quite a leap from *The Element of Crime* to...

LvT: I don't know about that. You may be right that I'm political and lean towards a humanist, leftist standpoint, but at the same time I'm also deeply critical about it. At least I don't feel I'm propagandistic in the sense of presenting only one truth. I would consider that blasphemous. As it were, I believe the concept of hospitality

is humanism in a nutshell. My father talked about this a lot, that you can read a country's moral standard by how they treat their guests, just as you can read the moral standard of a home by how they treat their guests. It's a beautiful thought. It might not be 100 percent true, but there is something to it: if there is a place you like to come, where you feel welcome, you also have positive thoughts about how that home functions. At any rate, the opposite is certainly true: a home where you don't like to come and don't feel welcome is, in all likelihood, a home that is not functioning in a good way. My father was a refugee in Sweden because he was Jewish, and my mother was a refugee there, and they both fully understood the difference between being welcomed and not being welcomed. So, I really do believe in the value of diversity.

AMERICA

JL: This whole thing about American critics resenting you for being such a profound critic of America, how do you see that?

LvT: I basically see it as a good thing, because America should have a lot of critics. Now, I'm not a particularly relevant critic, of course, since I can only base my criticism on second-hand statements and images and what not, because I never went there. And for that reason, I'm fairly easy to dismiss.

I was very enthusiastic about Kafka, who wrote his book *Amerika* having never been there. I find that amazing. Still, my material is many times bigger than Kafka's, since so many things all over the world are about America now.

Basically, that's fine with me. I think authorities should be criticised, even if there isn't really anything to criticise them for. That's a major truth: the big, strong kid on the block should be criticised because, having power and strength, he ought to be merciful and just. When you have the power, you ought to be just. And since America has the power, any kind of criticism can only be an asset, because it can open up certain areas where the powers that be need to take a hard look at themselves. There has to be ongoing critique for consideration both in and outside the US.

JL: But is the trilogy's keynote, then, this fundamental critique of America as a concept, a spirit, a state of mind?

LvT: I have nothing against the US as a concept, nor as a 'spirit.' But I do have a problem with how things are right now in politics and how politics have been in general. But that's not the trilogy's keynote. I hope the films could be seen by people from Mars who have no idea what America is.

JL: That's what I'm talking about. One thing is that we all should be critical about what is happening in the US today. It's appalling and horrific. I think everyone would agree. But deeper down I see some amazing qualities in America. That's why I made my America films, which are also a kind of contrarian, personal, poetic comment on simplistic images of America. What I wanted to do in my America films was provide an image of America as I saw it in my dreams - a kind of poetic vision gleaned from American movies and American art, specifically, the prairies and the dream of freedom that are so American. When I made the second film, *New Scenes from America*, I figured there was all the more reason now - 20 years after I made the first film, *66 Scenes from America* - to bring out this completely contrarian experience of the poetic, forgotten sides of the American dream.

LvT: I understand, and I share the American dream. After all, it's not just an American dream, it's a human dream. The people who choose to become Americans might feel it more strongly - after all, it has propelled people from all over to cross a huge ocean, sailing into the dream. So, the dream is probably more alive in Americans than in non-Americans.

JL: Yes, it's paradoxical that America is the biggest melting pot when it comes to welcoming. There is much more of a tendency in America to welcome minorities as Americans than there is in Denmark. If you look at the American population, there is no homogeneity. On the contrary, there is heterogeneity and diversity.

LvT: Yes, and that's exactly where I admire America for being so amazing. It is so

unlike the Danish social-democratic integration model, which I believe is completely wrong. I admire the American model where people are allowed to have what are now called ghettos - well, they should be able to have that and it doesn't necessarily have to be a ghetto. I mean, if we had the best cross section of all sorts of groups from one country, such as an Eastern European country, you would be able to build an amazing society within society. It would enrich us much more than having everyone learn Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling* by heart in Danish.

AMERICAN VS. EUROPEAN FILM

JL: There is something else I would like to talk with you about. It's the fiction that 'European films are better.' That's not true, of course. There is a lot more going on in American film today. With few exceptions, European film is in an anaemic state. Europeans make a lot of films that aren't worth seeing. It's a pleasure to see someone like Godard making a comeback, though he doesn't have the same freshness and vitality as before, but, hell, I only watch American movies. My most important roots are in American movies, and I think yours are too - apart from Carl Th. Dreyer and those guys, the giants of film history. I don't want to see Bertolucci's new film, for instance. I would much rather watch Tarantino's. I see very few films a year, because I'm so sick of the mainstream. But I like to watch films that ride their genre well and are amazingly well crafted, such as *Collateral* by Michael Mann. The best film I have seen all year is Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby*. It deserves the accolades. It's terrific and it has a courage that is quite unique. It's very muted, hushed as a whisper, and in a sense it turns its back on the camera. The whole last section is one long death play that is also morally courageous. Well, I don't know if you feel like commenting on this drawing of lines between European and American film? I mean, what the hell is that all about, anyway? It annoys me to watch this fight to protect European film against the imperialism of American film, as they say.

LvT: Well, there can be no doubt about the commercial dominance of American films. But please, leave that market to the Americans, if they want it. They are insanely good at making commercial films - let them have it.

As for the films you mention that 'stick out,' it's probably true that more films stick out in America. My impression is that Europe is more of a mixed bag. But I'm not into this whole thing that films *have* to be European. I also like the ones that 'stick out' the best. They are the interesting ones. Whether the American or the European way is the best way to make something stick out, I don't know. But it would be a shame if we *only* had commercial films. Then your films and mine would never have been made. That's also why I think the European system is justified.

JL: Certainly! I'm not ungrateful about the European system. American filmmakers I meet at festivals envy us having such a good system that enables us to make films without having to accommodate this or that. That people like us, who have special ideas about what films should look like and a desire to make personal films, have room to operate, of course that's right.

LvT: But if we lived in the US, we would have accepted commercialness as a rule of the game. It is only a rule of the game, after all. And not a very interesting one at that, because it's not something that helps make a film more personal. On the contrary, it's a question of casting such a wide net that you catch somebody in it.

JL: A frustrating rule of the game, right? But in American movies, you also see an undergrowth of percolating energy in young filmmakers who want to bust the boundaries inherent in the commercial system.

LvT: That's what's so wonderful. It's like the Soviet era. Things were percolating then, too - more out of defiance than anything. Defiance is good. Almost wherever it appears, defiance is good. It's excellent fertiliser, you know. You, too, have worked out of defiance!

JL: All the time. Defiance is a good inspiration - working against something.

STUBBORNNESS

JL: The terrain you are exploring in your trilogy: on one hand, it's like it's a kind of 'instant desert,' an endgame in which something is played out that still inspires you. On the other hand, you also seem to be unfolding a very big narrative, a kind of literary narrative, within it. The fact that you stay there must mean that it's a place you feel comfortable?

LvT: Not necessarily. I actually feel more comfortable finding new niches and ways of doing things. But as you say, it's a concept and I have absolutely set out to see this concept through all three episodes.

JL: You are a stubborn person.

LvT: It's sort of what I do, being stubborn. I also think it's necessary. It's a kind of maturity test: now, I made something on a black floor and I think it would be too bad to just leave it like that, just letting the black floor 'grow over.' It's like making a commercial, you know. In commercials you are always shooting for a certain genre that will illuminate the product. I want this genre to be a genre in itself. I don't want it to be something I choose because there is a certain product to sell. I like the black floor, so now I'm continuing it into all three films - even if it is white in the next films, it's still an empty space, you know?

JL: But a lot of things are also stripped down to reach that point, right? In your own work, as well?

LvT: Yes, as in Dreyer's, too, by the way. He also stripped things down like a madman. It's a kind of maturity test. I always set myself difficult tasks. It's like saying, "Now I'm going to bicycle to Barcelona."

JL: You did that?

LvT: No, I didn't. Hell, I never bicycled anywhere. But I would be stubborn enough to do it. I have so much stubbornness that I'm willing to put myself through hell. That's what I've been doing, I think, up to now. It's what I do. The moment you cannot put yourself through hell anymore, or you don't feel like it anymore, that's probably the time to call it a day.

So, at the moment, I'm putting myself through hell writing the third film in this trilogy. It's not easy, unfortunately. Also because it's the conclusion. I think the project has acquired certain elements now that are good. So it will work out, but it's tough.

It might have been easier if I only had to consider certain commercial demands, because then it would just be a matter of whipping out some commercial elements and looking at the third part through those lenses, seeing whether it was commercial enough. But, of course, we are not thus blessed in this country. Anyway, it's amazing what you can get out of torturing yourself, and I've done that a lot, I'd say.

DREYER AND KUBRICK

JL: Do you still think of Dreyer a lot?

LvT: I do and I don't. Dreyer and Kubrick are part of my filmic consciousness.

They have defined greatness for me, one way or another. They are in there, but so are a lot of other people.

JL: Dreyer is a presence in your films, an inspiration that has been used a certain way.

LvT: It may mainly be his image of women. I may need to get away from that again, but it's a good fit for me because I connect much better with actresses than actors. They are more difficult to work with and when you want to go the places I want to go, it's easier if you have a good connection and a certain openness. But wanting that openness has been a personal evolution. When I started out, I was a lot less naturalistic.

JL: It's my impression that, these last few years, you have been into taking the actors places. At least, that's something you have talked about a lot, taking them to a place where they don't really like what they are doing, a kind of extreme nakedness in their performance.

LvT: Yes, and that's easier with women. They have an easier time being naked. Men always need to have a club on their shoulder.

TRUTH & UNREASONABLENESS

JL: Then there's the truth thing. It's almost like an obsession with you. It seems you believe in certain means for reaching the truth, like doing a kind of penance.

LvT: Perhaps. As I see it, you've got to have a focus. You know, when shooting a rifle, you have to aim at something.

You can aim at anything you feel you have a relationship to - let's call it the truth or whatever. There's a truth for every person in a situation - for actors, too - and if you only locate that, you have found some kind of truth. What this exercise is about is not pushing through your own version of the truth, but creating an interaction and trying to find out what the truth is for the others. After all, the 'truth' is an impossible concept but if there is something you can draw a bead on, that's good enough. It's just a word that comes closest to what I'm after.

JL: But it also comes out as definitions in your manifesto-like expressions, such as Dogme.

LvT: That's because, in the manifesto-like, the words have to have a certain weight. So you work this kind of word magic, and I'm fine with that. I love unreasonableness, I'm very taken by it and I know you are, too. I was crazy about Strindberg, you know, and it's hard to find a more unreasonable person than that - it was astonishing.

I'm very happy about unreasonableness. It's almost American, right? Like a part of the polarisation you imagine exists in the US. Let's have some more unreasonableness. Wouldn't that be great? There is far too little unreasonableness.

ZENTROPA & DOGME

JL: There is an incredibly free spirit here at Zentropa. I imagine that's something that originally sprang from your mind?

LvT: Actually, it's largely to the credit of my partner, Peter Aalbæk. I had some theories at one time that we should make what I called an 'open film village,' but that fell to pieces and since then I have pulled out of it a lot. Peter does an excellent job of running Zentropa. He is very open about lending equipment to the deserving, etc.

JL: I want to get at the role you took in creating Dogme and inspiring people. You have left a real mark in the filmmaking community. Your Dogme thoughts have had an inspirational effect all over the world. You have something to offer, it seems, and you have been very generous with it.

LvT: I don't consider myself generous. I only do what I do because I want to and because it's how it should be. I don't think of that as being generous. I think the French New Wave was amazing, of course, and the other waves that came here and there - and that was what we were aiming for with Dogme95. We simply hoped to find a tool we could use for something. The first thing I asked Thomas Vinterberg when I called him up was, 'Would you like to start a wave?' And he said, 'Yes! 'Good, come over and we'll make these Dogme rules.' He was into it, he was game.

That's the way it was ■

For further information see reverse section.

JØRGEN LETH Born 1937, Denmark. Filmmaker, journalist, poet. He has directed over 30 films since the early '60s, including *Good and Evil / Det gode og det onde* (1975), *Sunday in Hell / En forårsdag i helvede* (1976), *Haiti. Untitled / Haiti. Uden titel* (1996), *New Scenes from America / Nye scener fra Amerika* (2002) is a follow-up to his classic *66 Scenes from America / 66 scener fra Amerika* (1981). Important awards include the Danish Academy's Special Prize 1983, a life-long grant from the Danish Art Foundation 1995 and the Danish Arts Foundation Award for *Søren Ulrik Thomsen - Poet / Jeg er levende - Søren Ulrik Thomsen, digter* (1999).

LARS VON TRIER Born 1956, Denmark. Graduated from the National Film School of Denmark, 1983. The following year he directed *Element of Crime / Forbrydelsens element* (1984). Recipient of major international awards, among them Prix Special de Jury in Cannes for *Europa / Europa* (1991) and the Grand Prix in Cannes for *Breaking the Waves / Breaking the Waves* (1996). A major popular breakthrough came with *The Kingdom / Riget* (1994). Founder of the Dogme95 concept. His own tribute to Dogme was *The Idiots / Idioterne* (1998), *Dancer in the Dark / Dancer in the Dark* (2000) won the Palme d'Or. His ninth feature film, *Dogville / Dogville* (2003), was selected for the Official Competition in Cannes 2003.

THREE STORIES OF PROUD MEN

A conversation with director Per Fly and his leading man Jesper Christensen about their new drama *Manslaughter*, the final instalment of a Danish tour de force. The trilogy is now complete.

BY LISELOTTE MICHELSEN AND MORTEN PIIL

The trilogy is done. First came *The Bench* about the lower class, starring Jesper Christensen as an alcoholic, Kaj, a proud man and in every sense a loser. *The Bench* was among the most critically acclaimed Danish films in recent years. As came as a surprise to a lot of people, it was also a huge popular success. Per Fly won over critics and audiences again with the second part of his trilogy, *Inheritance*, which was about the upper class. *Inheritance* was the most seen Danish film of 2003. Now, Fly and Christensen are back together again in the trilogy's final piece, *Manslaughter*, taking on the middle class. Christensen plays the lead in this high-voltage psychological murder drama about truth and lies, guilt and self-deception.

Christensen's character in *Manslaughter* is Carsten, a high-school teacher who was politically active as a young man in the 1970s. Now his political engagement, though still heartfelt, has degenerated into the odd chinwag over red wine with his wife and their friends in their suburban home. His life is rocked when he has an affair with the much younger Pil, a former student of his and a political activist. One night, an

action she is in goes wrong and a police officer dies. Pil and her friends go to Carsten for help, which puts him in a dilemma when he realizes that Pil is to blame for the police officer's death. Should he advise her to come forward and pay the price for what she has done, which would mean losing her? Or should he advise her to lie to avoid serving a long prison sentence?

Carsten ends up a party to the lie constructed around the political action. He and Pil win the legal battle. But can they run away from their actions? Do the ends justify the means? What are political ideals worth when you are an accessory to murder?

HE RESEMBLES ME AND JESPER

In Carsten, Fly has created a character that is closer to himself than the protagonists of his last two films. Christensen, too, sees a lot of himself in the character.

Per Fly: "Carsten resembles me, and Jesper. I understand him really well. I think he's right about what he's saying. I researched the "autonomous" environment in Copenhagen and the anti-globalisation scene, thinking these were just some punks who throw paint at Prime Minister Fogh. But I also found some super intelligent political people who have a mission and fight for something. The arms factory that the film's three activists demonstrate against really exists. It's the Therma plant in Aarhus, which manufactures parts for F16 fighter planes.

"Carsten wants to fight against the lies in his life, which is a correct analysis. He is searching for some

meaning or direction in his life. When he's suddenly thrown into a situation where he has a chance to reach for some of his ideals, he completely loses his grip. Sadly, he starts by telling the biggest lie he ever told, denying that he knows anything about who caused the policeman's death."

Jesper Christensen: "I know so much about Carsten. He mirrors my own life - age-wise, politically, character-wise. Carsten has a healthy instinct for who to feel most sorry for at any given time, who to show solidarity with and what his job is. When disaster strikes, he rationalizes it in terms of his political stance and life in general. So he has things under control for a while - or so he thinks. For of course, he doesn't. He's afraid of getting old, of giving up the fight, vegetating in front of the TV and clipping coupons. Politically, he has stopped acting. And now he thinks the solution to it all is to be 19 years old again. That will make everything all right, he thinks."

Fly: "Yes, he taps into the energy of his young mistress, Pil, trying to turn back time - as many men do when they reach that age - and relive his youth and active political commitment. He wants to return the needle to the start of the record and play it over again. But, of course, that's impossible.

"In *The Bench* and *Inheritance*, the characters go through some fairly common events - for their social classes, that is. In *Manslaughter*, which is about the middle class, I wanted to take up an uncommon course of events. I wanted to work with a killing and a character who is dragged into an unflattering course



Jesper Christensen and Beate Bille in *Manslaughter*. Photo: Per Arnesen

of events. *Manslaughter* investigates how far you can go before it becomes impossible to defend a character. Apart from the class theme, all three films are about a masculine way of dealing with problems and about men in crisis. All three are about pride and about men who go to extremes because they are holding onto something they probably shouldn't be holding onto. Pride, of course, is a huge masculine strength: it builds bridges and wins wars, but it can also lead us straight into the abyss. The film is an attempt to understand a man who crashes and burns.

"A decline occurs in all three films, true, but I don't think any one of them shows an actual fascination with decline. There is no romance in the decline."

Christensen. "No, there isn't. In *Manslaughter*, we also describe some completely ordinary conditions of life. We all try to control our lives, but once in a while we discover that, no matter who we are or how much of a control freak we are, we really have nothing under control and we don't like it. These are moments everyone will recognize."

Fly. "The three films were hard to make because I had to emotionally live through the characters' decline. Writing this film, I talked with people who have committed manslaughter and at one point I was close to a panic attack because I had to reach inside and touch the emotion: what is it like to kill another human being?"

A POLITICAL PERSON

Because Carsten is a political person, his existential crisis is also manifested as a crisis in terms of his political ideals and concepts.

Christensen. "Carsten is obsessed with what's true and what's a lie. He is a high-school teacher and his job is talking and teaching politics. He cannot understand what happened to the dreams of the seventies. Back then, we thought we could change things. And that turned out to be a lie. The left has had a few minor, marginal victories, but we never really succeeded in anything."

Fly. "That's not how I see it. As I see it, many things today are echoes of things that happened in the seventies. But at a certain point there was a need to rebel against them. I don't belong to the seventies generation, but I feel a kinship. I'm from the eighties and we were so sick of the seventies spirit that, of course, we had to rebel against it and be punks and anarchists. But now comes a young, clean generation that does not have the same image of the seventies generation as we do. I think the political age will return, and let's hope it will not be completely like it was in the seventies."

"When I made *The Bench*, I wanted to reinvent the political film. Instead of having a readymade answer and then making a film about it, I wanted to make a political film according to an investigative method. Today, it's considered seventies-ish and a no-no to

talk about class struggle. But, of course, the reality is that there are different classes in society. Some thought it was an outmoded idea, but my producer and I held onto it. Then when *The Bench* was a hit, it became possible to finance the next films.

"Working with a political theme in *Manslaughter* has also been a journey for me. *Manslaughter* is a more investigative film than the other two. *Inheritance* was extremely clear and well defined and I wanted to try something different in this film."

TRUTH AND LIES

In the film, when Carsten finally decides to tell the truth, no one wants to hear it anymore. It is "too late." There is no longer any use for his confession in the judicial system.

Fly. "Defendants and prosecutors are a tough breed. For them, it's not about finding out the truth, it's not about emotions. All the victims and relatives of victims I spoke with when I researched the film said that knowing the truth was the most important thing for them - but that's not built into our judicial system. It's interesting to discuss the value of the truth to someone who has lost a loved one in a crime. Researching the film, my experience was that the truth emotionally is worth much more to those affected by a crime than I would have ever imagined. Knowing the truth, you can move on with your life. The truth heals."

"The film is very much about lying and living a

lie, and how to avoid living a lie. After all, no one can live a completely truthful life. We all lie a little bit all the time or we couldn't function in a social context. But did a lie or denial ever make anyone's life bigger or richer? I cannot think of a single example. I've got to agree with what my older brother's scout picture said, "Stand tall and always tell the truth!"

THE MYTH OF ICARUS

Manslaughter's protagonist practices paragliding, which the director consciously uses as a symbolic parallel to the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus. Daedalus designed the Minotaur labyrinth for King Minos, but afterward Minos would not let Daedalus and his son Icarus leave Crete. They escaped by means of wings made of feathers and wax, but when Icarus flew too close to the sun, the wax that held his wings in place melted and he plunged to his death.

Fly: "I was partly inspired by real life, how people who used to be politically involved are now into things like marathoning and paragliding. I also wanted to expand my storytelling vocabulary and lend the film some ambiguity. The myth of Icarus popped up and I thought it made a good match for the story. There are different ways of interpreting the myth in terms of my film. The way I see it, no one can blame Icarus and Daedalus for wanting to get off the island with the labyrinth, and inventing wings and flying away is really a heroic deed. But the costs are serious. Icarus falls down and dies. In the film, what dies is Carsten's illusion that he can relive his youth. In the end he crashes, but he starts walking again and I see him coming out of the film a stronger person. He did what he could. He went to the police and told the truth. He has a right to a life after what happened. But he never gets rid of his guilt - like Daedalus, he has to live the rest of his life with a great sorrow. But at least he is not still out on the island, or living an ossified day-to-day life, starving to death."

Christensen: "That's not how I interpret it. The way I see it, Carsten is Daedalus and Pil is Icarus. He taught her - and then she freaks out, like Icarus, and does something she shouldn't have done."

Fly: "That's another possible reading. The Icarus theme is one of the things I put in to add ambiguity to the film."

PRECIOUS IMPROVISATION

The screenplay for *Manslaughter* took a year to write and is constructed in part around the actors improvising. Despite careful preparations and research, the shoot was at times nerve wracking.

Fly: "We improvised a lot more than we did in the two last films. I decided to use my intuition more and it was sometimes hard to keep track of what was going on during the shoot. We had a script, but I always had the sense that we needed to put more in, that we needed to reach into the corners even more. It was important for me that we were able to move quickly, even though we were a big crew of 30 people."

Christensen: "Yes, but they trust Per, even when he doesn't make up his mind until the last minute. The money often goes into the improvisation. Flexibility is extremely important, because it makes room for the intuitive. I never experienced such a level of freedom as an actor."

There were scenes in *Manslaughter* that we both sensed weren't working the way they had originally been written and then improvised material emerged

that no one had been polishing at home or talked about as anything other than a possible direction or area of thought. We feel comfortable working like that. But, of course, it affected people who were only on the shoot for one day..."

Fly (laughs): "Yes, it was a little hard for those who showed up knowing their lines and were told, 'Stop what you're doing. We don't want to do what it says. Think of something better!'"

Christensen: "Anyway, it was easier for me to improvise in *Manslaughter* than in *The Bench*, because Carsten is a lot closer to myself than Kaj."

CONTROL AND POWERLESSNESS

Jesper Christensen recently had a big role in Sidney Pollack's drama thriller *The Interpreter*, starring Sean Penn and Nicole Kidman. At age 56, Christensen is considered one of Denmark's leading character actors. He has been in more than 60 films and TV productions. *Fly* says that he has never seen Jesper let go like he did in *Manslaughter*.

Christensen: "I was more of a control freak when we made *The Bench*. But it's also about how anxiety generating the shoot is. There you are, everything goes quiet, everyone is looking at you and you have to justify why this film costs 40,000 euro a day. If you aren't properly prepared, but expect to get by on supreme inspiration, you won't succeed very often. In *Manslaughter*, we were very well prepared. Because of the improvising we had done in rehearsals, I brought a lot of baggage to the shoot that wasn't in the script."

"I usually pick my projects based on directors I would like to work with. The screenplay is less important, especially if someone like Per Fly wants you in the picture. When the story, like in *Manslaughter*, is fuelled by your own personal life, your own lived life, it takes love and trust before you start giving of yourself. And unless you present a personally engaged take on the part, acting is the most boring thing in the world, bordering on the silly and embarrassing. If you don't give of yourself and get confidential, what's the point? You pick people, not screenplays."

"The same goes for working abroad. The only problem is it's very hard to improvise in a language you don't command. As soon as it starts going badly, you tend to think it's your fault. Your diction and inflection may be saying something entirely different than you think, and you cannot hear it because you didn't grow up speaking the language. Like the Danish actor Erik Mørk said, 'If someone comes in and asks, "Where's John?" I can say, "He's not here," so that it means 20 different things.' But in English, I can only say it one way, I only have that one shot in my gun. That poverty can make you crazy and sad at times - and then you get just as deliriously happy about coming back to that old fool," Christensen nods in *Fly's* direction.

I AM ANXIOUS-NEUROTIC

Fly's next big project is a TV series in seven episodes with the working title, *7 Lives*. Tracking the production of a stage play, the seven episodes show the same time segment experienced from seven different points of view. His dream is to carry over his experiences from *Manslaughter* into a freer way of working in his future films.

Fly: "We really made *Manslaughter* like a kind of jazz film. We knew all the chords and scales, but we didn't know what we'd be playing on top. I used to dream



Director Per Fly. Photo: Jan Buus

PER FLY Born 1960, Denmark. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark 1993. Has directed several series for television, made commercials, music videos, and short fiction films which includes *The Little Knight* (1999) and prizewinning *Calling Katrine!* (1994). Prior to his feature film debut *Bænken/The Bench* (2000), a triple winner at Lübeck, he directed *Prop & Berta*, a puppet-animated feature released in 2001. *Arven/Inheritance* (2003), Per Fly's third feature film, received rave reviews, crossed the quarter million mark at the box-office in its first month, and received the Jury Award for Best Screenplay at San Sebastian. *Drabet/Manslaughter* (the third film in his trilogy) is his fourth feature film.

about having such freedom, but it also turned out to be anxiety provoking and I lost sleep during the shooting and editing. Every day I walked on the set as if it were the last shoot of my life. Also, I had to make sure that the third film of the trilogy would not be a complete flop. Hopefully, in the long run, I will feel good about working with a degree of freedom and openness, for the combination of structure, near military precision and total freedom is the right way for me to work.

"I'm anxious-neurotic, like all directors, and shooting *Manslaughter* was a journey into territory involving a maximum loss of control. We all dream about being seen and accepted for who we are - letting go of control is a step in that direction" ■

For further information see reverse section.



Nicolas Bro and Bodil Jørgensen in *Dark Horse*. Photo: Henrik Ohsten Rasmussen



Jacob Cedergren and Tilly Scott Pedersen in *Dark Horse*. Photo: Henrik Ohsten Rasmussen

TRIBUTE TO THE SIXTIES

The Icelandic filmmaker Dagur Kári is following up his award-winning first feature, *Nói Albinói*, with *Dark Horse*, an offbeat comedy in black and white.

BY KIM SKOTTE

Francois Truffaut's *Jules & Jim* and his recurring protagonist Antoine Doinel, the two cool characters in Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise*, J.D. Salinger's loner Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* and Vernon God Little in DBC Pierre's literary sensation of the same name – literature, music and the movies abound with young male misfits who have to find their own roundabout paths through the outermost periphery of handed-down middle-class convention: romantic, desperate outsiders who eye so-called normal adult human beings with scathing humour and a sad shake of the head. Unexpected love is usually their only available escape hatch. The

tradition of the misfit is a rich one. In *Nói Albinói*, his multiple award-winning first feature, the Icelandic filmmaker Dagur Kári very convincingly inscribed himself in this tradition.

Nói, the protagonist of Kári's first film is a 17-year-old slacker who likes to stick to himself. He lives in a remote village in Iceland surrounded by all-mighty, wordless nature and his fellow Icelanders who are only slightly more communicative than a glacier. Nor is *Nói* much of a talker. But whereas the other inhabitants of this sleepy backwater are sluggish in a lot of other ways, too, there is clearly a lot going on inside *Nói*'s head beneath his youthful indolence. He has a decision to make. Should he simply sink into the wordless, local sludge – or does he have what it takes to break out and find another place for himself? Kári painted this youthful portrait with both humorous detachment and unbreakable loyalty. *Nói Albinói* took the eye level of its young protagonist to a degree that is rare in film.

DEPARTURE AND CONTINUATION

Dark Horse, Kári's second feature, marks both a departure and a continuation. Again, the protagonist is a young man with no appreciation for the splendours of social mores. Daniel is a graffiti painter and he is crazy about music. He is far less crazy about such sticky concepts as paying the rent, having a steady income or a fixed residence, filing taxes or paying parking tickets. Only, it is a very different setting this time. *Nói Albinói* was kept in frozen blue hues defined by winter, nature and isolation; *Dark Horse* is in black and white, big-city black and white, and set in the little big city of Copenhagen where Kári attended Denmark's National Film School – two films shot under widely different circumstances and with great variation in tone. *Dark Horse* is far more of a comedy than *Nói Albinói*. Smouldering desperation has been replaced by witty repartee and phlegmatic cool in a light-hearted vein. Even so, there are clear enough links between the two films. Though Daniel and *Nói*, one Danish, the other



Director Dagur Kári. Photo: Henrik Ohsten Rasmussen

DAGUR KÁRI Born 1973, France. Brought up in Iceland. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 1999. Made three short films, two of them award-winners: *Old Spice* (1998), winner of Canal+ Award at Nordic Panorama and *Lost Weekend* (1999), recipient of 14 international awards. His feature film debut, the Icelandic co-production *Nói Albinói / Noi the Albino* (2003), a box office success, was awarded in 11 countries. Second feature film: *Voksne Mennesker / Dark Horse* (2005).

Icelandic, are products of widely different circumstances, they are kindred spirits – two misfits created by one temperament but under very different circumstances.

“*Nói Albinói* was made under very tough conditions in the middle of winter, almost at the edge of the world,” Kári says. “*Dark Horse* was shot in Copenhagen in the summer. Still, I find it much easier to make a film in Iceland. The Icelandic film industry is so young that it has no regulations or unions. There is a sense that anything is possible and that all problems can be solved in a matter of minutes. It’s a very rock ‘n’ roll attitude. In Denmark, you have constant meetings. I have a hard time seeing what that’s good for. Why do you always have to talk about it? That’s hard for someone from Iceland to understand. In Denmark, if you want to blink an eye you have to apply for a permit and pay a fee. Also, considering the short working hours, it is next to impossible to make a film in Denmark,” Kári says. Nonetheless, he did manage to make *Dark Horse* and, when pressed, he is willing to admit that,

all things considered, Denmark is not particularly rigid. It’s probably Iceland that is the exception.

IRREGULAR HOURS AND FAMILY PATTERNS

“I think it’s a peculiarly Icelandic thing. Of course, it’s understandable that people don’t want to work 12 hours a day, but the Icelandic mentality is very different. In Denmark, it’s common for people to plan their work around their spare time. That concept doesn’t exist in Iceland. People there work all the time. That has some advantages when you are making a film, but of course the consequences can be tough. Families fall apart, people leave each other,” Kári says, perhaps providing a hint to why you look in vain for ordinary, functional nuclear families in his films. Kári’s families are irregular and dismantled. In Kári’s two films, the sons may be a bit quirky, but they do not hold a candle to the fathers. *Nói*’s father is a drunk and an Elvis fan. Daniel’s father is a hardboiled enigma who is always roaring off in a tail-finned gas-guzzler.

As long as he can get away with it, Daniel drifts from pillar to post. Nor did *Nói* take well to commitment and regular hours. Surely, this must pose a dilemma for Kári, if he is even remotely like his protagonists. How do you combine a basically laidback, anarchic attitude with the monomaniacal energy it takes to whip home a film project?

“Yes, it would be great if you could meet the two extremes halfway,” Kári says with something of a sigh.

Does he resemble his two protagonists? “They are different parts of one imagination, and of course your imaginings are also part of who you are. After all, there are many things you dream of doing. They do not resemble my real life, but they do resemble my fantasy life.” Thus *Nói* was born. “He was a character I invented when I was around 16. I had been collecting ideas without quite knowing what they would turn into, a novel, a comic book or whatever. Then I got accepted to the National Film School in Copenhagen and it seemed really obvious to use the material for my first feature. It was very important for me to shoot my first feature in Iceland. That would also allow me to cap off a process that had been going on for 10 years.

NO PLOTS, PLEASE

Dark Horse, I started on a clean slate. Every option was open to me,” Kári says. The film was co-written with the Danish screenwriter Rune Schjøtt. Taking a somewhat unusual approach, they practically played the material into shape in a ping-pong process. For several good reasons.

Dagur Kári is not crazy about the notion of a traditional plot. He does not want to start by thinking about the story, but prefers to constantly work with little ideas and let them do the work for him.

“I don’t get ideas for a story. I get ideas for situations. Then I start collecting. Rune and I took our notebooks and emptied them of ideas. Some we discarded, others we built on. The idea was always to try and have fun with it and not think about the problems or the story until the very end. That it became a comedy I think has a lot to do with the fact that there were two of us. It becomes a game. You want to impress the other person. When you send things back and forth to each other, it has to be fun. You want to make the other person laugh. It started

as a bit of a joke. We said we wanted to make a film that looked like Kieslowski directing an episode of *Seinfeld*. Sitcom crossed with the artsy-fartsy,” Kári says, as this Danish-speaking reporter suddenly picks up an Icelandic lilt in the English expression, “artsy-fartsy.” The film was supposed to start like a sitcom and gradually quiet down and get more serious in the process. That was another ambition: to switch genres in mid-stream. Seamlessly, almost unnoticeably.

“The story, so to speak, grew organically out of material we were having fun with. Characters grow quickly that way. Two situations alone will say a lot about the character involved in them.”

THE SHOOTING STAR AND THE TOP MODEL

The lead, Daniel, is played by Jakob Cedergren who was the Danish “Shooting Star” at last winter’s Berlin Film Festival. Around him we find a line-up of the most exciting young and youngish names working in Danish film. Cedergren plays Daniel, a graffiti painter who pays the rent by spraying declarations of love on commission. His life runs its haphazard course until the day he falls in love himself and has to debate whether the time has come to take life a little bit more seriously. The girl he falls in love with, Franc, is played by an unusual screen debutante. Tilly Scott Pedersen is Danish, but has been around the world before taking her first part in a Danish film. Striking out at the tender age of 17 to study photography in New York, she was discovered by the Metropolitan Models agency and went on to work in London, Paris and Milan. Back in New York, she studied for two years with Jackie Bartone (The American Academy of Dramatic Arts) and had bit parts off-Broadway. Now, she is flashing her singular good looks and quirky charisma in a Danish film by an Icelandic director, no less, and in black and white, the coolest colour scheme since Jim Jarmusch did *Stranger Than Paradise*.

“It’s important for me to create a cinematic universe that is a few steps removed from the actual world, but which still resonates in things we know. Copenhagen is highly recognizable to Danish audiences, but by making it black and white you create a new Copenhagen within Copenhagen. There was another, more pragmatic reason for it, as well. We shot at more than 100 locations. Black and white was an effective ploy to ensure cinematographic cohesion. A third reason was that I wanted to pay homage to the sixties, a time with a highly effervescent film language, offhand and stylish at once. I wanted to express that in a way that, so to say, was nostalgic in the now. Black and white is great for that.” Despite its homage to the sixties, *Dark Horse* is a very contemporary film. This is underscored by the soundtrack, another aspect where Kári is in control. The score is by Kári’s own small band, *Slowblow*, which also did the score for *Nói Albinói*. Again, however differently the two films have been handled, there are many aspects of the two films that maintain an inner cohesion. It goes to show you can take the filmmaker out of Iceland, but you cannot take Iceland out of the filmmaker ■

For further information see reverse section.



Christoffer Boe og Tine Pfeiffer. Photo: Katja Hemming Hansen

THEIR OWN LITTLE ADVENTURE

Christoffer Boe's *Reconstruction* won the Camera d'Or award in Cannes for best first feature two years ago. Teaming up again with Tine Grew Pfeiffer, this year's Producer on the Move in Cannes, Boe is back with his second feature, *Allegro*, a science fiction film without the science.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

Christoffer Boe does the talking when I meet with him and his producer, Tine Grew Pfeiffer, to discuss their

latest film, *Allegro*. This suits Pfeiffer just fine. She is not crazy about doing interviews.

In 2003, their first feature, *Reconstruction*, an unusual, style-conscious love story, won the Camera d'Or in Cannes, drawing raves from critics linking the young iconoclast to the French New Wave of the 1960s.

"*Reconstruction* was in every way a declaration of love to film and the genre itself," Boe says. "As we saw it, we were making a love story about the first encounter between two people, which was turned over and inside out until people either left the theatre in anger or ecstasy."

Allegro, co-written by Boe and Mikael Wulff, is a science fiction film, though far from a conventional one. Like his idol Jean-Luc Godard, the 30-year-old director is engaged in redefining and re-energizing familiar genres. "To me, science fiction is a genre that asks, 'What if?' The film essentially takes place in what could be the present. I'm not interested in the science aspect, but in the genre's inherent desire to question conventional concepts – in the sense that things may well be different from how we normally perceive them. In *Allegro*, we take a love drama and see what happens to it within a science fiction setting."

PRETTY STRAIGHTFORWARD

Allegro, starring Ulrich Thomsen, Henning Moritzen and model and photographer Helena Christensen, is about “a man, Zetterstrøm, who has lost the love of his life,” Boe says. “And because of that, he denies his past. He wants to forget it, and certain people resent him for it. They kidnap his past and place it in the Zone in central Copenhagen. The Zone is kind of a city within the city that is closed to the outside world. The challenge for Zetterstrøm is to get inside the Zone and get his kidnapped past back.”

When I comment that the plot sounds kind of far out, Boe smiles. “It’s pretty straightforward when you watch the film,” he says, stressing that he is not interested in making intellectual films.

“You can be blinded by the fact that my films reverse some fundamental ways of watching films. Basically, I think the pleasure there has to be in watching films, is really about giving in. The moment you are able to, or feel up to, giving in to the films I’m trying to make, I hope they work on a level that requires no intellectual preconditions for their experience. The understanding lies on an emotional level.”

VISUAL FLAIR

A challenge in making *Allegro* was how Hr. Boe & Co., as Boe and his regular collaborators call themselves, could make a stylish film for little money.

“Science fiction usually requires a lot of money for set designs and postproduction,” Boe says. “This had to be *lo-fi*. Ideas are what count. I’m not interested in big effects, and anyway Danish films cannot compete with American movies that have time and money to pour into effects. However we can compete on a good idea and a visual flair we find appealing. That gives us a different space to manoeuvre in than the big American blockbusters and we need to take advantage of that.”

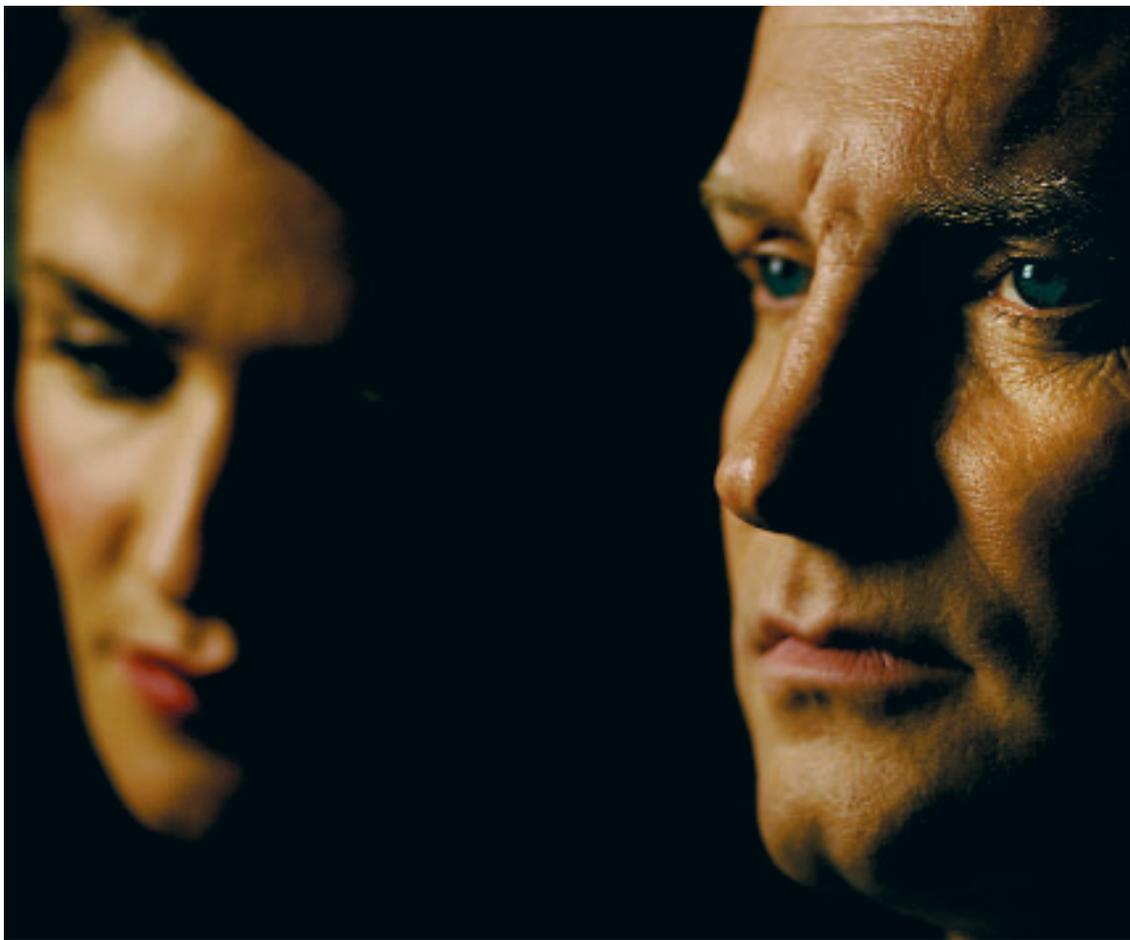
SIMPLE MECHANICS

Pfeiffer and Boe met at the National Film School of Denmark where they made three shorts together, *Obsession*, *Virginity* and *Anxiety*, which in a sense were precursors to *Reconstruction*.

“Getting together is a big thing,” Boe says. “The question then is how to evolve your collaboration from there, for instance pitching to a production company as a team, saying, ‘We would like to make a film with you.’ Of course, this has its limitations, because you then have to accept the company’s basic conditions.”

Pfeiffer always knew she would be working in film. She wanted to go to film school at the age of 16 but she was told that she was too young. After two years of working for producer Vibeke Windeløv, Pfeiffer knew she wanted to produce, and she was accepted into the National Film School’s producing programme.

Knowing that he wanted to be a filmmaker, Boe first took film studies at Copenhagen University – to gain a theoretical and historical overview, he says – before applying to the National Film School. “It comes from a great joy and love for the film medium and what it is capable of doing,” Boe replies when asked why he wanted to be a filmmaker. “Film is a wonderful place to get closer to life. Film is this strange medium that entertains us while we watch ourselves. For an hour and a half we can cry and laugh without consequences. We learn about love, loss and death before we ever experience them in real life. Films are a VIP ticket to life, an all-access backstage pass.”



Helena Christensen and Ulrich Thomsen in *Allegro*. Photo: Alphaville Pictures

IT IS A COLLABORATION

In 2003, Boe and Pfeiffer founded a joint production company, AlphaVille Pictures Copenhagen (there is no denying the inspiration from Godard). Having made *Reconstruction* for Nordisk Film for EUR 1.25 million, they now chose to produce *Allegro* independently at a budget of EUR 2.2 million.

It is a collaboration, says Boe. “Tine and I spend enormous amounts of time on each film and we both need to feel it’s the right one. I determine which direction I want the film to go in, but we both have to figure out the best way to get there and if there are ways of making it bigger, better and funnier.”

“On the strength of *Reconstruction* we had an ideal opportunity for creating the framework we wanted,” says Pfeiffer, who is this year’s Danish *Producer on the Move*. She is bringing along a new Boe project. “We didn’t want to be locked into facilities or a specific sales agent and we needed to have as much freedom as possible in terms of picking the people and companies we want to work with. We have embarked on our own little adventure and we want to build our own network.”

“Nordisk Film deserves credit for giving us such a free hand in *Reconstruction*,” Boe says. “We could have opted for that again, but of course such freedom comes in return for signing off the rights. It’s not our film. *Reconstruction* belongs to Nordisk Film and that’s how it should be since they gave us an amazing opportunity. Even so, after *Reconstruction*, it seemed natural for us to take over both the responsibility and the risk, but also all the potential.”

YOU’VE GOT TO HAVE A “PROJECT”

Though their first time at Cannes furnished Boe and

Pfeiffer with international contacts, they decided to finance *Allegro* exclusively with Danish funds. Apart from the Danish Film Institute, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), SF Film and Nordisk Film & TV Fund have put up funds.

“We wanted to get started quickly,” Boe says. “The film was realisable budget-wise with Danish financing, so, all things considered, that was the path of least resistance. Especially since we are a start-up company and we want to do everything ourselves and keep control.”

If you want to make a lot of films, and Boe does, you have to have a “project” or a concept, he says. Unlike those of his fellow Danish filmmakers who work in trilogies – notably, Lars von Trier and Per Fly – Boe has elected to examine various genres. “Luckily, there are plenty to choose from,” he says. The thriller is next in line.

“For me, it’s been enjoyable and productive to take up different genres. That way, you cannot simply reproduce what you did before, since you are now dealing with the potentials and limitations of another genre. Also, it somehow seems natural. I have set myself a ‘project’ that requires me to find the next genre and get started” ■

CHRISTOFFER BOE: Born 1974, Denmark. Graduated in film and media at the University of Copenhagen, 1996, and in direction at the National Film School of Denmark, 2001. His graduation film *Anxiety* received the Prix Decouverte de la Critique Francais and was screened in Critics’ Week, Cannes 2002. Boe’s feature film debut *Reconstruction* (2003) received the prestigious Camera d’Or and the Critics’ Week Youth Jury Award at Cannes in 2003. Boe is also recipient of FIPRESCI’s Director of the Year 2003. His second feature is *Allegro*, to be released in 2005.



Helena Christensen felt like a spy on the set of Christoffer Boe's *Allegro*, starring the Danish supermodel and photographer. Photo: Rolf Konow

A PRIVILEGED BEGINNING

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

"It's like falling over backwards and hoping someone is there to catch you. No matter if it's a good friend or a family member standing behind you, I think everyone knows how hard that can be."

Helena Christensen is describing what it was like to act in Christoffer Boe's new film, *Allegro*. The character of Andrea, the protagonist's love interest, is the first real movie role for the 36-year-old Danish supermodel and photographer. Previously, she, along with several other supermodels, had a cameo in Robert Altman's satirical look at the fashion industry, *Prêt-à-Porter* (1994).

"I told Christoffer I was ready to pull out all the stops and give 100 percent of myself as long as I could be sure that he would be there for me the whole way through," she says on the phone from New York. As she still needs to see the finished film, our conversation is mainly about the experience of shooting *Allegro* and working with Boe, and she only has good things to say about him.

"He's a very passionate director with a vision that he doesn't stray from," she says. "And that rubbed off on me. It was a huge challenge to try and live up to what he had in mind, while pushing myself all the time."

Christensen, of course, is no stranger to the limelight. She was one of the world's most popular supermodels in the nineties, and life on the catwalk and in photographers' studios has prepared her to

perform in front of a motion picture camera.

"What I do as a model is kind of like a silent movie where you give much more of yourself physically than mentally. In *Allegro*, it was thrilling and freeing to be involved mentally and get into it in a whole other way."

Over the years, she has taught herself to shut out all the people around her when she does runway, poses for a fashion spread or shoots a film and she was not struck by stage fright on the set of *Allegro*. Still, she had nightmares about forgetting her lines when playing opposite Ulrich Thomsen

"I felt like throwing up before each setup. I thought Ulrich would freak out about how unprofessional I was and how long everything was taking. Doing something physical is one thing, but having to act natural at the same time is something else entirely. It's strange because these are things we all do every day of our lives, but when you have to do them on command it looks studied and artificial."

Christensen found a good teacher in Ulrich Thomsen. "What may have pushed me to give more of myself," she says, "was fear of letting him down. I felt that, if I didn't do my best, it would bring down his performance which is always the best. When we stand across from each other, I get this amazing energy from him. It's in his eyes, and it changes everything. You are standing there, opposite this other person, and he pulls you into it. You act like the character he brings out in you. All of a sudden, you become that person."

When Boe asked Christensen to be in *Allegro*, she was not all that interested at first. "I harbour no ambition of becoming an actress," she says. Boe had written the part of Andrea for her and she was eventually swept away by his commitment and passion.

"You're asking for it, I thought. I really have to feel that I want to do this and that there is trust in me that I can do it, that there is something to tap into, some kind of natural acting talent. I told Christoffer so from the beginning. I am quite fulfilled in many ways, because I have had a pretty bizarre, but super cool, job that has allowed me to try all kinds of different things. I have no need to plunge into different things just for the sake of trying them out."

She asked Boe to always be honest, and he was, candidly honest. "He's like a child in some ways. He speaks his mind."

Helena Christensen would definitely say yes if she got an offer to do a new film by a filmmaker who inspired her like Christoffer Boe did. But, she says, "It was a really privileged beginning for me. I was with the most talented actors in Denmark and the most talented director. Everyone supported one another. It was like being part of a family."

"I felt a little bit like a spy on set. It was hard for me to say, 'Now, you're an actress in a movie,' so I played around with the idea that I was just there to see what was going on" ■



Nicolas Bro and director Christoffer Boe (right). Photo: Katja Hemming Hansen

Christoffer Boe is currently working on another transgressive feature film project, *Offscreen*, produced under the New Danish Screen subsidy scheme.

A MAN TURNS INVISIBLE

Offscreen is about a man who is afraid of becoming invisible. This fear causes him to clash with the world around him. It is a battle that he loses. Blow by blow.

The actor Nicolas Bro has long felt ignored by people. Even his wife is not looking at him with the same affection anymore. To safeguard his existence, Bro gets a camera. He wants to film everything, film love, show his wife how beautiful their love is.

Bro talks his good friend, the filmmaker Christoffer Boe, into lending a hand and with great zeal, Bro starts shooting.

Bro's dependence on the camera quickly turns into an obsession. For fear of disappearing, he films everything, but too late he realizes that it is the people around him who are disappearing.

"*Offscreen* is a marriage of fiction and reality," Boe says, "a film in which everybody plays themselves. It is a great way for a director to relinquish all responsibility. I just say, 'Improvise and film yourself and come back in a year when you have shot a film.' No, I keep Nicolas on a very short leash. Also, he can move in the public space in a whole other way than he could have in a traditional production. You simply call up and ask if it's all right that someone stops by with a camera. You don't have to book locations or extras. It's a quick, but also a hard, way of getting life down on celluloid."

TIME AS AN ART FACTOR

Vinca Wiedemann, artistic director of New Danish Screen, sees *Offscreen* as an exemplary project, both because of its radical artistic premise and in terms of New Danish Screen's low-budget concept.

"The basic concept of the project is unlike anything I have ever seen before. The idea is to utilise time, which after all doesn't cost anything, as an artistic factor and a storytelling element. The film takes the concept of a minimal film crew to an extreme, since Nicolas Bro films himself continually for a year or so."

Offscreen is shot over the course of a year to record the city, the body and the seasons changing.

Shooting is done almost daily. The editor and the director go over the footage on a weekly basis and

make a rough cut. Moreover, a 'story group' meets every two to three weeks to view the material and come up with suggestions for new scenes tying in with the overall story structure.

"The project is distinguished by the enormous dedication of the involved principals, who represent the avant-garde of the new Danish film generation." Wiedemann says. "*Offscreen* is experimental and artistic to a degree that is likely to send ripples through the film community" ■

CHRISTOFFER BOE Born 1974, Denmark. Degrees in film and media from Copenhagen University, 1996, and in directing from the National Film School of Denmark, 2001. His graduation film *Anxiety* received the Prix Decouverte de la Critique Francais and was screened in Critics' Week at Cannes, 2002. Boe's first feature, *Reconstruction* (2003), received the prestigious Camera d'Or award and the Critics' Week Youth Jury Award at Cannes in 2003. Boe was also the recipient of FIPRESCI's Director of the Year award for 2003. *Allegro*, his second feature, will be released in the Autumn 2005.

NEW DANISH SCREEN administers a subsidy scheme for the development and production of fiction films in various formats. The goal is to support and inspire the development of the film idiom and narrative technique in order to maintain and further the dynamics and diversity of Danish film. New Danish Screen is a service for emerging professional-grade talents as well as more experienced professionals. The unit is jointly operated by DFI, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) and TV 2 Denmark.

Read more at www.talentudvikling.dfi.dk

Read about Princes and Soap, two other feature films in the pipeline from New Danish Screen, in the reverse section.

PICK OF THE CROP

ACTING TALENT, BOTH FRESH AND SEASONED, IS COMING UP GANGBUSTERS IN DANISH CINEMA RIGHT NOW



Nastja Maria Arcel in *King's Game*

BY MORTEN PIIL

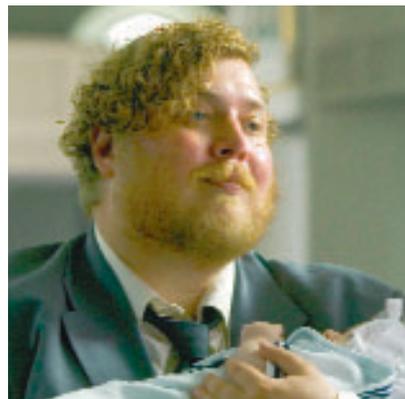
NASTJA MARIA ARCEL, 1963

A relatively large number of Danish films are about children and teens. Even a highly talented actress runs the risk of being typecast as the proverbial mother. It happened to Nastja Maria Arcel for a few years, even though she more than anyone combines charm with ace acting chops. Having reached the age where many movie actresses undergo a career crisis, Arcel for her part has blossomed in more challenging parts calling for her trademark blend of resolved maturity and quiet strength. In *King's Game*, the first feature by her director brother, Nikolaj Arcel, she plays a leading politician embroiled in a high-level scandal. The film was last year's biggest critical and popular hit in Denmark. She also stood out in *Lost Generation*, the 2004 epic about experimental lifestyles in the 1970s, giving one of the film's most fully fleshed-out and captivating performances. Nastja Maria Arcel can be seen in another big supporting role in this year's *The Judge* (working title).

In this drama of conscience directed by Gert Fredholm, she plays an attractive, supremely capable attorney, the girlfriend of Peter Gantzler's title character.

NICOLAS BRO, 1972

Amassing credits in 17 Danish films over the last five years, Nicolas Bro is surely the most frequently used Danish supporting actor in recent memory. He falls squarely into the Hollywood studio tradition of remarkably adaptable character actors effortlessly meshing with the whole. His stock character is the child-eyed fat man. Acting against type, he was brilliant as a cunning investigative reporter in *King's Game* (2004) and as a shady art connoisseur in *Stealing Rembrandt* (2003). Other choice parts for Bro include Leo, the sidekick in *Reconstruction* (2003), and Gunnar, an alcoholic in *Adam's Apples* (2005). The actor also has a prominent role in Dagur Kári's *Dark Horse* (2005). Alongside his screen work, Bro has a successful stage career, notably at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. In 2002,



Nicolas Bro in *Adam's Apples*

he won the Danish theatre critics' Reumert award. Nicolas Bro has also made his mark as a playwright, penning such works as *Natsværmer* ("The Moth") and *Guddommeliggørelsen af den laveste fællesnævner* ("Deifying the Lowest Common Denominator").

LARS BRYGMANN, 1957

Though he is usually seen in supporting roles, Lars Brygmann endows his characters with a wealth of nuances and a depth that often make him the best thing in the film. In 2003's runaway Danish hit, *Stealing Rembrandt*, Brygmann finally got his first leading role as Mick, a small-time hoodlum who inadvertently steals an inconveniently priceless canvas by the Dutch master. Nailing him dead-on, Brygmann made his character both credible and touching. Brygmann, who radiates low-key intensity, is often cast as a well-mannered man with a secret, such as the abusive husband in *The Bench* (2000). Just as often he plays weak, though likeable, characters, such as the press-hounded politician's-husband in



Lars Brygmann in *Rembrandt*

King's Game (2004). Brygmann has further expanded his range in leading roles as the father in the children's film *Someone Like Hodder* (2003) and the authoritarian Collin in this year's Hans Christian Andersen film, *Young Andersen*. Lars Brygmann can be seen in another big part this autumn in Åke Sandgren's *Flies on the Wall*.



Jacob Cedergren in *Dark Horse*

JAKOB CEDERGREEN, 1973

Preparing for his breakthrough performance as the lowlife bodybuilder Tom in 2003's popular and critical favourite *Stealing Rembrandt*, Jakob Cedergren packed on eight kilograms of muscle over five months. The actor has an uncommon talent for combining sensitivity with a tough-guy attitude. Cedergren nails Tom's thick shell and loose fists, the narrow crack of enlightenment slowly widening into a fuller realisation of the hopeless predicament he is in. Earlier, critics raved about his commanding performance in *The Spider* (2000), a sophisticated, historical TV drama series starring Cedergren as an ambitious cub reporter on the trail of a many-tentacled corruption scandal in post-war Copenhagen. This year, he plays the title role in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, a Danish-Canadian co-production depicting the culture clash between a party of explorers dog-sledding across North America in the 1920s and a small Inuit community getting its first exposure to Western civilisation 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 (Atanarjuat)*, a Golden Camera winner in Cannes. This year, Cedergren also stars as the graffiti-painting protagonist of Icelandic director Dagur Kári's comedy-drama *Dark Horse*.



Jesper Christensen in *The Bench*

JESPER CRISTENSEN, 1948

Jesper Christensen can currently be seen in a supporting role in Sidney Pollack's new political thriller, *The Interpreter* (2005), starring Sean Penn and Nicole Kidman. But Christensen's biggest role this year is in Per Fly's *Manslaughter* as a high-school teacher entangled in the death of a police officer. In 2000, Christensen's long, productive career reached a new peak in Per Fly's *The Bench*, a popular and critical favourite that earned the actor a string of awards. Christensen was superb as Kaj, a self-destructive alcoholic desperately clinging to the last vestiges of his pride and lashing out in sarcasm as he drowns his self-loathing in oceans of booze. When his long-lost daughter surprisingly comes back into his life, he is forced to take a good hard look at himself. Christensen crafts a complex, moving portrait of this essentially dislikeable character. Having racked up more than sixty film and TV credits over the years, Christensen is unanimously regarded as one of Denmark's most intelligent and versatile character actors. He has a remarkable ability to switch from good humour to unpredictable menace at the drop of a hat. In 2002, Christensen played the lead in *Minor Mishaps*, which won the Blue Angel award at the Berlin Film Festival. All along, Jesper Christensen has continued to cultivate his successful stage career. He has played the title roles in *Richard III* and *Faust*, and he recently starred in a TV production of Molière's *The Misanthrope*.

TRINE DYRHOLM, 1972

In recent years, Trine Dyrholm has firmly established herself as a rapidly



Trine Dyrholm in *The Big Day*

evolving character actress with great versatility in parts ranging from sensual contemporary woman to social outcasts, such as Kate, an inmate, in the 2004 Dogme drama *In Your Hands*. Dyrholm radiates intensity as Kate, a tragic character who, guarding a terrible secret, holes up behind an unbreachable mask. The performance earned Dyrholm the film critics' Bodil award. In Thomas Vinterberg's Dogme classic, *The Celebration* (1998), she played the protagonist's former girlfriend who still has a crush on him. The actress started out as an updated 1990s version of the perennial, blond and blue-eyed ingénue. Her big-screen debut in *Spring Tide* (1990) won her her first Bodil. She later starred as a young thrill-seeker in Tómas Gislason's road movie *P.O.V. - Point of View* (2001) and as a bipolar woman in the offbeat erotic drama *Gemini* (2003). On a different tack, she was sensual and balanced in *Bungalow* (2002), a subtly playful German movie directed by Ulrich Köhler about a confused young soldier who drops out of the service and matures in his relationship with an actress played by Dyrholm. This year, Trine Dyrholm has the lead in two films: Morten Arnfred's *The Big Day* and Åke Sandgren's *Flies on the Wall*, which stars Dyrholm as a headstrong film director.

HELLE FAGRALID, 1976

In a few short years, Helle Fagralid has caught the public eye as one of the most promising talents of the under-thirty generation. It is easy to forget that her breakthrough was just two years ago when she played a confused aspiring writer in a production of Lars Norén's *Details* at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. Incidentally, this psychologically caustic chamber drama by the leading Swedish playwright also marked the debut as stage director of the Oscar-winning filmmaker Bille August. Small of stature, but possessing considerable erotic charisma, Fagralid is able to portray strong-willed women as well as insecure victim types. She has



Helle Fagralid in *Ambulance*

her first leading big-screen role in this year's bank-robbery drama *Ambulance*. Fagralid plays a paramedic trapped with a dying patient in an ambulance carjacked by two desperados. Originally trained for the stage, Fagralid has appeared in a large number of films and TV productions dating back to her days as a child actor, including *Dance of the Polar Bears* (1990), *Body Switch* (1995) and the Scandinavian TV series *Hotel Oslo* (1996). Helle Fagralid also played a rebellious convent schoolgirl in *Agnus Dei* (1997) and had a small, but pivotal, role in *King's Game*, last year's big winner at the Danish box office, as a cabinet minister's personal secretary who refuses to toe the party line.

when his ruling to deport a political activist triggers a chain of fatal events. Otherwise, Gantzler is probably best known as the bashful hotel receptionist in Lone Scherfig's 2000 Dogme comedy *Italian for Beginners*. Before that, he was a hunky taxi driver in the popular TV series *Taxa*. He also starred as an undertaker tied to his mother's apron strings in the 2001 comedy-drama *One Hand Clapping*. Peter Gantzler, who graduated from the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance in 1990, has been working on the stage and the big and small screens since the mid-1980s.

PAW HENRIKSEN, 1975

Taking an unusual road to an acting career, Paw Henriksen was a juvenile delinquent who turned his life around at age 14 when he found boxing. His amateur boxing career would eventually take him to the international level. After two well-received supporting roles, *Watch Me Fly* and the TV film *Eva* (both 1996), acting began to hold more of an attraction than fighting. "Boxing gave me discipline and direction in my day-to-day life that I used when I applied to the National School of Theatre in 1996," Henriksen says. Upon graduation in 2004, he received the critics' talent prize for his stage work. But his real impact has been on screen in a series of standout supporting roles performed with authenticity and raw emotion. The actor is equally credible whether playing a hoodlum or a sensitive



Peter Gantzler in *The Judge* (working title)

PETER GANTZLER, 1958

A character actor with leading-man good looks, Peter Gantzler can be seen this year in Gert Fredholm's drama *The Judge* (working title) in the central role of a judge whose world is shattered



Paw Henriksen in *Ambulance*

average guy. Last year, he played the deeply traumatized soldier who is eventually killed in Susanne Bier's *Brothers*. This year, he appears in the incest drama *Accused* as Pedo, a good-natured lifesaver and the protagonist's best friend. Later in the year, Paw Henriksen can be seen in the crime drama *Ambulance* in his first leading role as a bank robber who tries to raise money for his mother's surgery.

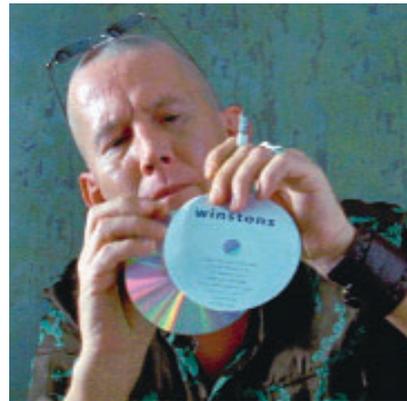


Nikola Lie Kaas in *Murk*

NIKOLAJ LIE KAAS, 1973

A major drawing card in Danish cinema, Nikolaj Lie Kaas stars in two films this year: in the hit comedy *The Sun King*, he is the unemployed, simple-minded Tommy and in Jannik Johansen's soon-to-be-released drama *Murk*, he is Jacob, a young man investigating the circumstances surrounding his sister's death on her wedding night. In 2003, Lie Kaas played the lover in Christoffer Boe's acclaimed *Reconstruction* and one of two cannibal deli men in the black comedy *The Green Butchers*. The actor got his first leading role in 2001 as the Kaspar Hauser-ish older brother in the Dogme film *Truly Human*, putting his boyish good looks to good use as a bewildered man-child born into the strangest of all worlds: the Danish welfare state in the year 2001. Early in his career, the Danish Film Critics gave Lie Kaas a best supporting actor award for his performance as a bitter, young resistance fighter in Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *The Boys from St. Petri* (1991).

The actor later won another critics' award for his performance in Lars von Trier's 1998 Dogme film *The Idiots* as the sensitive Jeppe who falls head over heels in love with another member of the gang of fools. On stage, Nikolaj Lie Kaas has played the title role in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen.



Thomas Bo Larsen in *Big Plans*

THOMAS BO LARSEN, 1963

Many will remember Thomas Bo Larsen as the screw-up younger brother in Thomas Vinterberg's Dogme classic *The Celebration* (1998). The character was a twist on Larsen's breakthrough role in Vinterberg's first feature, *The Biggest Heroes* (1996), as a fast-talking small-time criminal who is a lot less tough than he would like the world to think. While Larsen is commonly cast as a hustler or thug, he continues to expand his range in a variety of shorts, TV dramas and features, playing anything from pretentious artist to pottery-making new-age hippie. The actor starred as a streetwise angel with an ear for rock in *Miracle* (2000), a children's musical, and as a love-struck bank robber in *Mona's World* (2001), a romantic comedy. He has also appeared in a large number of contemporary stage dramas by such playwrights as Line Knutzon and Ole Bornedal. Thomas Bo Larsen starred as a shady, albeit rocking, small-time huckster in last year's hit comedy *Big Plans* and this year he can be seen in *Dear Wendy*, *The Sun King* and *Ambulance*, which once again has him playing a bank robber.

MADS MIKKELSEN, 1965

The most versatile of leading men, Mads Mikkelsen easily leaps from the historical swashbuckling of the Hollywood blockbuster *King Arthur* (2004) to the grimy Danish underworld of Nicolas Winding Refn's *Pusher II* (2004). His performance as the hard-luck drug dealer Tonny in Refn's film earned him a Bodil award from the



Mads Mikkelsen in *Adam's Apples*

Danish film critics for best actor in a leading role. Undisputedly Denmark's most popular movie star, Mikkelsen is also one of the most respected young character actors working today. The actor got his big-screen breakthrough as the bisexual protagonist of *Shake It All About*, the 2001 comedy hit. Meanwhile, *Unit One*, a popular TV series that ran from 2001 to 2002, made him a household name. Mikkelsen was an introverted video nerd in another Refn film, *Bleeder* (1999). In Susanne Bier's aching love drama *Open Hearts* (2002), the biggest Dogme hit since *Italian for Beginners* (2000), he played a good doctor and family man who gives in to driving passion. And in Anders Thomas Jensen's black comedies, *The Green Butchers* (2003) and *Adam's Apples* (2005), Mads Mikkelsen shows further versatility as, respectively, a hawk of human flesh and a beleaguered minister grappling with a neo-Nazi (Ulrich Thomsen).

ULRICH THOMSEN, 1963

A Danish character actor with a thriving international career, Ulrich has played parts of varying magnitude in 15 British, American and German films over the years, most recently Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). Still, Thomsen is probably best known for his work in *The Celebration*, the 1998 Dogme film that made his career and the careers of so many other Danish actors. Thomsen played Christian, the tormented son who spills the family's darkest secrets in front of everyone at his father's 60th birthday party. Thomsen handled this demanding role with sublime understatement, expertly embodying his character's vacillation between hesitance and confrontation. The film's success later landed him a part as a James Bond villain in *The World is Not Enough*. Back in Denmark, Thomsen won the 2002 Danish film critics' Bodil award for his leading performance in *Inheritance* as the young restaurateur whose life falls to pieces when he is pressured into carrying on the family business. In Susanne Bier's popular *Brothers* (2004), he is eerily intense as a soldier traumatized by horrific wartime experiences and he is equally convincing in the dark-humoured vein as a crude neo-Nazi in *Adam's Apples* (2005). Ulrich Thomsen also stars as a piano virtuoso in Christoffer Boe's *Allegro*, opening later this year ■



Ulrich Thomsen in *Adam's Apples*

Overcoming - Kelly's heroes on wheels by Tomas Gislason.

Overcoming is a film that will provide profound, penetrating insight behind the scenes of the hermetically enclosed world of professional cycling.



Photo: Framegrab

WE CALL

Two new Danish documentaries use fiction-film effects to tell very different stories about riders in the world's toughest bicycle race and a pair of gang leaders fighting for their lives in the slums of Haiti.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

"We call them films, not documentaries," says producer Mikael Rieks about the two new, powerful documentaries from Nordisk Film: Tómas Gislason's *Overcoming* and Asger Leth's *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* - both made for theatrical release.

Now is a good time for theatrical documentaries, Rieks contends, though he knows it is hard to make money on a documentary. As he sees it, it is a matter of getting the right people to make the films and finding some broad subjects that will draw people into the theatres.

TÓMAS GISLASON: OVERCOMING

"The first film, *Overcoming*, began during the utterly amazing and euphoric Tour de France in the summer of 2003," Rieks says. Every day of that race, he would send text messages to Nordisk Film president Kim Magnusson and eventually they both agreed that it called for a film.

Early in August of that year, Rieks contacted Tómas Gislason, a documentary filmmaker known for his visually and narratively experimental films, notably *Maximum Penalty* (2000). Gislason had always been fascinated by bicycle racing and immediately agreed to make a film about it - on the condition that it not be a cheapie.

"You cannot make a film about the Tour de France without making it big and expensive," Gislason says. He got eight million kroner (just shy of one million euro) to realise his dream of peeking behind the facade of a professional team competing in the world's most gruelling bicycle race. Apart from Nordisk Film, funds were provided by the Danish Film Institute, TV 2, Nordic Film & Tv Fund and the BBC.

Tómas Gislason chose to portray Team CSC of Denmark, which

is managed by Bjarne Riis, a former Tour de France winner. "Of all the bicycle teams in the world, they were the interesting one to deal with because they are known for doing things completely different than other teams," Gislason says. The filmmaker followed the team up to and during the 2004 Tour de France.

"Whereas other teams operate with stars and water carriers, CSC operates with team spirit. They say, 'Don't focus on winning, focus on being a good person and as long as you do that you will also win a lot more races.' Ivan Basso has no problem about dropping back and fetching water for the others in the Paris-Nice race, even though he is the star, because it means that the others will ride as hard for him as they can when he is competing in the Tour de France."

Gislason likens *Overcoming* to a war movie, with Bjarne Riis as the silent general who "whips the guys into shape and preps them in unorthodox ways up to an impossible battle. Bjarne Riis was interesting because he is a rock of a man and you watch him evolve."

As Gislason sees it, bicycling mirrors life. "More than any other sport, bicycling loves mythologies, epic stories and heroic deeds," he says. "The interest clearly lay in describing the people more than the race - so many others do a perfectly good job of that. We practically cast each part in the story based on the characteristics of each person and in a way had them represent classical, dramatic characters in an epic tale. We wanted to make a film that was carried by emotional storytelling.

"Bicycling is a very, very closed world. We had to be in it and shoot a lot of hours before a familiarity between the riders and us emerged and the special moments happened that could be turned into scenes. We worked hard to build up the scenes and the story like you would in a fiction film, instead of making a conventional documentary with a voiceover."

All around, the walls between documentary and fiction are coming down, Gislason says. In fact, he sees more of a future for documentaries in the epic narrative style than for fiction films. "The whole reality wave, tracking the desire of ordinary people to define themselves vis-à-vis others, has blurred the

OVERCOMING Denmark 2005

DIRECTOR/SCREENPLAY Tómas Gislason
RUNNING TIME 105 min. **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER** Kim Magnusson **PRODUCER** Mikael Rieks, Stine Boe Jensen
CINEMATOGRAPHER Mads Thomsen, Niels Hauge **EDITOR** Morten Højbjerg et al. **SOUND** Eddie Simonsen. **PRODUCTION** Nordisk Film A/S Production in co-operation with TV2 Denmark, BBC, Nordic film and Television Fund and The Danish Filminstitute.

TÓMAS GISLASON Born 1961. Graduated in editing at the National Film School of Denmark. Has edited Lars von Trier's *Images of Relief / Befrielsesbilleder* (National Film School of Denmark, 1982) and Trier's debut feature *The Element of Crime / Forbrydelsens Element* (1984). Co-writer on von Trier's *Europa / Europa* (1991) and *The Kingdom / Riget 1-4* (1994). Has edited the TV-series *Once a Cop / En gang strømer ...* (1987), directed by Anders Refn. Has made video-clips, commercials and documentaries. The latter includes the portrait of the director Jørgen Leth *Heart and Soul / Fra hjertet til hånden* (1994), *The Patriots / Patrioterne* (1997) and *Maximum Penalty / Den Højeste Straf* (2000) which was in competition in Amsterdam the same year. In 2002 he made his feature film debut with *P.O.V.: Point of View*.



Photo: Framgrab

Ghosts of Cité Soleil by Asger Leth. Two brothers are stuck in a system of political violence. They are gang leaders in President Aristide's secret army of gangs from the slum. One wants to fight for the president. The other wants out. They live in Cité Soleil. The most dangerous place on earth.

THEM FILMS

boundaries," he says. "Dogme, employing the narrative stratagems of the documentary, has blurred them, too. Thomas Vinterberg's *The Celebration* is clearly an attempt to turn a fiction film into a documentary."

In Gislason's view, it is naïve to believe that the documentary represents an objective reality. "It's a lie we have tried to live for many, many years," he says. "We try to make people believe that what they are seeing is the truth, but of course it isn't. There is nothing natural about a person in a hotel room with a cameraman picking the shots he wants. In a film like *Overcoming*, you don't ask people to act, but you make certain choices. If, like me, you have 1,000 hours of material, you choose pretty exactly what to do with it."

ASGER LETH: GHOSTS OF CITÉ SOLEIL

Ghosts of Cité Soleil by first-time director Asger Leth takes a look at Haiti's eternal problem: its people are unable, or unwilling, to forgive. It is in their culture and history, Leth says. He knows the country well because his father, the respected Danish documentary filmmaker Jørgen Leth (*The Five Obstructions*, 2003), lives in the capital of Port au Prince.

"The country contains so much more than violence," Asger Leth says. "It was the world's first independent black republic. It's a beautiful country with able, proud people, but when it comes to power Haitians have an all-or-nothing-at-all mentality. It goes back to the time when the slaves rebelled against the plantation owners and colonial powers. People connected with the previous regime get nothing. They must die. They must be pulled up by the roots. There is a Haitian expression that says you should cut off your enemies' heads: 'Burn their houses, cut off their heads.' It pervades their culture and how they treat each other in the press. They have no tradition of presenting both sides of an issue. There is no openness, no tradition of listening."

Ghosts of Cité Soleil is about people and politics. It was shot early in 2004 when then Haitian president Aristide was under pressure from a rebel army fighting its way from Gonaive to Port au Prince and eventually forcing Aristide into exile. The

film's protagonists are 2Pac and Billy, brothers and gang leaders from the Cité Soleil slum. They are the ghosts of the title. With their armed gangs, they have fought for Aristide, but they now realise that the president's days are numbered and that he will eventually leave them in the lurch.

"In all likelihood, they were going to be killed," Leth says. To him, it was thrilling to make a film about someone everybody hates, whom no one would want to make a film about. "They are in many ways the bad guys, but I wanted to try and see them from a different angle. Do they have something to offer, are they someone you can respect and forgive and leave room for when the new government takes over? The two brothers lead a rather large, secret army and they really prevented a huge bloodbath when Aristide fled Haiti. They let themselves be disarmed, because they are essentially good people who were not interested in more violence and war."

Shooting a film among heavily armed gangs, the so-called Chimeres, was obviously not without danger, especially after Aristide denounced the media as the enemy. A French nurse, Lele, who is also in the film, put Leth in touch with a young Serbian photographer, Milos Loncarevic, who was moving around the slum taking pictures. Leth made a deal with him and replaced his still camera with a video camera.

"Milos grew up during the Balkan War and had no problem coping in the tough environment of Cité Soleil," Leth says. "The gang members quickly accepted him and gave him unlimited access." This resulted in some very intense scenes, bringing you close to the young gang leaders and offering fascinating insight into their dreams and nightmares.

2Pac hopes one day to make a living from the rap music he loves. At one point, he calls the Haitian-born rap star Wyclef Jean, who lives and works in the United States, and asks him for help. In the end, Wyclef Jean wrote the music for the film and also put money into it. The rest of the film's budget of approx. 475,000 euro is financed by Nordisk Film, the Danish Film Institute and TV 2 ■

GHOSTS OF CITE SOLEIL Danmark 2005
DIRECTOR Asger Leth **RUNNING TIME** 90 min.
PRODUCERS Mikael Chr. Rieks, Tomas Radoor
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS Kim Magnusson, Jørgen Leth, Wyclef Jean, Seth Kanegis, Jerry Duplesis, Cary Woods
CINEMATOGRAPHER Milos Loncarevic
Frederik Jacobi, Asger Leth
EDITOR Adam Nielsen
COMPOSER Wyclef Jean
PRODUCTION Nordisk Film A/S Production in co-production with Sunset Production Inc., and Sak Pase Films Inc., in co-operation with TV2 Denmark and The Danish Film Institute.

ASGER LETH Born 1970. Has made video-clips, commercials and short fiction since 1996. The latter includes *Again. Today* / *Igen. Idag* (1997) *Gala / Gala* (1996). Writer & Second Unit Director on Jørgen Leth's *The Erotic Human / Det erotiske menneske* (Work in Progress) and Lars von Trier's and Jørgen Leth's documentary *The Five Obstructions / De fem bænd* (2003). Assistant director on Jørgen Leth's *New Scenes from America / Nye scener fra Amerika* (2001).

EXIT

WITH A TWIST

A perfect shot. Through the window, through the chair and straight through the fat man's head. He collapsed, slid off the chair and hit the floor. Nobody could have survived it...

EXIT, Robert Depuis's graduation film at the National Film School of Denmark, is an action thriller with puppets and a single actor.

The National Film School's animation programme produced a successful graduating class last year. Karla Nielsen's *The Shadow in Sara* was selected for the Berlinale, Sabine Ravn's *Bernie and Bingo* was recently screened at BUFF in Malmö and now Robert Depuis's *EXIT* is running in the Cinéfondation student film competition at the Buñuel Theatre in Cannes.

EXIT, a stringent, dark film, combines stop-motion animation with computer postproduction, compositing and live action footage. Not only are different film techniques mixed, the usual narrative ploys get a twist as well.

We follow a black-clad hit man in an unnamed, universal metropolis who gets an assignment to kill a fat man. After he has executed the hit with a perfect shot straight through the fat

man's head, he calls his client to close the case. The hit man burns his picture of the fat man and sweeps the ashes into a drawer holding the ashes of the pictures of all the other people he has killed. Only, the fat man did not die. *EXIT* is an existential action thriller using puppets and a talented young Danish actor, Nicholas Bro, to tell the blood-soaked story of a hit man confronted with the creator of his universe ■

ROBERT DEPUIS. Born 1973, Norway. *EXIT* (2004) is Depuis's graduation film from the National Film School's Animation Programme. Robert Depuis has a background in graphic design and previously trained as an animator. His films tend to be dark, gloomy tales of faith, doubt, revenge, guilt, death, the breakdown of the family and the end of the world and the soul.



The wheels are in motion to raise awareness of the Oresund Region as Northern Europe's leading filmmaking metropolis. "There are a number of good reasons for choosing Copenhagen ahead of London and Paris," says Ulrik Bolt Jørgensen, the Danish film commissioner.

FREE OF CHARGE



OFC FILM COMMISSIONERS Ulrik Bolt Jørgensen (above), the Danish film commissioner, has worked on several international co-productions in addition to directing documentaries and commercials, since graduating from the National Film School of Denmark in 1991. Natasha Banke, the Swedish film commissioner, is a producer of TV commercials and also has a string of shorts, documentaries and music videos to her credit.

BY JAKOB FOG MIKKELSEN

One of the OFC's most important missions is making foreign movie companies aware of the unique advantages of producing films in the Oresund Region: gorgeous locations and a deep talent pool, a healthy production environment with a high technical level and flexible crews, plus a large international airport and short travel times within the region.

"Our services are free of charge, so there is every reason to draw us in as a sparring partner when looking for the ideal locale for your production," Bolt Jørgensen says. The OFC film commissioners are only a phone call away and will go to work for you, contacting relevant collaborators and presenting the best possible solution

for any specific project.

A group of hard-working location managers is affiliated with the OFC. It is they who have stocked the OFC's extensive database with images of locations in Greater Copenhagen and Southern Sweden, the geographical area embraced by the Oresund Region. The location managers are ready to move quickly and accurately on specific inquiries.

The Oresund Film Commission, a joint venture between Copenhagen Capacity and Position Skåne, is financially supported by the EU interreg IIIA programme and a number of local organisations on both sides of the Oresund, the sound separating Denmark and Sweden.

"Establishing the film commission has created a communications platform.

Our job now is to raise awareness of the region's many attractive opportunities for local and international production companies," Bolt Jørgensen says. The goal is to draw in international film companies and hold on to domestic ones. As it is, Danish film companies do not necessarily shoot their big productions in their own local area. Lars von Trier, for instance, shot both *Dogville* and his next film, *Manderlay*, in Trollhätten, Sweden, where subsidies are available from a regional film fund, Film i Väst.

Efforts are currently underway to establish a regional film fund in Copenhagen. As Bolt Jørgensen sees it, this is the way to go for the OFC to have any chance of reaching its goals, at least as far as feature films are concerned. Production companies ultimately make

their decisions based on financial considerations.

"Film companies are always looking for the right location and finances obviously figure very heavily in their decision-making. Once we get an opportunity to offer subsidies, we will be competing solely on production conditions and in that respect we are fully competitive - even better!" ■

THE ORESUND FILM COMMISSION is the brainchild of Copenhagen Capacity, an organisation dedicated to strengthening selected areas of growth in the Copenhagen area, the traditional home of the Danish film industry. The OFC was formed as a joint Danish-Swedish film commission for the entire Oresund Region in partnership with Position Skåne, the Swedish counterpart to Copenhagen Capacity, located in Malmö.

The project runs through spring 2006 and has an annual budget of EUR 270,000.

Read more: www.oresundfilm.com



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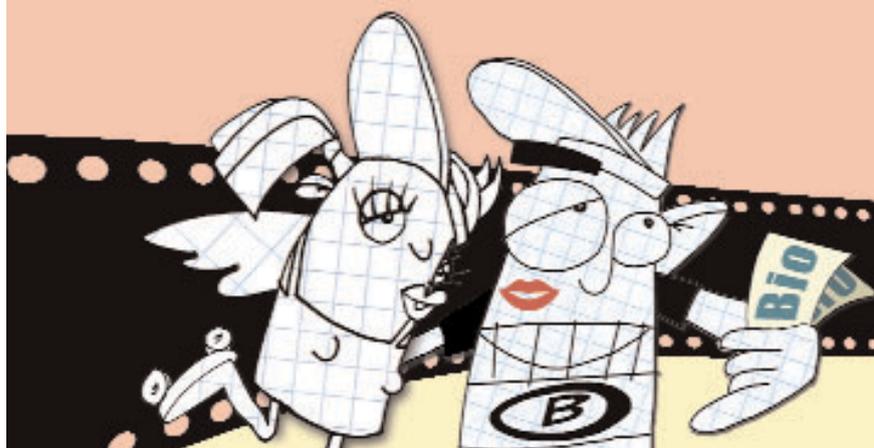
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Special Mention: **Disbelief** (Andrei Nekrasov)

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I Love You All (Eyal Sivan, Audrey Marion)
Special Mention: **Rejsen Paa Ophavet** (Max Keshner)
Special Mention: **Gunnar Goes Comfortable** (Gunnar Hall Jensen)

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