

PANORAMA SPECIAL

What No One Knows is a political thriller: When Thomas' sister dies in an accident he discovers that her death may be connected to their deceased father's work in military intelligence.

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GENERATION 14PLUS & KPLUS

Fighter (Natasha Arthy) and *Worlds Apart* (Niels Arden Oplev) in Generation 14plus, and *A Tale of Two Mozzies* (Flemming Quist Møller and Jannik Hastrup) in Generation Kplus.

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SHOOTING STAR 2008

Stine Fischer Christensen is this year's Danish Berlin Shooting Star. She stars in Anders Morgenthaler's *Echo*, which will be screening at the European Film Market in Berlin.

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FILM

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 Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

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PANORAMA SPECIAL

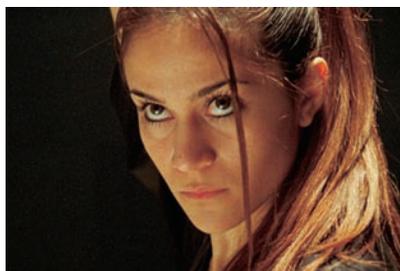
His fifth time in Berlin, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen first came to the festival audience's attention in 1982, where he won for best children's film with *Rubber Tarzan*, and again in 1999, winning a Silver Bear for his Dogme feature *Mifune*. *What No One Knows* is a political thriller, produced by Nimbus Film. **PAGE 3**



Søren Kragh-Jacobsen & Ghita Nørby Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

GENERATION 14PLUS

A classic coming-of-age story is how Natasha Arthy describes her new film *Fighter*, though its combination of a young woman of Turkish background and a passionate love for kung fu is hardly conventional. **PAGE 6**



Fighter Photo: Sebastian Wintersø

GENERATION 14PLUS

After his international hit *We Shall Overcome*, director Niels Arden Oplev is back with a new drama about youthful rebellion against oppressive mores. Based on a true story, *Worlds Apart* takes an unblinking look at a teenage girl's struggles, when falling in love makes her challenge the rigid principles governing the lives of Jehovah's Witnesses. **PAGE 9**



Worlds Apart Photo: Jens Juncker-Jensen

GENERATION KPLUS

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A Tale of Two Mozzies. Framegrab

SHOOTING STAR

Stine Fischer Christensen has a love affair with the camera. It loves her girlish good looks and soulful gaze. At 21, she has already demonstrated robust talent in several directions. **PAGE 15**

STICKING TOGETHER

Nimbus Film had a major hand in producing the very first Dogme hit, *The Celebration*. Today, as ever, the company stands for quality and professionalism. Meet the producers behind films like *What No One Knows*, *Mifune* and *Dark Horse*. **PAGE 16**

IN IT FOR THE SPIRIT

Final Cut Productions' *The Art of Crying* by Peter Schønau Fog has made it around the world and taken home several awards. Now, the company is busy finishing Jan Troell's *Maria Larsson's Everlasting Moment*. FILM met with the small, ambitious production company for a talk about team spirit, ambition and money. **PAGE 20**



Everything Is Relative Photo: Manuel Claro

HUMANITY UNDER A MICROSCOPE

Everything Is Relative is a kaleidoscopic fusion of documentary sequences, archive material and tableau's of human beings. It seeks to portray how our reactions to challenges in life are relative to the conditions that guide our individual lives. **PAGE 22**

CONTENT AND DISCONTENT / ESSAY

Steve Gravestock: The variety of Danish film production is wildly divergent, encompassing everything from gangster trilogies to domestic melodramas, romantic comedies to absurdist, sometimes anachronistic parables. The varied nature of the work may seem guaranteed to inspire intellectual vertigo, but there are central overriding motifs or concerns. **PAGE 24**



Italian for Beginners Photo: Lars Hegsted

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What No One Knows Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

DEMOCRACY ISN'T FREE

With the selection of *What No One Knows* for Panorama Special, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen may look back on a proud Berlin representation – counting an award for *Rubber Tarzan* (1982), a Golden Bear nomination for *The Island on Bird Street* (1997) and a Silver Bear for *Mifune* (1999). With his new film, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen ventures into the thriller format. A sharp comment on the political climate in Denmark, the film bears the director's singular trademark: an antiauthoritarian approach to life and filmmaking.

BY KIM SKOTTE

The established auteur Lars von Trier and young, untested Thomas Vinterberg co-conceived Dogme 95, launching the “Vow of Chastity” in Paris, March 1995. But Dogme 95 had four founding members when the time came to put the manifesto to the test in actual film projects, and “The Four Dogme Brothers” soon became a household name in Denmark.

The two other brothers were Kristian Levring, a relatively unknown director of TV commercials, and Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, a veteran filmmaker best known in Denmark for his sympathetic films for children and young people.

Early on, most people probably thought of Vinterberg, Levring and Kragh-Jacobsen as von Trier's stooges, a group alibi for the Danish bad-boy



What No One Knows Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

filmmaker's crusade against a staid, overstuffed cinematic tradition. That soon changed.

LYRICAL STORYTELLER

First, Vinterberg's directorial debut, *The Celebration*, beat von Trier's *The Idiots* at Cannes in 1998, winning the Jury Prize and later becoming an international hit.

The next year brought a second wave of attack from the Dogme brothers that was surprisingly effective. *Mifune*, a Dogme film directed by Kragh-Jacobsen, won a Silver Bear in Berlin. *Mifune's* female lead, Iben Hjejle, won critical acclaim that propelled her into a starring role in Stephen Frears' adaptation of Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*.

In Denmark, Kragh-Jacobsen's membership in the Dogme gang of four was met with mild astonishment. Not exactly known as an experimental filmmaker, Kragh-Jacobsen was seen more as an empathic, lyrical storyteller, an actor's director with a special talent for bringing out the best in young actors. To be sure, while von Trier's *The Idiots* set the Dogme standard for pure daring, *Mifune* was the most conventional of the first four Dogme films.

But exactly for that reason, *Mifune* highlighted an important point of the Dogme project: there is no rule stating that the product has to be wildly experimental. The Dogme rules and their inherent limitations could be like a window thrown wide open. A knife cutting away all excess fat. Or, in Kragh-Jacobsen's case, a veteran director's key to rediscovering the joy of filmmaking. A chance to invent a simpler, fresher approach to a complicated medium with its stuffy conventions, perhaps even to reclaim a lost innocence?

That Kragh-Jacobsen went in that direction – and hit home with audiences in Denmark and all across

Europe – was no coincidence. His films all show a fundamental, forthright joy in working in the film medium that is nothing if not infectious. Even his dark films glow with a discreet, impregnable light that seems to come from somewhere inside his humanist worldview.

You could say that his distinctive feel for credibly depicting children and young people reflects a sensitivity to innocence that has survived all his years in this cockamamie business, no matter how many knocks and blows it received. You always come away with the sense that somewhere inside the seasoned filmmaker there is a longhaired kid whistling a merry tune.

A SENSITIVE MAN MAKES A TOUGH FILM

Perhaps that sounds like a pretty odd introduction to the man who directed the new Danish, political thriller *What No One Knows*. Innocence will not get you far in that dark maze of deadly intrigue!

There is nothing naive or guileless about the chilling, tightly crafted story of a man, Thomas, who is whirled into a nasty affair involving a murder in his family and shady dealings in the secret service – crimes of such magnitude that no one in his right mind will believe Thomas' rambling. Meanwhile, the film's political points clearly reflect what some modern cynics would call an old-fashioned, anti-authoritarian view of life and its political wheeler-dealers.

Denmark is a country divided by the "War on Terror". A nation with a deep-rooted tradition never to take up arms, unless it is attacked, or to assist international conflicts with humanitarian aid and peacekeeping troops – that same nation has been among America's staunchest military allies in its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nor is the

Danish government adverse to the notion of using information obtained through torture. Nothing less than an earth-shaking political inversion of the standard Danish practice and mentality was pushed through without any public debate or significant protestations.

What should the role of the Danish military be? How close should Denmark's ties be to the United States and its secret services? The "War on Terror", in combination with exponentially growing possibilities for monitoring the populace in the digital society, presents a democratic challenge some say ought to concern the country's citizens and voters more than the ongoing struggle to save a popular tax freeze.

A conspicuously more authoritarian Danish society, with a beleaguered prime minister routinely playing the stern patriarch reasoning with his disobedient children, hardly seems like the kind of development that would please the director of *What No One Knows*.

THE PRICE OF SECURITY

Thus the mental and political backdrop for Kragh-Jacobsen's new political thriller.

The screenplay was co-written by Kragh-Jacobsen and Rasmus Heisterberg, the rising star of Danish screenwriting. The protagonist, Thomas Deleuran, is played by Anders W. Berthelsen, who will be familiar to international audiences from his leading performance in *Mifune* that gave him his breakthrough in Danish cinema. Berthelsen has been all over the Danish film crop ever since.

In *What No One Knows*, Berthelsen plays an everyman Dane, a namesake of the Bible's Doubting Thomas. Losing his girlfriend under traumatic circumstances when he was young, Thomas left his

upper middleclass home in anger at his authoritarian father and went to India to slack off. After returning, he has slowly sunk into a somewhat hazy state, muddling through life as a puppeteer in a children's puppet theatre. Thomas does not expend much energy on life's thornier questions. Not one to get involved, he just wants to pass time with red wine and half-baked projects in his cocoon of light inebriation where nothing really matters anymore.

Until the moment, that is, when he is forced to get involved. Then all hell breaks loose!

What No One Knows is a Danish thriller set in Denmark and partly in Sweden. The film's authentic atmosphere carries a sting in its portrait of its rather resigned and self-involved protagonist that is sharply critical of the current Danish mentality. No one can be engaged and detached at the same time.

"Democracy isn't free", a key line in the film goes. Secure living comes at a price. What we ought to be discussing, the film suggests, is how high a price we should be willing to pay for that security. What if the price is restrictions on our civil rights and devalued social ethics? That's a universal question and a highly current one.

There's nothing provincial about the ingredients in this Danish thriller. Behind its tense action, the film is about an individual's personal responsibility for preventing the balance between necessary

secrecy and destructive shadiness from tipping to the point where it undermines the spirit of democracy.

KIDS' DEPARTMENT

Though the pure thriller format is new to Kragh-Jacobsen, the basic conflict of individual freedom and imagination versus the authorities and all its father figures is a familiar theme in his films.

Freedom, imagination and humour used to be the order of the day at DR B&U, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's "Children and Youth Department". For years, the B&U was a prime incubator for new Danish talent. Among the most successful talents hatched there was a dyslexic, former electrical engineer named Søren Kragh-Jacobsen.

By the time he broke through as a popular TV personality, he had already made his name singing and writing popular songs for teens. In 1978, he made his directorial debut with a film for young adults, *Wanna See My Beautiful Navel?* From the outset, it was obvious that he was a director with an uncommon ability to be on the same wavelength as his youthful performers.

In 1982 he made *Rubber Tarzan*, which won the children's film competition in Berlin. Warm and funny, the film became a collective symbol for the ambitions of Danish children's films, which had



Director Søren Kragh-Jacobsen Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

SØREN KRAGH-JACOBSEN

Born 1947. Attended film school in Prague and worked for several years as a programme director at DR TV, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. He first came to the world's attention at the Berlin Film Festival in 1982, when he won a best children's film award for *Rubber Tarzan*. He next competed in Berlin in 1997 with *The Island on Bird Street*. In 1999, his Dogme film *Mifune* won a Silver Bear and several other prestigious international awards. *What No One Knows* is produced by Nimbus Film.



What No One Knows Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

"Is Denmark the quaint little country we like to extol in song, or could highly undemocratic activities conceivably be taking place behind our cosy, smug facade? That was our premise when Rasmus Heisterberg and I set out to write a story in a genre we both love, a genre I'd never tried my hand at before: the political thriller. The story takes place on many levels, though it mainly revolves around the Danish Defence Intelligence and a secret that our protagonist naively vows to unravel. It allowed me to offer big parts to Maria Bonnevie, who I've wanted to work with for a long time, and Anders W. Berthelsen, who I really enjoyed having in front of my camera in *Mifune*." Søren Kragh-Jacobsen

just gained a privileged status by in the new Danish Film Act. The act wholeheartedly backed up *Rubber Tarzan's* motto that everybody's good at something – you just have to find out what it is.

The dream of creating a humanist Danish children's film tradition was off to a flying start thanks to Kragh-Jacobsen. Then came *Thunderbirds*, his first venture into grown-up films, though in *Shower of Gold* (a children's thriller adapted from a TV series) and *Emma's Shadow*, both 1988, he soon returned to the world of children.

At the same time, he was consumed by a deep passion for historical films. *Emma's Shadow* is set in the 1930s, and his next two films, *The Boys from St. Petri* (1991) and *The Island on Bird Street* (1997), are powerful World War II dramas starring children and teens.

What No One Knows is his third film in a row about adults – though they don't always act like adults when the going gets tough! Grown-ups can be remarkably childish and insecure, while the kids in his films tend to display a courage and resourcefulness that the grown-ups would never have suspected they had. Even when there are no kids in his films, Kragh-Jacobsen tends to take their side. In many different ways, he is a forever-young filmmaker in Danish cinema.

"Something smells goddamn fishy around here!" may not be the most original line you ever heard in a thriller. Then again, there is nothing fishy about Kragh-Jacobsen taking on the thriller genre and proving true to himself and his youthful view of the aberrant ways of the world ■

For further information on *What No One Knows*, see reverse section, and on *Nimbus Film*, see page 16.

A classic coming-of-age story is how the Danish director Natasha Arthy describes her new film *Fighter*, though its combination of a young woman of Turkish background and a passionate love for kung fu is hardly conventional. Arthy's *Miracle* was chosen for Kinderfilmfest in 2001.

FIT FOR FIGHTER

BY LISELOTTE MICHELSEN

"I'm fascinated by people running," Natasha Arthy says. "It's such a dynamic thing. For my protagonist Aïcha, it's also symbolic. She's trying to run away from reality, from facing herself. And she runs because she's young, of course, and has ants in her pants. If you knew how many running scenes the film had before we cut it down!"

FIGHT INSTEAD OF DIALOGUE

For Natasha Arthy, it's more natural to tell a story in pictures than in words. She helped pen the screenplay for her new teen film *Fighter* - together with co-writers Nikolaj Arcel and Rasmus Heisterberg - but visual storytelling is what grabs her. For that reason also, it was clear to her very early on that kung fu would be an important element in the film.

"It's fun to have a fight instead of dialogue," the Danish filmmaker says.

"When there is choreography in a scene, you have something visual going on. If you just show two people sitting in chairs talking, you might as well be doing radio. A fight is a very dynamic thing to shoot. Making *Fighter* was very gratifying, because it's such a physical film. It lends itself to visual storytelling."



Fighter Photo: Sebastian Wintere



Fighter Photo: Sebastian Winterø

***Fighter's* kung fu choreography is non-bloody, disciplined and distinguished by a tremendous sense of aesthetics. If the scenes bring to mind films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, that's hardly a coincidence. Xian Gao, the Chinese kung fu master who worked on *Crouching Tiger*, trained the actors and choreographed the martial arts for *Fighter*. He also appears in the film as Aïcha's instructor, Sifu.**

Fighter is about Aïcha, 17, the daughter of Turkish immigrants in Copenhagen. Her big passion is kung fu. She is highly skilled at it and practices intensively. But when her father finds out that she is being moved up to a co-ed team and will be fighting men, he forbids her to practice her sport. Though she feels guilty about it, Aïcha continues practicing on the sly. At practice, she meets a young Danish guy and falls in love, compounding her inner turmoil. Soon, rumours are buzzing in the Turkish community and Aïcha's choices turn out to have unexpected consequences, not just for herself but for her entire family.

Arthy mentions *Run Lola Run* and *Billy Elliot* as inspirations for her film: "I wanted to combine *Lola's* energy with *Billy Elliot's* coming-of-age story," she says. "The first time I saw *Lola*, I left the theatre out of breath and completely wired like I wanted to go out and save all kinds of people. It's an amazing film, which I have seen many times since, and I kept it at the back of my mind when I was making *Fighter*."

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for *Fighter*. He also appears in the film as Aïcha's instructor, Sifu.

"The premise was to make a coming-of-age story, not a karate film," Arthy says. "I wanted to use martial arts as a form of storytelling. Violence isn't the point at all. We focused on employing the gracefulness of kung fu, how the fighters almost seem to be dancing, as in *Crouching Tiger*. The moves become a mode of conversation."

From the time she wrote the first outline more than four years ago, Arthy knew martial arts were a part of the story.

"I wanted to do the story of a female protagonist breaking away, without using words," Arthy says. "Her fighting is also an effective contrast to feminine stereotypes. Very early in my research, I met Semra Turan, who plays Aïcha, on the Web and at karate events. She has a fascinating way of fighting. She's petite, very beautiful and feminine, but really tough. I auditioned a lot of other girls, but no one else came close. I wrote the script with her and another girl, who does taekwondo, in mind."

ENTHRALLED BY KUNG FU

Three years ago Arthy shifted the film into high gear. At the time, she had Aïcha doing karate, as Turan does in real life. But then Arthy met Xian Gao.

His charisma and experience convinced Arthy that he was just right for *Fighter*, and she fast became enthralled by kung fu.

"I was taken in by the philosophy behind kung fu," Arthy says. "In brief, it's about finding your inner core, becoming conscious of your strengths and weaknesses, and being honest. I also think kung fu is a lot more beautiful to film than karate. Kung fu has bigger, rounder, more open movements. Karate is choppy, with smaller, harder movements. We let Semra keep the hardness of karate and added kung fu elements. Martial arts in movies are generally a gumbo of taekwondo, kung fu, kickboxing and karate. For a specialist, it's easy to spot the mix, but I consciously took authorial liberties in the film's use of martial arts. *Fighter* is not a documentary about kung fu but a teen film with a kung fu element."

Gao trained the actors in the film, both those with martial arts experience and the novices, including the male lead, Cyron Melville. Arthy developed the fight scenes with Gao and her DP, Sebastian Winterø.

"Sebastian and I made a book for Gao, describing the mood of each fight – emotional and dramatic guidelines for what each combatant brings to the scene mentally. Where the characters were emotionally at the start and end of each fight scene, and what I had in mind for the scenes in terms of frustration, love, anger, etc. Based on those guidelines, Gao choreographed the individual scenes. Then Sebastian gave him our comments, and Gao made whatever changes were necessary," Arthy says.

Shooting took two months in all, in segments distributed across a six-month period. In between shooting, the actors would practice kung fu and rehearse the choreography. As a lot of the cast were first-time actors, they also attended a series of workshops with acting coach Sara Boberg.



Fighter Photo: Sebastian Winterø



Director Natasha Arthy Photo: Robin Skjoldborg

NATASHA ARTHY

Born 1969. Has worked in TV, directing a number of popular mini-series for children and young people. She made a fanciful short, *Penny Plain*, in 1997 and debuted as a feature film director in 2000 with the award-winning youth film *Miracle*. Her first feature for adult audiences followed in 2003, the romantic comedy *Old, New, Borrowed and Blue*. *Fighter* is produced by Nimbus Film.

“I wanted to visualise Aïcha’s inner struggle. When you’re fighting yourself, the things you don’t want to face can take some very frightening forms. That’s Aïcha’s big challenge.” *Natasha Arthy*

“Quite a few of the actors had no prior acting experience, so I wanted them to feel secure around each other and work as a group, plus they had to have confidence in me. Sara Boberg taught them the Meisner technique, which is basically about honing your ability to listen and react to what’s being said.

“In several ways, it was a big advantage for me as a director to work like that. While the actors went through series of exercises and improvisations that had nothing to do with the film, I could sit back and watch them and be inspired to bring elements from the exercises into the film. It helped us break the built-in stereotypes of typecasting.”

NOTHING IS EVER THAT EASY

Both the young and the old players of Turkish background doubled as cultural consultants on the film. Arthy wanted *Fighter* to be credible down to the smallest detail.

“For me, the script wasn’t finished until we had played it through and the actors had commented, as in, ‘Listen, he would never react like that ...’ We changed some scenes and added others. Sometimes it was a detail, how someone is dressed or serves tea. Everything was discussed – I was extremely attentive to the cultural aspects,” the director says.

“It would have been a real shame if the film had looked like it was made by a Dane with naïve Danish eyes, going, ‘Go ahead, follow your heart, piss all

over your mom and dad. It’s your life, live it!’ Nothing is ever that easy. A lot of young second-generation immigrants are more dependent on their families than ordinary ‘ethnic Danes’ are. That’s important to keep in mind and appreciate,” Arthy says.

Having to rewrite scenes on set Arthy never thought of as pressure. In fact, she considered it a positive opportunity.

“I rewrote the script and made changes on set, and I felt really good about it,” she says. “Rewriting is a lot easier than trying to push something through that doesn’t work. Then you just end up tearing your hair out in the editing room. In the way I work I swing back and forth between order and chaos, chaos and order. It feels very natural to me to find a balance between controlling and letting go. And of course, a lot of things happen in the editing room. A lot of scenes didn’t make it into the final cut. My editor, Kasper Leick, worked on the film for six months and cut it down from two and a half hours to 100 minutes. Thankfully, Kasper is a calm and embracing person, and he had to be, because I would start panicking about time running out.”

“HEY, MAYBE HE DID HAVE A POINT!”

Arthy describes herself as someone who works intuitively and visually, which has its pros and cons. Her collaboration with her DP, Sebastian Winterø, was both rewarding and contentious.

“We are so different,” Arthy says. “I can sometimes be fairly diffuse, because I have to *feel* my way forward, and that can take time, while he is very specific. Our differences produced an insane amount of arguments. It was hard at times. But I think they were productive discussions. We pushed and provoked each other, and we both grew from it. We are very stubborn people who like to be in charge, so it can really push your boundaries when you have to realise that, ‘Hey, maybe the other person *did* have a point!’ Sebastian is a lot wilder

than I am. He constantly nudged me to take things as far as they would go, especially in terms of grading, and for that I am deeply thankful.

“Of course, we have a lot of things in common, too. We both love working with the contrast between close-ups and long shots, and we are both very visually oriented in our storytelling styles. We had never worked together before, and it was important to find common visual ground from the outset. Both of us, separately, were captivated by *City of God* by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund. It’s so raw and gorgeous, and has an amazing story. So we found common ground in the look of that film. It became a jumping-off point in terms of *Fighter’s* colours and textures,” Arthy says.

Fighter’s look is grainy and raw, in part because it was shot on 16 mm. A greenish, golden-brown colour-grading underscores the urban atmosphere, the idea of young runaways. The film is generally kept in a realistic style broken by a recurring dream, a symbolic scenario, where Aïcha fights a hooded ninja. The dream changes depending on how Aïcha is doing in real life.

“With the ninja scenes, I wanted to show that, though it may seem that Aïcha’s foes are her father, or others in the Turkish or Danish community, she’s really battling herself more than anyone else,” Arthy says. “The ninja is a fantasy element that can be construed as Aïcha’s dark or unknown side. I wanted to visualise Aïcha’s inner struggle. When you’re fighting yourself, the things you don’t want to face can take some very frightening forms. That’s Aïcha’s big challenge. She wants to run away from everything, but obviously that’s bound to fail. She has to find the courage to stop and face the situation, make up her mind about what she has to do, find herself without losing the people she loves” ■

For further information on Fighter, see reverse section, and on Nimbus Film, see page 16.

CONTROVERSIAL LOVE

After his international hit *We Shall Overcome*, director Niels Arden Oplev is back with a new drama about youthful rebellion against oppressive mores. Based on a true story, *Worlds Apart* takes an unblinking look at a teenage girl's struggles, when falling in love makes her challenge the rigid principles governing the lives of Jehovah's Witnesses.

BY EVA NOVRUP REDVALL

"Do you love God more than you love me?" 17-year-old Sara asks her father, sharply phrasing the central drama in Niels Arden Oplev's *Worlds Apart*: a teenage girl ostracised by her family and friends because she gets a boyfriend. Her father declares that he can't see



Worlds Apart Photo: Jens Juncker-Jensen

“The law says parents can’t hit their children or sexually abuse them. You can’t mistreat them, but you are allowed to brainwash them all you want, whether in the name of communism, racism or any other fundamentalist thinking.”

Niels Arden Oplev

her anymore if she chooses to be with her boyfriend, Teis. Sara presses him for an answer: Why does it have to be that way, she wants to know. Does he really love God more than he loves her?

RELIGION DIVIDING PEOPLE

Religion separates father and daughter. As Jehovah’s Witnesses, Sara’s family lives under strict rules, dictating what they can and cannot do.

Arden Oplev’s new feature, based on the real-life events of a young Danish woman, takes up big issues of what it means to grow up in a context that tolerates no dissent from the reigning dogmas. Arden Oplev’s last film, *We Shall Overcome*, which won the Crystal Bear in Berlin two years ago, is about a 13-year-old boy, in 1969, who rebels against an oppressive school system personified by a draconian headmaster. In *Worlds Apart*, Sara challenges the rules and mores of a rigid religious system. The two films are quite different, both in story and style, but Arden Oplev openly admits that they both deal with issues that are very close to him.

“To zoom in on why I made this film, again it’s about how adults treat children that are in their power, children that are their responsibility,” Arden Oplev says.

We are in a Copenhagen café, as the Danish director takes a breather from the demanding pre-production for his next project, adapting Stieg Larsson’s bestselling thriller novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, shooting later this year in Stockholm with a Swedish cast. “The law says parents can’t hit

their children or sexually abuse them. You can’t mistreat them, but you are allowed to brainwash them all you want, whether in the name of communism, racism or any other fundamentalist thinking,” Arden Oplev says. “Probably, that’s not something you can legislate, but you can make a film raising concerns about what it leads to. “Many films have been made about people drawn into various sects or cults,” he says. “But there have not been a lot of films about what it means to be born into and grow up in a sect. What happens when that’s all you’ve ever known and you’re suddenly forced to add nuances to what you’ve learned? What do you do when your image of the world completely shatters and you have to survive? *Worlds Apart* takes up those issues and, of course, I hope the film will generate debate.”

TRUE STORY

After *We Shall Overcome*, Arden Oplev was having a hard time deciding what film to do next, when the story for *Worlds Apart* came to him suddenly on an ordinary day in April 2006.

“I was reading a really good story in the paper, written like a gothic tale, about a girl, Tabita, who is expelled from the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Her story really touched me,” Arden Oplev says. “At the same time, I thought it would be exciting to do a story that had never been done on film before in Denmark. Her story was eminently suited for film, which deals with emotions much better than any piece of reporting ever can, no matter how well written.

“As a filmmaker, I’m in a phase now where a story’s emotions are very important, plus I’m interested in religious stories. My personal view of metaphysics is like the old Bergman quote: Your heart is religious, but your brain is atheistic. It’s exciting to explore the relationship between reason and feelings. And after *We Shall Overcome* I felt it was important to find material that I could connect with emotionally,” the director says. “What Tabita went through completely fascinated me.”

Arden Oplev and his regular screenwriter Steen Bille got in touch with the two reporters who wrote the story, and they hooked them up with Tabita. Arden Oplev and Bille did a five-hour interview with her that became the raw material for the film.

“Once I had talked with Tabita, I knew I had to do this film,” Arden Oplev says. “I was even more fascinated now, because there was so much going on in her story that we never would have thought of ourselves.

“Later, we obviously changed certain things to dramatise the story, like the part about denying someone a blood transfusion. In the film, Sara’s friend dies after an accident. In real life, it was someone else, but we needed it to be someone we had connected with in the film to make it relevant to the main story. Such changes are always debatable when your film is based on a true story. How far can you go? I’m sure if you took apart *Erin Brockovich*, you would find corners cut and things added,” the filmmaker says.

DRAMATISED DOGMAS

Arden Oplev and Bille did extensive research into the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They wanted their story to be as truthful as possible regarding the community’s faith and way of life.

“We took great pains to represent their faith as correctly as possible,” he says. “I talked with former Witnesses, I read their literature and visited their church. But of course, you have to deviate at certain points. We couldn’t always stick to the exact format of a prayer meeting, for example. Someone is also bound to point out that all Witnesses aren’t as strict as the ones in this film, but I never said I was portraying one of the less orthodox families.

“The story has been condensed to a couple of months from a couple of years. We also chose to link two central Jehovah’s Witness dogmas. One is that we are living in the last days. The other calls for expelling anyone who does not act correctly. Linking the two, expulsion equals a death sentence, since outcasts won’t survive Armageddon and be part of a new and better world. We pushed that point. Some would say too hard. But for me, part of the reason for doing a film about the Jehovah’s Witnesses was showing how those two dogmas



Worlds Apart Photo: Jens Juncker-Jensen



Worlds Apart Photo: Jens Juncker-Jensen



Director Niels Arden Oplev Photo: Jan Buus

NIELS ARDEN OPLEV

Born 1961. Graduated in direction from the National Film School of Denmark, 1989. His graduation film, *Winter's End* (1989), was honoured at the Student Film Festival in Montreal, chosen as Best Fiction in Mexico City and nominated for an Academy Award in 1991. Arden Oplev is the concept director for two popular Danish TV series, *Unit 1* and *The Eagle*. His first feature, *Portland* (1996), was an Official Selection in Berlin. More recently, *We Shall Overcome* (2006) was a hit at several top festivals, also winning the Berlin Crystal Bear.

NORDISK FILM

Founded 1906, making it one of the world's oldest production companies. Nordisk Film has produced high-quality films for a worldwide market during the silent era. Today the company is part of the Egmont media group and a market leader within the development, production, post production and distribution of electronic media in the Nordic region. Activities comprise film, animation, commercials, music videos, DVD and electronic games. Owns cinemas in Denmark and Norway as well as production facilities throughout Scandinavia. Produces animation through its subsidiary A. Film. Legendary films include Carl Th. Dreyer's first silent features, the popular *Olsen Gang* series (Erik Balling, 1960s/70s) and Oscar winner *Babette's Feast* (Gabriel Axel, 1987). Among notable titles today are *Facing the Truth* (2002) by auteur Nils Malmros, *Aftermath* (2004) by debuting Paprika Steen, and the epic Tour de France documentary *Overcoming* (2005) by Tómas Gíslason. Within the low-budget concept Director's Cut, the company has produced a series of features, among these *Reconstruction* (Christoffer Boe, 2003), recipient of Camera d'Or, and *Accused* (Jacob Thuesen, 2005), selected for Berlin.

bring things to a head - for everyone, but especially for the children," the director says.

"I do not presume to judge these people. I don't judge anyone. Personally, I think it's wrong of the father to cast out his own child, but I can't make myself the judge of why or how someone would make that decision, since I didn't grow up a Jehovah's Witness myself," he says.

"Ultimately, so many people end up doing the same things, believing the same things, as their parents. Say, becoming every bit as conservative as them," Arden Oplev says.

TOUGH CASTING

Sara, the lead, is played by 17-year-old Rosalinde Mynster. For Arden Oplev, casting is always difficult, but especially so when having to rustle up fresh new faces.

"Casting is really hard and I'm completely neurotic about it," he says. "I still wake up in the middle of the night in an anxious sweat worrying

about how *We Shall Overcome* would have turned out if we hadn't found Janus for the lead.

"Finding the right person to play Sara was just as tough, and just as crucial, because the acting is so central to this film. It's a completely simple, bare-bones story, with no car chases or anything else thrown in," Arden Oplev says. "I hadn't done a realistic film set in the present in a long time, and I found the filmic simplicity of everything hinging on the acting to be very attractive," he says.

"If the story had been told from another angle, it would have been 'just' another story about young love. But it's not, because a huge absurdity lurks in the middle of the apparent simplicity. Sara and Teis live in a parallel reality that only looks exactly like ours," the director says.

"On the face of it, Sara's family looks just like any other family. But beneath the seeming normality, there's a hidden layer of absurdity. Take the part where Sara and Elisabeth are reading with their younger brother August. They look like any other

ordinary kids doing homework, except the subject they are studying is the end of the world and Jesus Christ as the commander of the heavenly armies!

"The family's fundamentalist Christian faith puts everyone under pressure," Arden Oplev says. "Perfectly normal, simple situations, like your daughter wanting to go to a party or meeting a boy, instead turn into insurmountable problems."

Shooting the first part of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy* in the spring (the three novels have sold nearly two million copies in Sweden alone) is a change of pace for Arden Oplev. As the title implies, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is an altogether more fiery affair, with murder, mayhem and exploding cars.

"*Worlds Apart* has only hellfire," the director jokes ■

For further information on *Worlds Apart*, see reverse section.



“It’s an ‘Ellington principle’. There has to be direction and vision. Like Ellington, we set up a framework, but there has to be a lot of possibilities for working spontaneously within it. For the individual to bust out a solo.” *Flemming Quist Møller*

Flemming Quist Møller and Jannik Hastrup have put their separate thumbprints all over Danish animation for close to a lifetime now. The two friends haven’t worked together professionally since they made the classic *Benny’s Bathtub* in 1971. Now they have jazzed up Quist Møller’s timeless Danish children’s book *The Biking Gnat and the Dancing Gnat* with heapings of hot licks in their new animated feature, *A Tale of Two Mozzies*.

BY KIM SKOTTE

Egon the Bicycling Mosquito, Dagmar the Dancing Mozzie, Dominella the Ant Queen, a gentle aphid being milked by an ant milkmaid – the colourful cast of the new animated film *A Tale of Two Mozzies* is lined up in a frieze over a set of double doors in the large Copenhagen apartment that is home to Dansk Tegnefilm.

Another cast-member, the smart-mouth Banjo Beetle, plucks up a storm in “The Musect,” a jazzy bug-world band.

“It’s always cool to have a good band,” Flemming Quist Møller tells me, as if it were a law of nature. Jannik Hastrup nods his agreement. Naturally, there has got to be a swinging house band when these two veteran jazzmen, who played in a band together in their youth, team up again to give Egon his belated feature-film debut.

“Egon was originally invented for animation,” Quist Møller says, but an actual cartoon was beyond their means. So Egon ended up living his first bug’s life between the covers of a now classic Danish children’s picture book. Not too shabby for a skeeter kid with a cocky cap and a fresh approach to life.

WANNA PLAY?

Meanwhile, the idea of an animated film starring Egon kept nagging at them for 40 years, until the pieces finally fell into place a couple of years ago. Hastrup was having dinner at his old friend Flemming’s house when he had a look at the drawings for a follow-up volume to the first Egon book. Quist Møller was essentially doing the book as a way to keep himself occupied. He enjoyed doing a story with a popping palette and making the story up as he went along. Jazz on paper, you could call it.

“Wanna play, Flemming?” The question hung in the air over the dinner table. Flemming and Jannik hadn’t played together for a long time. In 1960, they both started, a week apart, as hopeful, young apprentices in the studio of Danish animation pioneer Bent Barfoed. Eventually, they would come to imprint Danish animation like no others. *War of the Birds*, *Samson and Sally*, *Circleen*, *Amazon Jack*,

Hans Christian Andersen and The Long Shadow – Hastrup and Quist Møller are responsible for a substantial chunk of the Danish animated tradition. However, they never worked together again after making their classic animated feature *Benny’s Bathtub* in 1971. Until now, that is.

“There wasn’t enough material in the two Egon books, but they constitute a universe. Something to play around with,” Egon’s creator tells me. “So I started reading up on insects. I read about warrior ants, how they invade other colonies, enslaving black ants.”

MESSAGES IN EVERYTHING

“Field ants keep stables of aphids,” Hastrup adds.

Where some things are concerned, there would seem to be less of a difference between humans and insects than you might think. Their film is pure natural history crossed with a built-in flea circus, they profess, making no effort to conceal that the class-divided society of ants also offers a natural backdrop for two seasoned animators who always considered it the most natural thing in the world to let their worldview shine through in everything they do.

“I didn’t build my story on messages, not at all. I’m just trying to do something that works in terms of drama and humour. But of course one’s basic outlook shines through. That’s also why there’s so little violence in the movie,” Quist Møller says, gladly accepting credit for the healthy, anti-authoritarian note that rings out amidst the general hi-jinx.

“Everything always has a message, even if Danes are scared to death of running into a message or a wagging finger,” Hastrup asserts. “People here used to tell me that there was too much finger-wagging in my films. But no one ever criticised filmmakers from other countries for wagging *their* fingers. Of course, you make a film because there is something you want to say. People who claim they aren’t saying anything – that it’s all fun and games – don’t you believe them. There are messages in everything.”

At any rate, wagging fingers are nowhere in sight when pedal-pushing Egon, unlike your garden-variety fledgling mosquito, comes zipping out of the pond on a shiny red racing bicycle. A fresh-faced lad, he has so much lust for life, he sometimes fails to recognise other people’s dreams and needs, including sweet Dagmar’s.

“Egon doesn’t have a bad bone in his exo-skeleton, though he is a tad self-absorbed,” his creator concedes. Both Dagmar and Egon are young people who are into their own thing – dancing and cycling, respectively. Egon, now as ever, is always up for a good sprint. You can be sure, though, that he would never dip into EPO. Unnatural, unhealthy

performance-enhancing drugs hardly jive with animated films crafted the natural way. Market research and target groups don’t cut it either. You will find no hip-hop mannerisms or shrill Disney in *A Tale of Two Mozzies*.

What you do get is natural children’s voices, jazz music, an easy-going manner, a child-like joy of colours, and hominess instead of horror.

ENTERTAINMENT FOR ALL

“The film is a fantasy and there’s really no reason to drop pop-cultural references to up-to-the-minute kids’ fashions,” Quist Møller says.

“People always ask us what group we are targeting. I find that impossible to answer, except to say it’s intended for everybody,” Hastrup adds with a shrug.

“We made the film so even very small children of 3-10 can keep up,” Quist Møller says. *A Tale of Two Mozzies* provides entertainment for all, young and old, without the kind of raw action that can scare little kids.

Neither of the two veteran animators automatically rushes to the theatre to watch the latest cartoon features turned out by Hollywood’s production lines.

“They tend to be so chewed over according to the Hollywood formula. They can’t leave anyone out. And the stories tend to be so tacky and boring and predictable. But, granted, there are many funny and inventive individual scenes,” Quist Møller concedes. Hastrup, for his part, is more enamoured of the animated penguin movie *Happy Feet* and the work of the Japanese master Hayao Miyazaki, who still does hand-drawn films. *A Tale of Two Mozzies*, too, is distinguished by hand-drawing and hand-colouring, though not for reasons of technological purism. Computers have become a treasured tool for Quist Møller and Hastrup, as well.

COMPUTERS TAKE THE EDGE OFF

“We now move bits of card around on the computer rather than by hand and tweezers. The card pieces used to get grimy and bent after a couple of days. We don’t have to deal with that now,” Hastrup says. According to their division of labour, he did the storyboards, directed the animators and oversaw everything in the day-to-day, while Quist Møller designed the characters and backgrounds and performed the score.

“We want to keep as many things as possible as open as possible, for as long as possible.” *Quist Møller & Hastrup*



Egon the Bicycling Mosquito, Dagmar the Dancing Mozzie, Dominella the Ant Queen, a gentle aphid being milked by an ant milkmaid – the colourful cast of *A Tale of Two Mozzies* ...



A Tale of Two Mozzies. Framegrabs

THE MEN BEHIND THE MOSQUITO

In 1960, Hastrup and Quist Møller both got apprenticeships in the studio of Danish animation pioneer Bent Barfoed. In their spare time, they played jazz in the same band. Together they founded Fiasco Film and in 1971 made the Danish animated classic *Benny's Bathtub*, now included in the official Danish film canon. From there, their career paths diverged.

FLEMMING QUIST MØLLER

Born 1942. Musician, writer, actor, filmmaker. With his son, Carl Quist Møller, and Stefan Fjeldmark, Quist Møller directed *Amazon Jack* in 1993 and has also co-directed the two sequels, *The Movie Star* (1996) and *Jungo Goes Bananas* (2007).

JANNIK HASTRUP

Born 1941. Animation director and animator. Jannik Hastrup has left a huge imprint on Danish animation, directing such films as *The Thralls* (1978), *Samson and Sally* (1984), *War of the Birds* (1990) and *Mice* (1998) and, most recently, the three *Circleen* films (1998, 1999 and 2004).

DANSK TEGNEFILM

Founded 1976 by Jannik Hastrup, Danish grand master of quality animation. Marie Bro joined the company in 1996. The studio has a production catalogue containing numerous features and even more short fictions. Among the studio's feature films are award winners *Samson and Sally* (1984), *War of the Birds* (1990) and *Hans Christian Andersen and The Long Shadow* (1998). The costly Danish-French co-production *The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Bear* (2003) was honoured with Special Mention in Berlin and has received numerous other festival distinctions. Hastrup is also the creator (together with Hanne Hastrup) of the wise and astute little elf Circleen and her mouse friends, forever popular with small children. Circleen's feature film debut, *Circleen – City Mice* (1998), was awarded in Chicago and Montevideo, and the second in the series, *Circleen – Mice and Romance* (2000), was selected for Kinderfilmfest, Berlin.

For further information on *A Tale of Two Mozzies*, see reverse section.

“Computers are a big step forward. Things are a lot less stressful for animators now,” Quist Møller says. “They can take more chances with less risk.” Computer programmes make it possible to enrich the colours of the hand-drawn images without affecting the verisimilitude of the colours. That’s important because, more than anything, *A Tale of Two Mozzies* is a colour film with eye-popping visuals and jumping tunes. The score is largely the result of the musicians’ own creative efforts. Many methods and many styles were at play.

“There were precious few notes to lean on,” Quist Møller says about the score, though he could have been talking about the whole cycling mosquito kit and caboodle.

“They have a very jazzy way of making movies in this house,” Quist Møller says. “It’s an ‘Ellington principle’. There has to be direction and vision. Like

Ellington, we set up a framework, but there has to be a lot of possibilities for working spontaneously within it. For the individual to bust out a solo.”

“We want to keep as many things as possible as open as possible, for as long as possible,” the two maestros agree.

“A tight plan with a loose hand,” their recipe goes, and the two Danish animators more than ever sound as though they were living on an entirely different planet than the one inhabited by Disney, Pixar and the rest. A small Danish planet punching up the palette, as it did in the 1960s. Where the music is jumping, the pace is easy and the kids sound like kids. On Planet Ellington. Where a whole lot of childlike wonder amazingly is still intact ■

Revised version of an article published in the Danish newspaper Politiken, June 7 2007.



Actress Stine Fischer Christensen Photo: Morten Lundrup

FILMOGRAPHY

Echo (2007), *Princess* (2006), *After the Wedding* (2006), *Young Andersen* (2005), *Aftenland* (2003), *Indien* (1999), *Tifanfaya* (1997).

BREAKTHROUGH IN AFTER THE WEDDING

Fischer Christensen was “discovered” by filmmaker-slash-cartoonist Anders Morgenthaler after acting in a 2003 student film, *Aftenland*, at the National Film School of Denmark.

Morgenthaler cast her as the porn star Christina in *Princess* (2006) his aesthetically inventive animated film for adults. It was a role she largely improvised to life. The character appears only on porn videos watched by the animated characters.

Her real breakthrough came later that year in a dramatically different role as newly wed Anna in *After the Wedding*, Susanne Bier’s critically acclaimed drama of a torn family.

Again, she gives real depth and credibility to a seemingly rather one-dimensional character, a spoiled, somewhat naive rich kid who marries a shallow man from her social set.

When Anna discovers, first, that her father isn’t her real father, second, that her husband is cheating on her, she suffers a painful loss of innocence that comes across as heart-rendingly authentic in Fischer Christensen’s performance. The climax comes when Anna visits her newly discovered biological father Jacob (Mads Mikkelsen) in his hotel room. With terrific spontaneity, she conveys the bashful intimacy of this awkward father-daughter encounter.

The performance earned her a Danish film critics’ Bodil award as the year’s best supporting actress.

THE NEED FOR TRAINING

Stine Fischer Christensen considers herself an actress who puts a high demand on naturalism. Her love affair with the camera is clearly a happy one: the closer in, the bigger the effect, as the camera captures the slightest emotional ripple on her smooth, childishly innocent face. A face of visual poetry, the quintessence of vulnerable girlishness.

No matter how successful, any Danish actor or actress would be foolhardy to put all his or her eggs in the movie basket. Early on, Fischer Christensen realised she needed real acting chops and applied to the Danish National School of Theatre, where she is now in her third year.

She had her stage debut in autumn 2007, playing a small part in the stage version of Thomas Vinterberg’s Dogme film *The Celebration* at Copenhagen’s Østre Gasværk theatre.

“I was always fascinated by theatre and learned a lot from my first outing on a big stage,” Fischer Christensen says. “There is a joy of the moment and in developing my part night by night. When I was 14 years old, I worked at Østre Gasværk as a hatcheck girl and was enormously fascinated by the game all the grown-ups were playing on stage. So it’s fun to be part of the same game now” ■

PURE TALENT

Stine Fischer Christensen has a love affair with the camera. It loves her girlish good looks and soulful gaze. At 21, she has already demonstrated robust talent in several directions.

BY MORTEN PIIL

You see it in her forthright child’s gaze, a prime impression of something endlessly soulful. Stine Fischer Christensen is one of those rare actresses who know how to peel away all protective layers to appear emotionally naked and vulnerable.

This ability produces sublime moments in her latest role, in Anders Morgenthaler’s drama *Echo*. As rootless Angélique, she fleetingly steps in as a combination big sister and replacement mom for a confused six-year-old boy kidnapped by his desperate divorcé dad. Her charisma lends the scenes of her saying goodbye to the boy a melancholy, tender yearning that is pure poetry.

This Angélique is no angel, though. A reckless drifter, promiscuous, sensual and potty-mouthed, she is fuelled by a desire for adventure and a lust for life that swiftly draw the boy, Louis, to her. They are

kindred souls, sharing a fundamental innocence and openness to life.

In Fischer Christensen’s hands, what could easily have been a one-note portrayal of a tough cookie with sex appeal becomes a multi-dimensional portrait of a flesh and blood person.

FORMER CHILD ACTOR

Fischer Christensen learned what it’s like to stand in front of a camera at an early age. She played in several of her older sister Pernille Fischer Christensen’s short films (Pernille had her big breakthrough as the director of *A Soap*, winning the Silver Bear in 2006).

Fischer Christensen also had a leading role as the gawky title character of Annette K. Olesen’s ambitious fantasy short *Tifanfaya* (1997).

“As a child, I was too young to fully comprehend what it means to be a child actor,” Fischer Christensen says. “Often, it was just really boring, standing around in a cold forest, for instance, waiting to play a scene. I was more interested in what the crew was doing and figured it had to be a lot more exciting to be behind the camera. The game the grown-ups were playing looked like a lot more fun.”

STICKING TOGETHER

Nimbus Film, Denmark's third-largest production company, had a major hand in producing the very first Dogme hit, *The Celebration*. The company is headquartered in Filmbyen directly across from its competitor and partner of many years, Zentropa Film, which is owned and run by such colourful figures as Lars von Trier and Peter Aalbæk Jensen. Today, as ever, the company stands for quality and professionalism. Thus, two of this year's Danish Berlinale participants, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *What No One Knows* (Panorama Special) and Natasha Arthy's *Fighter* (Generation 14plus) are produced by Nimbus Film.

On the following pages, three Nimbus producers discuss their double role as the directors' close ally and management's extended arm.

BY MORTEN PIIL AND LISELOTTE MICHELSEN

In Denmark, the Nimbus Film production company is synonymous with a highly developed sense of cinematic quality. A broad cross section of Danish directing talent works for, or has worked for, Nimbus Film, including Thomas Vinterberg (*The Celebration*), Nikolaj Arcel (*King's Game*), Søren Kragh-Jacobsen (*Mifune*), Ole Christian Madsen (*Prague* and *Flame & Citron*), Dagur Kári (*Dark Horse*), Pernille Fischer Christensen (*A Soap*) and Natasha Arthy (*Fighter*).

Nimbus Film's line-up of producers likewise includes some of the most respected names in the business, very different personalities with their own special skills united by their remarkable commitment to working together - with the directors, whose visions they will be midwifing, and among themselves.

Nimbus Film above all stands for compelling stories done with the utmost professionalism and unwavering quality in all aspects of production. Having spoken with three of the company's leading producers, it does not seem surprising that Nimbus' bar is set so high.

THE HOLY TRINITY

Nimbus puts a priority on production not ego, on fruitful collaboration not draining rivalry. Although its producers may, in a sense, be competing for the same state subsidies, which are necessary to even be able to make movies in Denmark, they are colleagues first and foremost. They are happy to share their experiences with one another, and sometimes

one producer will even ask another to collaborate, as Morten Kaufmann and Birgitte Skov did on two features, Dagur Kári's *Dark Horse* and Jannik Johansen's *White Night*.

The holy trinity of director, screenwriter and producer has pride of place at Nimbus, with the director having the final word on all artistic matters.

Maintaining this principle and always keeping quality in mind, Nimbus Film and its producers have attracted some of the most creative people in Danish cinema. The company is starting 2008 on a strong note, launching the most expensive domestically produced, Danish-language film ever, Ole Christian Madsen's occupation-era drama, *Flame & Citron*, a story of two Danish resistance fighters and desperados who became legends by liquidating informers.

NIMBUS FILM PRODUCTIONS

Founded 1993 by producers Birgitte Hald and Bo Ehrhardt. Were later joined by director Thomas Vinterberg. Considered a major player in Danish cinema, having attained success in seeking out new talents and emphasizing innovation. The company values long-term relationships with individual filmmakers and gives precedence to the creative collaboration between director, scriptwriter and producer. Celebrated for several dogme films, especially *The Celebration* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1998) and *Mifune* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1999). Has a strong brand in short fiction, not least for a young audience with titles such as *The Boy Who Walked Backwards* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1994) and Oscar nominee *Teis & Nico* (Henrik Ruben Genz, 1998). Feature films include Nikolaj Arcel's thriller *King's Game* (2004) and Dagur Kári's comedy *Dark Horse* (2005). Pernille Fischer Christensen's debut *A Soap* was a double-winner at Berlin, 2006, and Ole Christian Madsen's *Prague*, a boxoffice success, won the Jury Award for Overall Excellence at San Jose, 2007. Two of Nimbus' films are selected for Berlin 2008: Natasha Arthy's *Fighter* and Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *What No One Knows*.

“You keep on working, even when the turd is on the table! You put a cheese dome over it and move on.”



Producer Morten Kaufmann Photo: P. Wessel

MORTEN KAUFMANN

What is the decision-making process like at Nimbus Film? Who decides what films get made?

“I have always had a very close working relationship with Birgitte Hald, the Nimbus executive,” Kaufmann says. “You can’t unilaterally say who decides what, because we have a very fluid and creative back-and-forth, where Birgitte might be involved in certain stages of the production process.

“Ideas might come from management, from the director or a producer. Also, the producers are very different. Birgitte Skov and Lars Bredo Rahbek are a lot more aggressive than I am, for instance – they might grab a director by the sleeve and say, ‘I want to work with you!’ Personally, I’m more passive, but it’s my good fortune that people come to me, asking me to be a part of their projects,” Kaufmann says.

Peter Aalbæk Jensen, who heads your neighbour and competitor Zentropa, says it’s solely up to the producers what films get made. Is that what it’s like at Nimbus, too?

“No, it’s not that simple,” Kaufmann says. “The Danish Film Institute is another factor. We apply for subsidies from the Film Institute only after the project has been approved by the management – that’s Birgitte Hald, Bo Ehrhardt and Jørgen Ramskov.

“Then, if we get a commitment from the Film Institute, which is basically always the foundation of our financing, a final important decision-making stage follows: a green-light meeting where the worked-out project is presented to management with all the financing in place. Then, management can hit a button and either launch or sink the film,” he says.

What aspect of production are you most involved in?

“Working with screenplays, shooting and editing – for me, that’s the cream. That’s also why I like to serve as production manager on the set of my films, unlike Lars Bredo Rahbek and Birgitte Skov, say, who for their part are a lot more involved in financing and promotion than I am,” Kaufmann says.

THE TURD ON THE TABLE

Describing the producer as a combination of the director’s closest confidant, his rock in the time of need or a whip when that’s required, would you say that just about covers it?

“Sure, those three functions are certainly part of the job. But it’s really hard to sum up the producer’s role in one fixed formula, for the simple reason that directors are so different,” Kaufmann says.

“I have mainly been working with Thomas Vinterberg, Ole Christian Madsen, Natasha Arthy and Katrine Windfeldt, and they all bring entirely different requirements and expectations to the partnership. While one only wants half a page of notes for a screenplay, another wants you to help write the lines. Some you have to be a father to, others expect a workmate. The great thing about this job is how you step into a new concept, a new universe, with each new project. One of the most important things is getting people to work together. You have to realise that no one can keep lying to someone forever. Everyone talks with everyone else on a production, and the truth will out,” he says.

“That’s why it’s so important to realise that you sometimes have to say unpleasant things – and say

MORTEN KAUFMANN

Has been affiliated with Nimbus Film since it was founded in 1993. In 1995, he graduated in production from the National Film School of Denmark. Kaufmann was a producer/line producer on Nimbus Film’s first two Dogme films, Thomas Vinterberg’s *The Celebration* and Søren Kragh-Jacobsen’s *Mifune*.

FILMOGRAPHY

- *Sinan’s Wedding* (Ole Christian Madsen, 1997) / Short Film
- *The Celebration* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1998) / Line Producer
- *Mifune* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1999)
- *Pizza King* (Ole Christian Madsen, 1999)
- *Miracle* (Natasha Arthy, 2000)
- *Kira’s Reason – A Love Story* (Ole Christian Madsen, 2001)
- *It’s All About Love* (Thomas Vinterberg, 2002) / Line Producer
- *Angels in Fast Motion* (Ole Christian Madsen, 2005)
- *Dark Horse* (Dagur Kári, 2005) / (Co-produced with Birgitte Skov)
- *Prague* (Ole Christian Madsen, 2006)
- *A Man Comes Home* (Thomas Vinterberg, 2007) / (+ Screenwriter and Production Manager)
- *White Night* (Jannik Johansen, 2007) / (Co-produced with Birgitte Skov)

them in a constructive way, so the partners can work together creatively, even when there are real conflicts going on,” Kaufmann says.

“Getting a handle on all the little games being played between the main forces on a production I’ve come to think of as the most exciting thing about production work. Basically, it’s about confronting people with the truth instead of protecting them. If you hush conflicts up, everything drowns in padding. Being a conflict manager and a mediator when contentions erupt among people in the crew I find immensely interesting. Not to experiment with people’s feelings but to unleash their creativity. Creativity has much better conditions when everyone realises exactly where everyone else stands and no one goes around with any hidden agendas. You keep on working, even when the turd is on the table! You put a cheese dome over it and move on,” he says.

“Things can go wrong, of course, and miserably so, when you go for that level of honesty. But when it works, it makes for so much better collaboration.”

SERVING TWO MASTERS

You have been both a line producer and an ordinary producer at Nimbus. What’s the difference?

“The line between being a line producer – that is, mainly a Mr Fixit – or an actual producer has been kind of fluid around here. After serving as a line producer on *It’s All About Love*, I said that I wanted to limit myself to producing. Fortunately, people like Thomas (Vinterberg, *ed.*) and Ole Christian Madsen wanted to continue working with me in that capacity,” Kaufmann says.



Producer Birgitte Skov Photo: P. Wessel

“I’m probably more of an initiator, in the sense that I get in touch with directors I would like to work with. That’s what I did with Dagur Kári. He and his screenwriter had a hundred ideas, which led to *Dark Horse*.”

BIRGITTE SKOV

Has a Masters in Film Studies from Copenhagen University and later earned a degree in production from the National Film School of Denmark, 1997.

FILMOGRAPHY

- *Skoda* (Anders Gustafsson, 2001) / Short Film
- *The Boy Below* (Morten Giese, 2002) / Short Film
- *Old, New, Borrowed and Blue* (Natasha Arthy, 2003)
- *Scratch* (Anders Gustafsson, 2003)
- *Dark Horse* (Dagur Kári, 2005) / (Co-produced with Morten Kaufmann)
- *White Night* (Jannik Johansen, 2007) / (Co-produced with Morten Kaufmann)

“It’s great to work with the same directors over an extended period. You get to know each other so well. You learn how to handle a problem – if the director is worn out, if he seems distant – with time you learn it has nothing to do with you, it’s because he has real problems. You take it from there, instead of taking it personal. When you are younger, you might think it’s all about you,” he says.

Is the producer the company’s or the director’s man?

“Can he serve two masters, you mean? For my part, I can only say that, if I really believe the director is right about his vision for the film, I will support him, even if the brass is against it,” Kaufmann says. “All the while, my job essentially is to make sure that the film gets made within the framework laid out by the company. It’s my call whether to do the director’s or management’s bidding.

“There are times when I think management is right in judging that certain scenes simply aren’t essential cost-wise and will likely end up on the cutting room floor anyway. In those cases, I side with management over the director,” he says. “It’s a tough balancing act at times. The director shouldn’t get the sense that his producer automatically does management’s bidding.

“In general, it’s hard to completely avoid that situation, to be honest, but when we do, it’s immensely satisfying,” Kaufmann says.

“Sometimes, it’s a matter of getting the director to give up a wild goose chase, at times when the producer can take a more detached view. I’ve done that, but how often, or how often I’ve been wrong, I really can’t say. You’d have to ask someone else,” he says.

BIRGITTE SKOV

What aspect of the producer’s job interests you the most?

“Mainly, developing the story within the triad of writer, director and producer,” Birgitte Skov says. “In Denmark, that combination originates at the National Film School. The school gave us the tools to read screenplays on the level of a writer or director. We learned a common language that has been incredibly useful.

“In film school, that was the aspect that engaged me the most, and it still does in my work today. The fuel for my work comes from dealing with stories that I feel are important. We take those stories and improve them, in collaboration and by outside input,” she says.

“Once shooting begins, a train is set in motion that I have less influence on,” Skov says. “The production manager deals with all the practical issues. Of course, I have a dialogue with him and the director and love to watch the rushes, but only when the time comes to retell the story in the editing room, I come back into the picture and feel I can contribute with an essential role as the film’s first audience.”

THE ROLE OF INITIATOR

Do you initiate projects or do you sit around and wait for them to come to you?

“I’m probably more of an initiator, in the sense that I get in touch with directors I would like to work with,” Skov says. “That’s what I did with Dagur Kári. He and his screenwriter had a hundred ideas,

which led to *Dark Horse*. And that’s what I did with Jannik Johansen when I hooked up with a project we were developing, *White Night*, written by Anders Thomas Jensen. Jannik got involved in the screenwriting and ended up directing the film, even though his real home is with another production company, Fine & Mellow. There are no fixed rules for how a film gets started or who I will be working with. The only requirement, really, is that I see something in the material that makes me want to work on the film. Desire keeps the train running. After all, a film can take two to three years to make, from the first four lines of the screenplay are written to opening night.

“All the while, the producer has a double-sided partnership with her company and the director,” Skov says. “I have to mediate a dialogue between art and money, between the director and management, so both parties feel that the decisions that are made are what’s best for the film.”

COLLABORATING

You twice worked with another Nimbus producer, Morten Kaufmann, on other films. Why?

“Working as a producer can be incredibly social. You have access to hordes of people, but the role of the producer is basically a pretty lonely one. You’re the one who is in charge of everything,” Skov says.

“I asked Morten Kaufmann, my colleague here at Nimbus Film, if he wanted to make Dagur Kári’s *Dark Horse* with me. So I could play ball with someone I respect. Also, I had a powerful sense that Dagur would bowl Morten over with the things he can do.

LARS BREDO RAHBEK

With a degree in production from the National Film School of Denmark, Lars Bredo Rahbek went to Nimbus Film in 1997. He has produced films such as *Skagerrak* (2003) and *A Soap* (2006), and executive produced Thomas Vinterberg's *It's All About Love* (2003). This year, Nimbus is putting out two ambitious Rahbek productions: Ole Christian Madsen's historical drama *Flame & Citron* and Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's political thriller *What No One Knows* (Panorama Special, Berlin 2008).

FILMOGRAPHY

- *What No One Knows* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 2008)
- *Flame & Citron* (Ole Christian Madsen, 2008)
- *A Soap* (Pernille Fischer Christensen, 2006)
- *Torremolinos 73* (Pablo Berger, 2003)
- *Skagerrak* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 2003)
- *It's All About Love* (Thomas Vinterberg, 2003) / Executive Producer
- *Tut & Tone* (Charlotte Sieling 1998) / Short Film

“A Soap was a very small, intimate film that was shot mainly in a two-room apartment. Physically there was no room for me on the set. I had to peek in through the mail slot! Conversely, in the case of *Flame & Citron*, which was shot on location all across Europe, I sometimes had a hard enough time just finding the crew!”



Producer Lars Bredo Rahbek Photo: P. Wessel

“Correspondingly, Morten asked me if I wanted to do Jannik Johansen’s *White Night* with him – because we have similar tastes and supplement each other well – though that doesn’t mean we’re a steady thing,” she says.

“A major quality about working here at Nimbus is that we, as a producer group, are generous with one another. We know how to draw on one another’s qualities, we read one another’s scripts and call around if there’s a problem. This goes on, even though we know that we are competing for the same funds. We really have a collaborative spirit that makes us want the best for one another,” the producer says.

Who has the final say whether a film gets made?

“It’s hard to say. A big factor is whether we get the funds we apply for from the Danish Film Institute and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) or TV2. The three of them really decide the fate of any project, since, without their commitment, we have no platform for taking the project to Nordic subsidy schemes and private investors,” Skov says.

LARS BREDO RAHBEK

What aspect of production interests you the most?

“I like to be around when the lights are turned on, and when they are turned off,” Lars Bredo Rahbek says. “That is, at the very beginning, when the idea is conceived, the screenplay developed, and financing and casting fall into place – and at the end, when the film is marketed and positioned at festivals.

“It’s fun to be in the vanguard and lay out domestic and international marketing strategies, thinking Berlinale and so on, a full eight months before the film opens. That game turns me on,” Rahbek says. “But the most important part of the whole process for me is engaging with the director. It’s essential that we’re on the same page and respect each other, and that I’m able to tune into the director’s vision or idea. It’s not simply a matter of getting started at any price. I know that I will be living with the film for a really long time – up to five or ten years – after it’s been made. Case in point, I still have tasks to do regarding *It’s All About Love*.”

How much of an on-set presence are you?

“I typically visit the set about three times a week and talk with the director about how things are going: Are there any problems, does anything need to be changed? It depends on the shooting process, too, which varies a lot from film to film. *A Soap* was a very small, intimate film that was shot mainly in a two-room apartment. Physically there was no room for me on the set. I had to peek in through the mail slot!” he quips.

“Conversely, in the case of *Flame & Citron*, which was shot on location all across Europe, I sometimes had a hard enough time just finding the crew!”

INNOVATION FROM WITHIN

How do you experience your position regarding the director and the company?

“I’m between a hard place and a rock!” he says. “But really, the most important thing is having the directors’ back. It’s my job to understand their ideas. I have to decode the directors – what makes them

tick? – and then share my enthusiasm for them with the world, telling all the world that they can’t live without an Ole Christian Madsen or a Søren Kragh-Jacobsen.

“It’s so important that the director’s idea, his story, clicks with me. If it doesn’t, I will consider which other Nimbus producer might be turned on by it and hear if they want to take over the project. We have a very strong sense of community here at Nimbus,” Rahbek says.

“We producers use one another as sounding boards in all sorts of situations. A producer’s job can be a very lonely one. You have huge financial responsibility and feel the anxiety that a financial gamble arouses in management,” he says. “That was the case when we started *Flame & Citron*. It’s so important for the producer not to pass that anxiety on to the creative forces – the director and the crew – because that would create uncertainty and fear of limitations being imposed on the work.

“You have to toe a delicate line. At such times, it’s really good to have the other producers to talk with,” Rahbek says. “Nimbus is a real chatter place with a lot of feminine values. We’re a small house with big ambitions” ■

For further information on recent and coming Nimbus Film releases, see reverse section.

INIT FOR THE SPIRIT

“We’re not a tiny kitchen-table outfit, but we’re certainly not a big company either.”



Thomas Stenderup, Lena Lundt, Mikael Opstrup and Signe Byrge Sørensen Photo: P. Wessel

Peter Schønau Fog's *The Art of Crying* has made it to festivals around the world and taken home several awards. Now, Final Cut Productions is busy finishing Jan Troell's *Maria Larsson's Everlasting Moment*. FILM met with the people behind the small, ambitious production company for a talk about team spirit, ambition and money.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

"From day one, our profile was to do serious films," Final Cut producer Thomas Stenderup says. Stenderup took a master's in political science at Copenhagen University, and also taught there, before switching gears and earning a degree in production at the National Film School of Denmark.

"The company never went in a more commercial direction," Stenderup says. "Probably, all us here feel that we could, in principle, be doing other things. But we have chosen to do what we do, and each other. Sure, we have had to make certain commercial considerations in order to survive, but money was never a driving factor at all."

Final Cut's crowning achievement thus far is Peter Schønau Fog's critically acclaimed *The Art of Crying*, which has won 19 international awards and is on the 2007 top ten list of most seen Danish films. Now, the company has big expectations for *Maria Larsson's Everlasting Moment*, a historical drama by veteran Swedish filmmaker Jan Troell. *Everlasting Moment* is a Danish-Swedish co-production with Final Cut and Thomas Stenderup as producer. At the time of this writing, Troell is putting the finishing touches to the film.

WORKING TOGETHER

Early on, Final Cut produced only documentaries, but as the years went by, it became increasingly difficult to make a living from the kind of expensive, internationally oriented productions Final Cut likes to sink its teeth into.

Six years ago, Final Cut made a move into narrative films and has co-produced several Nordic features since then.

"The decision to expand into dramatic productions was extremely crucial, because it threw everything else into perspective," says Mikael Opstrup, a self-taught producer once affiliated with the Danish Film Institute. Opstrup came to Final Cut in 2002 as head of documentary film production. "Making narrative films is almost required when you also want to do documentaries of the scale we like to operate on," Opstrup says. "It's very difficult to make a living from documentaries alone. On the other hand, the pressure of doing features is so much greater. When it's good, it's great, but there's also a lot more risk."

Final Cut is a small company. Opstrup, Stenderup and a third producer, Signe Byrge Sørensen – along with Lena Lundt, who is in charge of administration – comprise the core, with a network of more or less loosely affiliated freelancers to draw on when actual production starts. "We're not a tiny kitchen-table outfit, but we're certainly not a big company either," Stenderup says. "We're in the middle range. We've grown a bit in recent years and put on some muscle, because we've succeeded in certain respects.

"Right now, we *could* choose to expand – and we are, but in tiny increments," Stenderup says. "I may not be entirely right about this, but I'm afraid what happens in a big company is that producers start competing against each other instead of working together, while directors get to feeling they are standing in line somehow. Sure, in a bigger



Maria Larsson's Everlasting Moment Photo: Nille Leander



The Art of Crying Photo: Søren Renholt

company, you might have personal contact to the producer you work with, but at Final Cut there will typically be several of us working on each project simultaneously – to help the projects and one another as much as possible."

At Final Cut, everyone supports and consults one another, and everyone reads the others' scripts. "We provide another pair of eyes on each other's calls," Stenderup says. "Final Cut has something of a mom-and-pop feel about it. There is no management that comes in and says, 'Guys, things aren't going well. You've got to do so and so.' The company is what we make it. You feel that as an individual" ■

For further information on *Maria Larsson's Everlasting Moment*, see reverse section.

FINAL CUT PRODUCTIONS

Founded 1993 by Thomas Stenderup. Although creative documentary is their original line of production, the company has been involved in feature film production since 1998. Produces short fiction as well. Has released a number of award winning documentaries, among them *Portal to Peace* (Thomas Stenderup, 1996), a cinematic poem about burial rituals in Cuba, and *The German Secret* (Lars Johansson, 2004), a personal and dramatic uncovering of a family past. Among the company's acclaimed features are the experimental, low-budget *The Man Who Would Live Forever* (Torben Skjødt Jensen, 1999), the Norwegian *Falling Sky* (Gunnar Vikene, 2002) and multi-awardwinner *The Art of Crying* (2007).



Everything Is Relative Photo: Erik Molberg Hansen

HUMANITY UNDER A MICROSCOPE

Everything Is Relative is one of those films where you imagine the screenplay calling for “a blind girl, a woman in labour, a soldier going off to war, two Japanese gay guys, a beauty queen from Mozambique, three praying nuns – and a partridge in a pear tree!” In other words, a film about everything and anything under the sun. Yet it’s not. Under its roomy umbrella title, *Everything Is Relative* little by little gels into a personal essay on a view of life – what it means to be human as seen through one person’s temperament.

BY LARS MOVIN

Taking the approach of an anthropologist, Mikala Krogh criss-crossed the world, gathering material for her cinematic laboratory in *Everything Is Relative*. Her experiment examines how the human scale for basic qualities of life tends to change according to the circumstances. The result is an ambitious, all-embracing document somewhere between documentary and personal essay.

That may sound abstract, but it’s not really. The film’s deceptively loose mosaic of staged scenes and documentary fragments takes up something quite specific: the basic conditions and feelings shared by all people, regardless of cultural, racial and religious differences. How, on the surface of things,

we people are able to adjust our expectations and criteria for happiness and sorrow according to the circumstances. More profoundly, the film shows us that we are made of the same emotional stuff. Sure, technology is advancing faster than a speeding bullet, the wheels of globalisation are turning ever faster, but on a number of fundamental points humanity remains unchanged.

“I was always fascinated by the human ability to adapt,” Krogh says. “It should be emphasised, though, that the film in no way seeks to justify the enormous economic and social differences that exist in the world. Everything being relative should never be taken to imply that it doesn’t matter that some people are living under horrendous conditions. That it’s okay that people in Africa are starving, since then they

are happy just to get a few spoonfuls of food. Not at all. For me, the film is mainly an exploration of the phenomenon that, despite all our differences, there is something that ties us together. It’s a statement that every human being demands dignity. And it’s an homage to humanity and our ability to survive.”

A MULTITUDE OF LANGUAGES

Everything Is Relative employs a plethora of cinematic moves. The film’s basic tone is documentary, but cinematic languages and methods vary from one sequence to the next. The material is divided into seven main sections centring on a specific emotion or condition of life. Each section spotlights a series of examples or flashpoints. In the section titled “Love”, three old married couples from different places in the world talk about how they found one another. Their accounts are juxtaposed by a scene of a young Japanese couple on the street, succumbing to lust and spontaneously getting a hotel room to have sex.

“Illness” drops us right in among the mourners at a funeral in Mozambique. “Happiness” shows a scene from a Texas airport of families awaiting the arrival

“I didn’t want to make a *Mondo Cane*-type film showing the exotic lifestyles of people in Papua New Guinea and that kind of thing. Going to Africa, we had to avoid the temptation to come home with footage confirming the cliché about the poor starving people in Africa.” *Mikala Krogh*

of fathers and husbands coming home from war. “Time” introduces us to an engineer from Bangladesh indefinitely stranded under slave-like conditions in Dubai and an old woman who spends an eternity buttoning a button in her blouse.

Most of them we see only once. A few make repeat appearances – most striking, a young woman with cancer, in a series of video journal entries, confiding her thoughts about her illness and the chemotherapy she is undergoing. Alongside the documentary fragments we are treated to a series of posed tableaux in the studio, a lab of sorts illuminating the different themes in subtle or stylised ways. Finally, the film features six monologues by screenwriting guru Mogens Rukov, small vignettes putting words to the themes and offering a lens or frame of interpretation.

RULES ARE STIMULATING

Everything Is Relative is partly inspired by Krogh’s preoccupation with Edward Steichen’s *The Family of Man*, the American photographer’s famous selection of images of the world’s peoples and cultures composed to showcase the universality

of human emotions. First shown at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1955, the images have been circulating ever since in a book that has sold more than four million copies, making it one of the most popular visual testimonials to humanity.

Another element was Krogh’s desire to experiment with the documentary format, a distinctive quality of several of her works.

Everything Is Relative presents a series of moments strung together like beads on a string. A mosaic, collage or anthology, a cinematic essay in encyclopaedic form – Krogh’s film especially brings to mind three noted filmmakers of the older generation: Michael Glawogger of Austria (in particular, his 1998 *Megacities*), Roy Andersson of Sweden and the Danish filmmaker Jørgen Leth, a kinship Krogh readily acknowledges.

“I like the encyclopaedic form. It’s fascinating to take different elements, independent portraits or stories, and combine them to see what they give each other, what they say together that they couldn’t say on their own,” Krogh says.

“The new film actually started out being a lot more sampled than it is now. I’ve made so many different films, and at one point I began to think it would be interesting to gather all the many ideas in one film,” she says. “I was even thinking about including outtakes, both from my own and other people’s films. As a filmmaker, you tend to end up with so much footage you like a lot, but simply can’t fit into the given structure. I got a lot of footage together, but as I was looking it over, I realised that I couldn’t use it for this film. It wasn’t shot with the right optics. So we ended going out and shooting everything ourselves.”

Everything Is Relative was shot in Mozambique, Dubai, Tokyo, Texas and Denmark. Add to this a smattering of archival footage, plus a single sequence from Siberia that had to be commissioned for practical reasons. The film could essentially have been shot anywhere. The big problem wasn’t so much finding suitable locations or people but defining what to include.

“Working with Mogens Rukov was a big help in terms of formulating certain rules of game for the project. This was necessary to avoid getting lost in the individual stories and to be able to exclude all the other exciting things we *could* have shot at each and every location,” Krogh says.

“Content-wise, it was important to show everyday situations that anyone could identify with. I didn’t want to make a *Mondo Cane*-type film showing the exotic lifestyles of people in Papua New Guinea and that kind of thing. Going to Africa, we had to avoid the temptation to come home with footage confirming the cliché about the poor starving people in Africa. Rather than trying to include everything, we decided to let a lot of things be implicit. We wanted to show a series of

flashpoints from people’s lives, snapshots with no before or after.”

Did you find it limiting not to be able to follow the individual stories over a longer period?

“On the contrary! Subordinating myself to these rules was enormously liberating. As I was shooting, it allowed me to focus on what was essential without constantly having to worry about what had come before or how a story was going to develop,” the filmmaker says. “I consider it a huge privilege to get a chance to explore the medium in this way. The traditional way of looking at things says there’s a whole film waiting inside every little story. But it simply wasn’t our job to do those stories this time. I wouldn’t rule out doing a more straight film in the future that could be inspired by my experiences from this film. Anyway, it’s far from certain that I will even get to do more films of this type. It may be a once-in-a-lifetime thing” ■

For further information on Everything Is Relative, see reverse section.

“I like the encyclopaedic form. It’s fascinating to take different elements, independent portraits or stories, and combine them to see what they give each other.” *Mikala Krogh*



Everything Is Relative Photo: Manuel Claro (top and middle) and Jacob Noel



Director Mikala Krogh Photo: Camilla Hjelm Knudsen

MIKALA KROGH

Born 1973. Graduated from the TV department at the National Film School of Denmark in 2001 with the documentary *MK*. She worked for several years in radio, before she debuted as a director in 1992 with *Epilog* (co-directed by Sara Bro), and has worked with personal, investigative and experimental documentaries ever since. Selected titles include: *Fish Out of Water* (2000), *Detour to Freedom* (with Sidse Stausholm, 2001), *My Father’s Choice* (2002), *My Grandad’s Murderer* (with Søren Fauli, 2004) and *Beth’s Diary* (with Kent Klich, 2006).

TJU-BANG FILM

Founded 1997. Originally formed as a creative working collective, the company today produces their own films giving a priority to documentaries. From 2005 owned by SF Film, thereby widening the scope towards feature films. Amongst many other films the company released Pernille Rose Grønkjær’s *The Monastery*, which received IDFA’s Joris Ivens Award in 2006.



Terkel in Trouble. Framegrab

CONTENT AND DISCONTENT



Flickering Lights Photo: Rolf Konow



Adam's Apples Photo: Rolf Konow



The Green Butchers Photo: Rolf Konow

“The varied nature of Danish Films may seem guaranteed to inspire intellectual vertigo, but in fact there are central overriding motifs which link many of the films,” according to Steve Gravestock, programmer of Nordic films for Toronto International Film Festival since 2001.

BY STEVE GRAVESTOCK

Since the mid-1980s, the quality of Danish cinema has remained remarkably consistent. International interest in Danish film has rarely weakened during this period, peaking in the mid to late 1990s with the birth of the Dogme 95 movement.

The end of the Dogme movement did not signal the end of this period. In fact, it's been followed by possibly more significant achievements, including the first two installments of Lars von Trier's US trilogy, Nicolas Winding Refn's *Pusher* series, Thomas Vinterberg's underrated parable *Dear Wendy* (2005), Anders Thomas Jensen's black comedies, and Susanne Bier's singular string of films beginning with *Open Hearts* (2002, one of the last official Dogme films).

The list could easily go on much, much longer.

This period has been remarkable because it's not linked to a specific type of film or style. It accommodates both neophytes and veterans, and includes both commercial and primarily critical successes, convention and innovation. The variety

“Anders Thomas Jensen plays very effectively with our own atavistic, childish need for a happy ending, our willingness to be seduced by outsiders, and what could be called our instinctive pleasure in his characters' initial contempt for propriety.”

of Danish film production over the course of this period is wildly divergent, encompassing everything from gangster trilogies to domestic melodramas, romantic comedies and absurdist, sometimes anachronistic parables.

The varied nature of the work may seem guaranteed to inspire intellectual vertigo, but in fact there are central overriding motifs or concerns which link many of the films.

DETRONING AUTHORITIES

In terms of tone, many of the filmmakers share a decidedly sinister, dark sense of humour. Thematically, there's a deeply engrained distrust of socialization and its agents. Recent Danish cinema is littered with self-serving doctors and delinquent or vile parents. The officious martinet, the rule-obsessed lackey, is also a preferred target, but teachers are probably the favoured *bête noir*.

Few escape rancorous, even scurrilous condemnation. In Ole Bornedal's hysterical *The Substitute* (2007), the new replacement teacher is a chicken-devouring alien from a planet overrun by war, who is determined to capture a class of Grade 6 students in order to study humanity's capacity for empathy (this may in fact be the gentlest portrait of educators in recent years – at least it's a fantasy).

The animated feature for young adults, *Terkel in Trouble* (2004), a very popular children's record based on a story by stand-up comedian Anders Matthesen, focuses on a teenager menaced by his incredibly popular new teacher, who turns out to be a serial killer. The film is narrated by the teacher he's replaced, a faded hippie who's on sabbatical – and is more than slightly miffed that his students aren't devastated by his departure.

The faded hippie teacher whose rhetoric is either self-serving or utterly flatulent is a dominant figure. It's especially prominent in Jacob Thuesen's corrosively funny portrait of the artist as a young man, *The Early Years* (2007), based on Lars von Trier's reminiscences from his film school days. The film follows von Trier's alter-ego, Erik, a sensitive suburban kid obsessed with trees and nature who is mistakenly admitted into a state film school. There he's beset by egomaniac professors convinced of their own genius and even more eccentric students, equally convinced of their gifts. The only skills they

can teach Erik, besides the limits of his naïveté, are how to be manipulative and ruthless.

Abdication of responsibility is a common occurrence in these films, especially by parents. It plays a seminal role in Nicolas Winding Refn's epochal *Pusher* series, particularly the trilogy's middle entry, *With Blood on my Hands* (2004). There we find out that the bungling hood Tonny, who has seemingly spent much of his brief life eking out an existence in the lower echelons of the underworld – and suffered for it – is actually the estranged son of one of the most powerful crime lords in the city.

Parents probably get the roughest ride in Peter Schønau Fog's brilliant debut *The Art of Crying*, one of the most successful domestic releases this past year. Based on a memoir by writer Erling Jepsen, the film examines a horrifically dysfunctional family. The profoundly disturbed father is a manipulative, yet somehow pathetic creep, fond of baroque emotional displays, usually at night, and always designed to curry favour and manipulate those around him.

His breakdowns obscure the fact that he's sexually abusing both his teenage daughter and his pre-teen son. Shot from the perspective of the young boy, who – at least at the beginning of the film – has no concept of what's taking place, the film is a comedy of extreme discomfort. It's harrowing one minute, uncomfortably absurd and funny the next.

The Danes are particularly skilled at this sub-genre, as anyone who has seen the Anders Thomas Jensen films mentioned above can attest to. Frequently, one is caught in utterly untenable moral situations, where one's sympathies lie at least partially with characters who are repulsive or worse.

Empathy is, of course, a tricky subject as evinced by Paprika Steen's two features as director: the stark and relentless drama *Aftermath* (2004) and the deranged black comedy *With your Permission* (2007). In both films, Steen explores the limits of our capacity for empathy as her initially sympathetic principals behave more and more erratically.

This angst about the family is evident in more straightforward ways in the dramas of Susanne Bier and Ole Christian Madsen, where seemingly secure middle class marriages fall apart.



Just Like Home Photo: Henrik Ohsten

ANDERS THOMAS JENSEN: A SLAP IN THE FACE TO POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Frequently, recent Danish films have specifically targeted the more repressive, bourgeois elements of Danish life and, indeed modern life in general. The filmmakers who've charted the key positions have been Anders Thomas Jensen, Lone Scherfig and, not surprisingly, Lars von Trier.

Anders Thomas Jensen's three sinister comedies as writer-director mock the whole notion of socialization as fraudulent or at the very least ludicrously arbitrary. In each film, decidedly fringe characters – psychotics, hoodlums and serial killers – find themselves almost magically reintegrated into society.

In his debut, *Flickering Lights* (2000), a quartet of loutish, rather brutal hoodlums escape from a more powerful and vicious thug and wind up hiding in an abandoned restaurant in the middle of nowhere. Shortly afterwards, they find themselves running a seemingly successful, very quaint restaurant.

In the follow-up, *The Green Butchers* (2003), two sad sack butchers – Bjarne, a suicidally lonely pothead, and Svend, a sweaty martinet who's been so

bullied his entire life that he has no notion of how to interact with anyone – accidentally kill an electrician and dispose of his body by dumping it in their meat supply. Soon enough, their shop becomes the most successful business in town and they become local celebrities – while the killing continues.

Jensen's most recent, *Adam's Apples* (2005), pushes this arc to more outrageous extremes by focusing on a half-way house/church in rural Denmark which hosts a spectacularly deranged group of reprobates – among them a rotund alcoholic sex offender who claims to have been a former tennis pro and a crazed man of Middle Eastern descent who blames oil companies, especially Norwegian ones, for all of the world's woes. These guys, however, aren't the craziest people in the house.

That honour is reserved for Ivan, the pastor who runs the place – a man so determined to look on the bright side of things that he simply ignores any unpleasant fact in front of him (when he receives bad news he can't ignore, he bleeds from his ears and collapses in a heap). Enter the new tenant: a hardened neo-Nazi named Adam who almost

immediately vows to make the priest accept reality. By the end, the pastor wins out and Adam turns into a clone of Ivan, wearing an identical sweater and humming off-key to Abba tunes.

In Jensen's films, propriety/normalization, if not always easily acquired, often comes with something as simple as a change of scenery. Surface reality (or propriety, the social image of reality) rules unopposed. Past actions, even the basics of character, are swept aside. Sanity, rationality and clear-sightedness just aren't valued in the social structures Jensen parodies. Much of this seems motivated by a critique of political correctness and contemporary liberalism, and its inability to address or comprehend evil adequately – or even to acknowledge an individual's personal history.

Jensen reverses the traditional trajectory of black comedy, which normally depends on a late reversal revealing the true nature of what we've been laughing at. Instead, even the most marginal or even reprehensible characters are happily integrated, though this is, in its own way, rather scary.

He plays very effectively with our own atavistic, childish need for a happy ending, our willingness



Italian for Beginners Photo: Lars Hogsted

“Scherfig’s focus is on those who’ve been left out. In *Italian for Beginners*, her subjects are marginalized – either by temperament or circumstance. The principals are either ungovernable, devastatingly awkward or simply desperately lonely.”



The Idiots Photo: Jan Schut



Manderlay Photo: Astrid Wirth

“In von Trier’s films, societies are closed systems, incapable of accepting or incorporating outside elements. Introduction of new ideas or different concepts invariably result in disaster, but it’s also true that the societies or rather cultures depicted are on their last legs.”

to be seduced by outsiders, and what could be called our instinctive pleasure in his characters’ initial contempt for propriety. Bjarne, for example, responds to the most minor irritation by hauling off and smacking people (the film incidentally was a huge hit in Denmark and did very well when it screened in Toronto, sparking a standing ovation in the middle of the afternoon).

LONE SCHERFIG: SOCIETY’S OUTSIDERS

One discovers a related concern half-buried within Lone Scherfig’s seemingly gentler romantic comedies, *Italian for Beginners* (2000) and *Just Like Home* (2007).

Scherfig’s focus though is not on those who’ve been subsumed but those who’ve been left out. In the former film, her subjects are as marginalized as Jensen’s – either by temperament or circumstance. The principals are either ungovernable (the quarrelsome restaurant manager, Finn); devastatingly awkward (clutzy Olympia and hotel clerk Jørgen Mortensen) or simply desperately lonely (Karen, the hairdresser and Andreas the new pastor who has recently lost his wife).

The social setting is far too proper and repressive to adequately accommodate them. Their parents are dead or vindictive. And even though things end happily for most of them, there’s a downbeat tone to the conclusion, in part because the neediest character, Olympia, is seemingly left alone at the end.

In the latter film, the situation has actually deteriorated because the lid has been removed. A small town’s social order collapses when a pompous pseudo-intellectual reveals that he saw a naked man running down the streets early that morning, evidence, he claims, of social discontent. Depression, angst and panic spread like wildfire, a blaze exacerbated by concerned citizens who’ve started a help line, which only provides the previously happily

repressed citizens with an outlet for their various complaints leading to more complaints and more widespread angst and so on and so on. Here even the pillars of the community are slipping down. The social fabric is so tentative that minor disruptions are enough to tear it up, at least momentarily – these films are romantic comedies after all.

LARS VON TRIER: SELF-SERVING HEROES

Von Trier’s own films don’t so much address the costs and limitations of socialization (though that’s present in several films) so much as the impossibility of action or rebellion.

Most of von Trier’s protagonists attempt to redress wrongs, from the crusading doctor who ventures into the forbidden lands to battle the plague against his superiors’ orders in *Epidemic* (1987) to the avant-garde theatre troupe cum anarchists who pretend to be mentally challenged in *The Idiots* (1998) to Grace, the heroine of his US trilogy. Invariably, though, they act in egregious bad faith, crippled either by egomania, stupidity, madness, or all of the above.

Epidemic’s heroic doctor actually spreads the plague to the supposedly infected areas. Stoffer, the leader of *The Idiots*, who rails vehemently and constantly against the bourgeois neighbourhood where they choose to play out their charade, is a privileged son of the upper class, sadistic (who routinely and publicly savages members he doesn’t feel are holding their own) and probably unbalanced. The only member of the troupe who actually dares to carry out Stoffer’s litmus test for true conviction, by “spassing out” at home or at work, is a late-comer, a hanger-on, who turns out to be truly unhinged by a tragedy. Her issues are far more real and immediate than the abstractions which drive the “real” members of the troupe. Artists and activists are generally conflated in

von Trier’s work, particularly in *The Idiots* (the troupe is referred to as a commune.)

The Grace of *Manderlay* (2005), the second installment of the planned US trilogy, claims that she’s there to aid the backward denizens of a gated community in the deep South, still stuck in pre-Civil War period. But when the citizens begin making their own decisions without her, she responds with extravagant gestures designed more to call attention to herself than genuinely to aid anyone.

Moreover, her decisions are decidedly ill-informed. Her decision to cut down the nearby forests in order to build houses for the inhabitants of the plantation result in the destruction of the wind barrier which protected the farm’s crops, destroying the community’s only livelihood.

In von Trier’s films, societies are closed systems, incapable of accepting or incorporating outside elements. Introduction of new ideas or different concepts invariably result in disaster, but it’s also true that the societies or rather cultures depicted are on their last legs.

Why Canadians and Torontonians respond to these films (Jensen, Scherfig, von Trier and Bier have rabid fans in Toronto) probably has as much to do with the middle power status and sensibility of both countries. Like Denmark, Canada isn’t exactly a steadfast believer in its right to do whatever the hell it likes, like more powerful, bellicose states. Neither country seems to believe it’s what Hegel might call a world historical state.

This position makes black comedy in particular the most compatible form, and it also makes sympathy with the marginalized, and awareness of the drawbacks and limitations of larger more monolithic structures, more likely. In a world (and an art form) increasingly obsessed with the bottom line, that emphasis on the discontented, the irrational, the irredeemable, is what makes recent Danish cinema essential and bracing viewing ■

STEVE GRAVESTOCK

Associate Director of Canadian Programming at the Toronto International Film Festival Group. Has been programming Nordic films at the Festival since 2001. Author of “Don Owen: Notes on a Filmmaker and His Culture” and a frequent contributor to Cinema Scope.

STRONG DOMESTIC MARKET IN 2007

2007 was another good year for the Danish cinema market. Danish films sold roughly 3.2 million tickets, for a market share of around 27%, bolstering Denmark's position as a prime European filmmaking nation.

International festival hits, including *The Art of Crying* directed by Peter Schønau Fog (19 awards) and Ole Bornedal's *Just Another Love Story* (selected for Sundance 2008), did well domestically. Danish moviegoers bought approx. 230,000 tickets to each of the two films. In December, Natasha Arthy's *Fighter* (Generation 14plus) opened to rave reviews and packed theatres.

Already, 2008 is looking to be another strong year for Danish cinema.

Expectations are big for the first half of 2008, which will see the release of Ole Christian Madsen's occupation-era drama *Flame & Citron*, starring Thure Lindhardt and Mads Mikkelsen, and Niels Arden Oplev's *Worlds Apart* (Generation 14plus), the director's first film since hitting it big with *We Shall Overcome* (2006).

Moreover, Pernille Fisher Christensen, who won both the Silver Bear and for Best First Feature in Berlin 2006 with *A Soap*, will be bringing out her new film, *Dancers*, starring Trine Dyrholm. Opening in June is Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's political thriller *What No One Knows*, (Panorama Special), starring Anders W. Berthelsen. For further information, see dfi.dk/english.



Carl Theodor Dreyer on the set of *Jeanne d'Arc* Photo: Danish Film Institute

CARL THEODOR DREYER WEBSITE

The Danish Film Institute is realising a long-held dream of a public Carl Theodor Dreyer website.

The DFI's Carl Theodor Dreyer Archive features a unique collection of working papers, original scripts and research materials for several of the famous Danish director's unrealised films, including *Jesus of Nazareth*, *Maria Stuart* and *Medea* (filmed posthumously by Lars von Trier in 1988 for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR). In addition are personal letters, photographs, film awards, a large collection of clippings, plus a book and article collection.

This collection will now be catalogued and published online, affording film scholars and the public alike access to previously unknown

facets of Dreyer's work and glimpses into his working method, as Dreyer's personal files lay bare the extensive research and other efforts he poured into his films.

Dreyer is arguably the most important Danish filmmaker of all time. His films remain in demand around the world, and considering the global interest in Dreyer and his films, the DFI expects the new website to attract wide attention, especially among institutions and international circles of film scholars, as it optimises future research opportunities. At the same time, the new website will give a wide public the chance to look over the shoulder of the classic Danish cinema artist.

Dreyer's output as a director comes to fourteen features, plus eight shorts and documentaries. In 1959, he published a book, "Om filmen", later translated into English as "Dreyer in Double Reflection: Carl Dreyer's Writings on Film".

TOP 20 / 2007

Population in Denmark: 5.5 m

1	HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX	USA	649.978
2	PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END	USA	585.285
3	SHREK THE THIRD	USA	555.396
4	RATATOUILLE	USA	444.345
5	ANJA AND VIKTOR - FLAMING LOVE	DAN	346.845
6	DIE HARD 4.0	USA	335.328
7	THE SIMPSONS MOVIE	USA	328.529
8	TEMPORARY RELEASE	DAN	309.193
9	SPIDER-MAN 3	USA	287.829
10	THE GOLD OF VALHALLA	DAN	258.298
11	JUST ANOTHER LOVE STORY	DAN	235.801
12	THE ART OF CRYING	DAN	228.303
13	THE LOST TREASURE OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR II	DAN	204.236
14	THE GOLDEN COMPASS	USA	203.762
15	ISLAND OF LOST SOULS	DAN	194.419
16	THE SUBSTITUTE	DAN	180.275
17	MR. BEAN'S HOLIDAY	STO	178.168
18	CASINO ROYALE	STO	174.691
19	NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM	USA	173.279
20	THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM	USA	171.262

Source: Statistics Denmark & Danish Film Institute as per 30.12.07



"Hissen" and director Ole Bendtzen Photo: Peter Himsel

TACKY BERLINERS

Danish director Ole Bendtzen is in the running for this year's Berlin Today Award with his short *Berlin Hair Today* developed and produced at the Berlinale Talent Campus.

BY NANNA FRANK RASMUSSEN

"Mockumentary is probably the closest thing to a genre fit for *Berlin Hair Today*," director Ole Bendtzen says. "*Berlin Hair Today* has a touch of Michael Moore and *Man Bites Dog* about it," he says, describing his film

"Berlin is a melting pot of bad hair!"

as a love letter to the city of Berlin, even as it gently skewers the people who live there.

Bendtzen's protagonist is a Dane who moves to Berlin to discover and savour the German capital's diversity. Hissen is his name, a flamboyant gay hairdresser on a mission to save Berliners' hair.

It goes without saying that Germans are renowned for having bad hair. "Everyone is familiar with the Bundes

League mullet, of course, but equally fascinating are the thousands of colours Germans dye their hair," Bendtzen says. "People in Berlin look like they don't care how they look to other people. Which includes their ugly hairstyles. Berlin is a melting pot of bad hair!

"What I love about my protagonist, Hissen, is how he turned his back on a career as hairstylist to the stars in Copenhagen. Choking on Copenhagen's 'good taste', he leaves for Berlin, home to some of the tackiest people on the planet. Berlin has room for diversity," Bendtzen says.

As for *Berlin Today*, Ole Bendtzen says, "It's simply an excellent idea, which we should adopt for Copenhagen. It would be enormously interesting to see a Chinese person or a Pakistani do a film about the Danish capital. How it looks to other people."

OLE BENDTZEN

MA in Film Studies. Winner of the International Film Comet at the Up-And-Coming Film Festival for Young Film Directors in Hannover, 2004, and the Emerging European Filmmaker award from International Cinema and the Italian National Film School of Italy, Milan, 2005.

FILMOGRAPHY

Berlin Hair Today (2008)
Otium (2006)
Udenfor verden (2005)
Metamorphosis (2003)
Uro (2003)
Venter på Joe (2003)
Lunch Break (1997)

BERLINALE TALENT CAMPUS

Since 2003, the Berlinale Talent Campus has offered emerging filmmakers from around the world a six-day adventure in the German capital. Every year, more than 350 filmmakers participate in workshops, lectures and panel discussions, not to mention international networking. Widely different international filmmakers and experts have been involved as instructors and inspiration. Last year's Talent Campus featured Stephen Frears, Walter Salles, Jasmila Zbavic (Grbavica) and Frederick Wiseman. See berlinale-talencampus.de

Mikael Persbrandt and Lene Endre in *Heaven's Heart* Photo: Bosse Håkansson

Director Simon Staho

SIMON STAHO

Born 1972. Made his feature film debut in 1998 with *Wildside* (1998), starring Mads Mikkelsen. Staho directed both *Day and Night* (2004) and *Bang Bang Orangutang* (2005) with a cast of Swedish actors and Mikael Persbrandt in the leading role. *Day and Night* won the Silver Hugo Award in Chicago and the critics' FIPRESCI Prize in Motovun, Croatia. In *Daisy Diamond* (2007), starring David Dencik (Shooting Star Berlin 2007), Staho returns to a mostly Danish cast. All four of Simon Staho's feature films have competed in San Sebastian. *Heaven's Heart* is his fifth feature film.

SIMON STAHO IN THE BERLINALE SPECIAL

Only a few months after the release of his critically acclaimed *Daisy Diamond*, Danish director Simon Staho's new (and yet unreleased) drama *Heaven's Heart* has been selected to screen in the Berlinale Special by Berlinale head Dieter Kosslick as the only Scandinavian film.

Heaven's Heart is the story of a couple, Lars and Susanna, who have been married for 20 years. They love each other dearly and have created a

happy, secure life for themselves, with well-paying jobs, a big house, two cars and a daughter, who is about to move away from home.

Life has turned out no less happy and comfortable for Susanna's best friend Ann and her husband Ulf. They, too, will shortly be celebrating their twentieth wedding anniversary.

One night, when the two couples are having dinner, Susanna tells the others about an adulterous co-worker.

Her story provokes strong reactions, leading to dramatic confrontations between the two couples that turn their lives and marriages upside down.

Heaven's Heart, starring Mikael Persbrandt and Lene Endre, is a Swedish-Danish co-production by Trollhättan Film AB and XX Film. International sales by Trust Film Sales.

Danish release: Spring 2008

World release, Berlin 2008: February 10

"In this story I want to show what happens to two people who have been happily married for many years, but who are suddenly forced to cope with infidelity."



Rikke Ennis, CEO at Trust Film Sales



Kenneth Wiberg, CEO at Nordisk Film International Sales

ZENTROPA AND NORDISK FILM JOIN FORCES

Zentropa and Nordisk Film have formed an alliance, setting up joint international sales.

Zentropa's international sales company, Trust Film Sales, has long held a strong position in international film sales, while Nordisk Film International Sales' main expertise is in TV sales.

The partnership will already be in place during the Berlin Film Festival. Apart from representing its own films, Trust Film Sales will now also be handling international sales of Nordisk Film titles, while Nordisk Film will be selling both companies' films to Scandinavian broadcasters.

