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#72

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Cannes issue 2011

MELANCHOLIA
OUT OF BOUNDS
VOLCANO
DRIVE





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INSIDE



FILM#72 Cannes issue
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Catalogue in the reverse section gives a view of current Danish feature films, documentaries and short films.

The Danish Film Institute is the national agency responsible for supporting and encouraging Danish film and cinema culture.

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DFI = DANISH FILM INTERNATIONAL

We'll admit it. We Danes can get a little smug sometimes. Maybe it's part of being from a small country. We're so proud when someone does well. It rubs off on everyone. We all feel a little bigger, a little more important. When Noma, for the second year running, is crowned as the best restaurant in the world. When Copenhagen is named the coolest city on Earth. When the TV series *The Killing* beats *Mad Men* in Britain. When Susanne Bier wins an Oscar and there is a Danish imprint on at least half a dozen films this year at Cannes, we just can't seem to stop cheering.

We quickly start believing that we have the world's most creative film industry, the most visionary politicians, the smartest film institute – and the world's best Film Act! Nothing less will do.

But can Danish film keep doing so well? A favourite pastime of the Danish media is regularly proclaiming a crisis in Danish film. NOW the party is over! We're headed for a cliff. And so on. Then, in short order and with a sigh of relief, it is announced that NOW we have turned a corner, the self-proclaimed crisis has lifted. In the last four years alone, we have had at least four major crises and three new golden ages in Denmark.

Regardless of prophecies and proclamations, we at the Danish Film Institute – in partnership with politicians and the industry – work steadfastly, with a view to the long term, to create the best framework for unfurling creative talent. It is a framework that needs to be constantly challenged and developed.

Sure we think we know how to make good films in Denmark. But we also, in all humility, think we can become much better at working with and learning from others.

Considering this year's Danish participation at Cannes and most of the other films treated in this magazine, one thing is plain: "Danishness" is not an island. Lars von Trier may have a fear of flying, but apart from that his orientation is as international as it is Danish. Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive* is produced in Hollywood. Frederikke Aspöck, making her debut as a director with *Out of Bounds*, went to film school in New York. Rúnar Rúnarsson, an Icelandic graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, shot *Volcano* on Iceland. *Room 304* was shot in the Czech Republic, *SuperClásico* in Argentina, *Teddy Bear* in Thailand, *The Ambassador* in the Central African Republic and so on.

Danish film and Danish filmmakers have moved onto the world stage in a big way. The strong artistic results achieved by Danish films are inspired by collaborations with artists and production environments in other countries. We realise this, and it is a trend that the film-policy framework should support and strengthen.

The wheels are already in motion. The new Film Policy Accord 2011-2014 has created even better opportunities for global partnerships. Plus, later this year the Danish Film Institute is setting up a new unit to strengthen international cooperation, in coproduction, cofinancing and development, and coordinate our overall international efforts.

Sure we think we know how to make good films in Denmark. But we also, in all humility, think we can become much better at working with and learning from others.

Henrik Bo Nielsen, CEO



Jim Sturgess and Anne Hathaway in *One Day* Photo: SF Film

Beloved bestseller to the big screen

Making headlines and stirring debate even before it was shot, Lone Scherfig's adaptation of *One Day* is ready for its audience.

Too beautiful. Too glamorous. Too American. A lot of people had a lot of opinions about the choice of Anne Hathaway, the Hollywood star to play smart-mouthed Emma from northern England in Lone Scherfig's adaptation of David Nicholls' bestseller *One Day*.

"Emma is insecure and sarcastic and very British – everything Anne Hathaway is not," Bibi van der Zee of *The Guardian* wrote in an opinion piece entitled "Why Anne Hathaway is so wrong for *One Day*."

It's almost here now, the film that made headlines and stirred debate long before its premiere. *One Day* is scheduled to open in the US on Friday 8 July, and in late September the British can see for themselves how the director of *An Education* interpreted David Nicholls' story about the friendship between awkward northerner Emma and handsome southerner Dexter in a story set on a single date, 15 July, over two decades. Selling 650,000 copies

in the UK alone, *One Day* is a literary phenomenon on a par with Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy.

The Danish director is well aware that expectations run high when a novel that so many feel so passionately about is adapted for film.

"It's always the case when you adapt something. There's a risk of comparison. But I'm not that worried. If you're worried about comparisons, you should stay away from adaptations," Scherfig told *The Guardian*. Nor does the uproar over Anne Hathaway faze her. She is deeply impressed by her American star.

"Anne jumped on a plane to London as soon as she heard I was working on the film, because she really wanted to play the role. I shot some tests of her to see what kind of an actress she is and, luckily, she turned out to be my favourite kind! Her background in dance gives her enormous physical control and musicality, which is extremely important, especially in a comedy," Scherfig told FILM prior to the shoot of *One Day*.

The male lead is played by Jim Sturgess, with Patricia Clarkson and Romola Garai in supporting roles. David Nicholls also wrote the screenplay for the film, which is coproduced by Random House Films and Focus Features.

By Louise Skov Andersen

An eye for emotion

For Manuel Alberto Claro, the DP who shot Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, the camera is a co-actor.

Although Manuel Alberto Claro has said he was never particularly inspired by the Dogme films, it almost seems a given that he would one day be working with Lars von Trier who fathered the Dogme concept. The introduction of hand-held cameras to the serious, but also audience-friendly, Dogme films paved the way for Claro's alert, unpretentious style straddling the intersection of fiction and documentary.

This is not the first time Claro gets to show what he can do at Cannes. His collaboration with director Christoffer Boe reached an early peak in 2003, when *Reconstruction* won the Camera d'Or for best first feature as well as the youth jury's Prix Regard Jeune.



Manuel Alberto Claro and Lars von Trier on the set of *Melancholia* Photo: Christian Geisnæs

Claro and Boe, who first met at the National Film School of Denmark, have continued their creative partnership in *Allegro* and last year's *Everything Will Be Fine*, a enigmatic thriller running in Directors' Fortnight. Claro has described their visual style as the intellectual and constructed in a raw, realistic form.

Dogme films paved the way for Claro's alert, unpretentious style straddling the intersection of fiction and documentary.

Another director who has benefitted from his touch is Heidi Maria Faisst - on *The Blessing and Rebound*. She had Claro dance around the actors as they were moving, which sits well with Claro's conviction that the camera should be a co-actor in the film.

Curiously, Claro was a latecomer to moving pictures. Born in 1970, he started his career as a still photographer. He enrolled at a school of photography and design in Italy at age 20 and later worked in New York and Copenhagen.

He never picked up a film camera until a few months before applying to the National Film School of Denmark, which snapped him up immediately. Graduating in 2001, he later found inspiration for his work in still photographers like Irving Penn, Robert Frank and Jacques-Henri Lartigue.

This year's Cannes Festival is a chance to see Claro working with a director who knows how to stir the audience's emotions - a perfect fit for Claro, whose declared goal is that the photography should always, and above all, insist on emotion.

By Nanna Frank Rasmussen

Totally unpredictable

Stellan Skarsgård's character in *Melancholia* is best man, while Skarsgård's biological son, Alexander, plays the groom. FILM asked the veteran Swedish actor about his longstanding work relationship with Lars von Trier.

You have worked with von Trier on almost all his films from Breaking the Waves to Melancholia. What makes him different from other directors?

"For him, it's all about trying different things and that's a good fit for me. A lot of directors pour their creative energy into preproduction and postproduction, but not von Trier. You never know what to expect when you shoot with him. Everything's in play. It can get pretty hairy."

How has he pulled the rug out from under you?

"There are many examples. In *Dogville*, there was a scene where I had to strong-arm and rape Nicole Kidman. I did that five or six times and figured that scene was in the can. But then von Trier said (Skarsgård imitates the Dane's sharp, almost sadistic hiss, ed.): 'Stellan, don't you think you could play it as a romantic comedy?' So I thought, 'How would Hugh Grant play it?' and tried that."

What does von Trier say when he corrects you?

"He always tells me to tone down my acting: 'Stellan. Less, less, less!' And I'm generally a very minimal actor."

Why do people call him a misogynist?

"It's nuts. Lars isn't black and white. The big American blockbusters are much less nuanced. He's the director who has given the best roles to women over the years. In fact, his female roles are basically about himself."

"If I'm ever going to get a really good role in one of his films, I would have to have a sex change operation."

So you wouldn't mind playing a woman in a von Trier film?

"By all means! If I'm ever going to get a really good role in one of his films, I would have to have a sex change operation."

By Rune Skyum-Nielsen



Stellan Skarsgård in *Melancholia* Photo: Christian Geisnæs

THE ONLY REDEEMING FACTOR IS THE WORLD ENDING

Pulling himself out of his depression with *Antichrist*, Lars von Trier is back to pique the world with *Melancholia*, a film about a subject as provocative as the end of the world. Ironically, it seems that the director, more than anything, has made a film that piques himself. As he tells Per Juul Carlsen, he's not sure he actually likes it. *Melancholia* may even be his first mainstream film.

BY PER JUUL CARLSEN

“Do you remember the Jiminy Cricket song at the end of the Disney Christmas special? At one point, a deer wanders in to listen and behind the deer’s ear a rabbit pokes out its head. That’s roughly the zone this film operates in,” Lars von Trier says.

The director’s *Antichrist* hit theatres only a couple of years ago and its graphic images of small children falling out of windows and female genitalia being scissored off are still burnt into our retinas. And now von Trier, the *enfant très terrible* of European cinema, claims that his new film *Melancholia* is like those perversely cute Disney animals? That’s almost more disturbing to imagine than the slow-motion shot of a boy falling towards death or Charlotte Gainsbourg’s mutilated genitals in *Antichrist*. Thankfully, he quickly shatters that impression, adding, “But the world will end even for the little rabbit and that annoying cricket.”

That’s more like it. Now von Trier is back in familiar territory. That is, in a place where we almost feel that we have a handle on him. Full of disturbing stories and diabolical wit, with a unique gift for making sense of madness. Personally, however, von Trier is very uncertain about whether it’s the right place.

“They showed me a mock-up of a poster and some stills and a trailer for *Melancholia*, and I went, ‘I don’t know this film.’ ‘But this is the one you made.’ ‘I certainly hope not,’ I said.”

“I’m writing a director’s statement on *Melancholia*, and I thought I’d write a negative one that highlights the film’s weak points. I feel called to do it. I may have made a film I don’t like.”

With practically any other filmmaker in the world, those words would sound disturbing, even sad. But not in his case. The words are precisely as ambiguous and self-contradicting as they ought to be when they are coming from von Trier. Obviously, it’s not good that he has made a film he may not like, but in his case it doesn’t matter so much. Especially because, however dubious, his enthusiasm for *Melancholia* is obvious and abundant.

The 55-year-old director appears to be in fine form as he greets me in his personal Führer bunker in Filmbyen, the Danish “Film Town” that occupies a former military base in Avedøre near Copenhagen. He’s accommodating and answers every question amiably, even the bad ones, blurting out that he’s “actually doing pretty well.” He’s quit drinking, he says, and now has more time to read, authors like Dostoyevsky and Thomas Mann. The impression is a far cry from the sickly, bloated patient with the wavering, unsteady gaze who presented *Antichrist* two years ago at Cannes. It’s hard to understand that this small, cautious man is the same director whose films make critics go ballistic, especially in the US and the

UK. But, considering that he has the surplus of humour to undermine his own film in a piece of PR writing, he would appear to be in a pretty good place right now.

“They showed me a mock-up of a poster and some stills and a trailer for *Melancholia*, and I went, ‘I don’t know this film.’ ‘But this is the one you made.’ ‘I certainly hope not,’ I said. It consists of a lot of over-the-top clichés and an aesthetic that I would distance myself from under any other circumstances. I hope that under all of that, a film is hiding that I actually have some love for. It reminds me of those Luchino Visconti films I always enjoyed that were like whipped cream on top of whipped cream. I went overboard, blasting Richard Wagner. I made the film with a pure heart and I couldn’t have done it better, and everyone did a good job. But when I see clips from it, I think, ‘I’d be damned. That was unpleasant.’ I’m usually madly in love with everything I do. I’m probably the most self-satisfied director you’ll ever meet. But this film is perilously close to the aesthetic of American mainstream films. The only redeeming factor about it, you might say, is that the world ends.”

According to the director’s own PR department, he has made “a beautiful film about the end of the world”, which sure sounds very von Trier-esque in its ambiguity. But just as von Trier-esquely, he rejects his company’s tagline. He does not consider



Melancholia Photo: Christian Geisnæs



Melancholia. Framegrab



Melancholia Photo: Christian Geisnæs

Melancholia to be about the end of the world and the human race but about humans acting and reacting under pressure. The idea for the film emerged while he was in treatment for the depression that has haunted him in recent years. A therapist told him a theory that depressives and melancholics act more calmly in violent situations, while “ordinary, happy” people are more apt to panic. Melancholics are ready for it. They already know everything is going to hell.

That notion grew into the story of two sisters who react very differently to the news that the planet Melancholia, which had been hiding behind the sun, is hurtling through the Solar System on a collision course with Earth. One of the sisters, played by American actress Kirsten Dunst, is celebrating her wedding in lavish style at a luxurious castle when Melancholia appears in the night sky, throwing humanity and the two sisters’ relationship for a loop. Most astrophysicists would probably reject the idea of a planet suddenly tearing itself loose from its orbit and barreling straight across the Solar System, but to the director who once used a chalk-lined floor as a set for his films *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, such fussy objections are irrelevant. The wonders of the human psyche during a disaster, not the laws of nature, are put under the microscope in *Melancholia*.

“I like it when things are sharply contrasted. That’s why I like juxtaposing all the silly details with the end of the world. When the Earth is ready to crumble between our fingers, whatever we do in the way of heroic conquests or petty family squabbles doesn’t matter.”

That’s as close as von Trier will go to discussing the plot of *Melancholia*. He will reveal, though, that a large part of the film takes place on a golf course.

“I steal everything from other films and I stole that idea from Michelangelo Antonioni’s *La Notte*,

which is also set on a golf course. There’s something oddly melancholy about golf courses. They go on forever and, if you take away all the golfers – and you won’t find a single one here – they’re amazingly cultivated landscapes. I always loved golf courses and graveyards.”

Melancholia’s aesthetic is another subject dear to von Trier’s heart. More than anything, it’s the film’s aesthetic that makes him unsure about whether he even likes his film.

“Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* has a 30-page discussion of what is the greatest work of art of all time. Proust reaches the conclusion that it’s the overture to Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, so that’s what we pour all over this film, pushing it for all it’s got. I haven’t used so much music in a film since *The Element of Crime* (from 1984, ed.), but here we wallow in it. It’s kind of fun, actually. For years, there has been this sort of unofficial film dogma not to cut to the music. Don’t cut on the beat. It’s considered crass and vulgar. But that’s just what we do in *Melancholia*. When the horns come in and out in Wagner’s overture, we cut right on the beat. It’s kind of like a music video that way. It’s supposed to be vulgar. That was our declared intention. It’s one of the most pleasurable things I’ve done in a long time. I didn’t have to force it out, like in *Antichrist*, not at all. Cutting on the beat is pleasurable.

“When my mother was on her deathbed, I found out that I wasn’t a Trier after all but came from a German family. I always found Nietzsche interesting and now I’m reading Thomas Mann. The Germans have always influenced me. At one point, I was tapped to direct Wagner’s *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth, but it turned out that they didn’t have the money for it anyway, because I was far too ambitious. I have always flirted a bit with the good Herr Wagner, and in *Antichrist* we inched towards a kind of German Romantic painting.

Indeed, *sturm und drang* and everything that followed.”

Among everything that followed the composer Richard Wagner and the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, as we know, was an anti-Semitic Austrian with an enthusiasm for Teutonic High Romanticism and a heavy-handed beat.

“Yes, the Nazis certainly cut on the beat. They didn’t pussyfoot around. I’ve always had a weakness for the Nazi aesthetic. A Stuka will outlive a British Spitfire in our consciousness by millennia. That’s my point of view. While a Spitfire has all those rounded forms and was a very beautiful airplane, the Stuka was a revelation. A lot of Nazi design was amazing. They had such big thoughts. The Stuka was a dive-bomber that swooped down and dropped its bombs with great precision. A special feature about the Stuka was that its bombs were equipped with a little whistle, which is staggeringly cynical but also a sign of artistic surplus. Someone was thinking, ‘How can we make this bomb even worse than it already is?’ The whistles were supposed to erode the enemy’s morale. The sound of that whistle was so scary. I was talking with some Danish elite soldiers who told me that when you’re attacking a group of people, let’s say in Afghanistan, you send the first two shots into the abdominal area of those in front. It’s extremely painful to be shot in the stomach. So the ones who are hit in the stomach start screaming, and when they do, the others get scared and lose their concentration. If they had been shot in the head, they would just fall down. There’s this rule to aim the first two shots at the abdomen and the rest at the head.”

Though von Trier is definitely on the outer rim of *Melancholia*’s universe in his musings on Nazi design and cynicism, it’s hard not to apply those thoughts to his films. Might it not reasonably be claimed that the director shoots his audience in the belly by revealing that *Antichrist* is about Satan

ruling the Earth and that the Earth goes under in *Melancholia*, making us, the audience, nervous and uneasy, and hence easy to hit in the head?

"I don't know about that. But, true, it is a principle that I like to follow. Such principles greatly appeal to me. I've done unpleasant scenes before, including in *Dancer in the Dark*, when Björk is going to be hanged. There, we used the lesson I've learned from all kinds of American films, that, as soon as an unpleasant event is announced, the unease should be dragged out endlessly. In *Melancholia* it's dragged throughout the entire film, because we know the world is going to end. And it does, in the last frame. So the audience has to be patient. While disaster films generally take place in the creepiest locations, sewers and worse, this story is set in a wonderful castle. I always hated fairytales, because they had to take place at a wonderful castle. Locations have always had to be these sort of mental images in fairytales, and in this film they most definitely are. It's a kind of fairytale setting, but I certainly hope there's some reality underlying it."

Fairytale castles, Disney and golf courses? Hardly classic von Trier themes – unlike the Nazis and other extreme worldviews. But maybe that's why they fit so well into the director's universe. He was always drawn to that which repels him, notably the clichés of art. He's not just trying to poke the audience and pique us with his films, he's also trying to poke himself. That's a requirement. As he concludes, in a voice rich with perverse joy and sober vexation alike, "*Melancholia* is the least naughty film I ever did. No clitorises are cut off – which might, then, be called empty gestures."

Has he made a mainstream film at last?
 "Well, you could say that. But it's not based on any desire to make a mainstream film. Really, I should be the last person to judge how an audience



Melancholia. Framegrab

will perceive a film. When we made *Epidemic* (in 1987, *ed.*), we were so sure the points would be rolling into our bank accounts. But how many people saw it on the opening weekend – maybe 137? I couldn't say anything about a film's appeal to a mainstream audience."

At any rate, it makes good sense to do a whipped-cream mainstream film about the end of the world. A raw, experimental art film about the end of the world would more or less neutralise itself and make for a predictable and uninteresting statement.

"Luckily, I tend to react to myself, so I hope the next film will be naughtier," von Trier says. By all indications it will.

"I have splendid plans for a highly erotic film, because my DP on this film, Manuel Claro, at one

point voiced a surprising prejudice. He urged me not to fall into the trap that so many aging directors fall into – that the women get younger and younger and nuder and nuder. That's all I needed to hear. I most definitely intend for the women in my films to get younger and younger and nuder and nuder. I'm warming up to an ambitious project called *Nymphomaniac*. I realise that nymphomania is not a politically correct diagnosis and I know that the validity of the title alone will be contested. But if I do a film called *Nymphomaniac*, and it's nice, I'll quit."

Not likely ■

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

"When the Earth is ready to crumble between our fingers, whatever we do in the way of heroic conquests or petty family squabbles doesn't matter."

LARS VON TRIER

Born 1956, Denmark. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 1983. Von Trier's major films fall into three trilogies: E-Trilogy (*Element of Crime*, *Epidemic*, *Europa*), the Golden Heart Trilogy (*Breaking the Waves*, *The Idiots*, *Dancer in the Dark*), and his US Trilogy (*Dogville* and *Manderlay*, third film yet to be produced). A Cannes laureate, Von Trier has received top awards for four titles: *The Element of Crime* (1984), *Europa* (1991), *Breaking the Waves* (1996), and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), which received the Palme d'Or. Also in Cannes competition was *Antichrist* (2009), a film which generated a wave of international interest and for which Charlotte Gainsbourg won Best Actress. *Melancholia*, billed as "a beautiful movie about the end of the world", is selected for the Official Competition in Cannes 2011.

ZENTROPA

Founded 1992 by director Lars von Trier and producer Peter Aalbæk Jensen. Acknowledged for having reinvigorated the industry with *Dogme 95*. International breakthrough came with Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996). Renown continued with Lone Scherfig's Berlin winner *Italian for Beginners* (2000). Von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) received the Palme d'Or, and also selected for Cannes were *Dogville* (2003), *Manderlay* (2005), *Antichrist* (2009) – and this year's *Melancholia*. Recent films at the Berlinale include Niels Arden Oplev's Crystal Bear winner *We Shall Overcome* (2006), *A Family* (2010) by Pernille Fischer Christensen, and Heidi Maria Faisst's *Rebound* (2011). Launched several films by Per Fly, Annette K. Olesen and Susanne Bier, whose latest *In a Better World* won her an Academy Award. Upcoming films include Bier's *The Bald Hairdresser*, two films by Simon Staho, and Nikolaj Arcel's *A Royal Affair* (see page 36). zentropa.dk



Director Lars von Trier Photo: Christian Geisnæs



Drive Photo: SF Film

DRIVING INTO CANNES

Following *Bronson* and *Valhalla Rising*, the Danish director Nicolas Winding Refn, with a cool cast including Ryan Gosling and Carey Mulligan, is kicking in the doors to the Official Competition at Cannes with his Hollywood-produced action drama *Drive*.

BY EVA NOVVRUP REDVALL

A one-man army. That's how Nicolas Winding Refn describes his approach to filmmaking. Until now, that is, when he's finally starting to have faith that the other people onboard are actually there to help him carry out his vision. It was on the shoot of *Drive*, which is in the run for the Palme d'Or in Cannes, that the pieces finally started falling into place for him – despite all the warnings against working in Hollywood and all the horror stories about meeting resistance and losing creative control.

Shot in Los Angeles, *Drive* happened when the film Refn was supposed to have directed with Harrison Ford fell through.

Instead, he got the opportunity to adapt James Sallis's novel *Drive* after a meeting with the Canadian actor Ryan Gosling. Gosling, who was Oscar-nominated for his supporting role in *Half Nelson* and is considered one of the hottest new names in international film, wanted Refn to direct the adaptation. This was the start of a fruitful collaboration that also gave Refn a chance to bring in a number of other actors he wanted to work with.

In *Drive*, Gosling plays a Hollywood stuntman moonlighting as a getaway driver in Tinseltown's criminal underworld. Refn has a cool cast supporting Gosling, including Carey Mulligan, of Lone Scherfig's *An Education*, and veterans like Albert Brooks and Ron "Hellboy" Pearlman, along with Bryan Cranston and Christina Hendricks, who have achieved worldwide fame in recent years for their roles in the TV series *Breaking Bad* and *Mad Men*. Even the tiny images Refn shows me on his iPhone, as we sit in a Copenhagen café, convey a heady atmosphere of pulp, noir and L.A. romance.

HAPPY IN HOLLYWOOD

"Of course I had heard all the horror stories about working in L.A.," Refn says. The director moved with his parents to New York when he was a small boy, returning to Copenhagen at age 17.

"Everyone kept telling me about all the restrictions I'd be under as a director, which definitely went against everything I'd been doing. But once I met Ryan, it just felt right to make *Drive* and, as I saw it, it had to be shot in L.A., even though it was expensive and difficult and we didn't have a lot of time.

"I came in with all the classic apprehensions, but I can't say it wasn't fun or I didn't get to do what I wanted or it didn't turn out the way I wanted it to. I had a very positive Hollywood experience that way. Or," he laughs, "Hollywood had a very positive me-experience."

A FEVER DREAM

With its stuntman protagonist, *Drive* is a furiously paced action-drama that taps into the whole mythology of Hollywood. Hossin Amini's screenplay, from Sallis's novel, made Refn think of a film like *The Stuntman*, by Richard Rush. Other titles, like *Point Blank* and *Bullit*, popped up as we talked about European directors with Hollywood accomplishments. Refn is fine with being a European away from home. Especially, if he gets to do the kind of genre films he loves.

"An advantage of working in genres is they do well commercially, while nothing keeps you from trying out several different dimensions and levels at once. Working in genres is satisfying artistically and, after all, it's only a plus that genre films find distribution.

"I love things that are way sentimental and I always wanted to do an action adventure in L.A. *Drive* was perfect that way. The book is pretty experimental and jumps around in time and space. The film doesn't, though it does have the sense of a fever

dream," Refn says. His last film, the epic *Valhalla Rising*, was in fact hailed by critics for its hypnotic visuals.

TRAINED IN CANNES

While Refn got an early taste of Danish and international success with his *Pusher* trilogy, *Drive* is the first film he takes to Cannes. But the prestigious festival once offered Refn his first lessons in the close connection between film art and the film market.

"I had my first real encounter with the film industry when I was young and worked at Cannes for several years in a row as a film scout for my uncle. There, I learned that films are things that are bought and sold, and if people aren't hooked within the first ten minutes, they leave. That was really educational. Of course, you want to make great films, but films are also a commodity for an audience," Refn says.

Four years into his career, he got a brutal crash course in the financial realities of film production. Hailed as the great Danish

hope after his first feature *Pusher*, he went bankrupt when his ambitious thriller *Fear X*, starring John Turturro, flopped.

Refn describes his film *Bronson* as mirroring his own evolution as a director. Bronson, the notorious British prisoner Michael Peterson, had a tendency to wreck everything around him until he finally realised he was going nowhere and changed his life around. Today, Refn thinks he has become better at not obsessing over his films and accepting that, if a project won't budge, it's probably better to move on.

SCANDINAVIA IN THE WORLD

With the prospect of walking the red carpet in Cannes and a fistful of exciting projects in the pipeline, the future is looking bright for Refn. Working with Gosling was a pleasure, the director says, and they are hoping to repeat in a remake of the sci-fi film *Logan's Run*, about a future society where everyone is required to die at a certain age.

But first he is relocating to Bangkok in August to do pre-production on his next film, *Only God Forgives*, a Danish production and the first of a pair in a deal with Gaumont and Wild Bunch. Meanwhile, he is writing a screenplay for a thriller, *Walk With the Dead*.

"I certainly hope to be able to move back and forth between projects and countries, because it gives me so much inspiration and energy. A lot of good things are happening in Scandinavia, where you find some of the best Film Acts in the world. But it's also important not to have this 'us vs. them' mentality, and think in terms of new possibilities instead. A lot of us are leaving to make films in English because, let's face it, it's the dominant language. But that doesn't mean we don't take something Scandinavian with us. In that sense, it's easy to think of *Drive* as a Scandinavian film, too, and not just an American film" ■

Drive is produced by Bold Films, Odd Lot Entertainment, Seed Productions and Marc Platt Productions. For further information on *Only God Forgives*, see reverse section.

"I learned that films are things that are bought and sold, and if people aren't hooked within the first ten minutes, they leave."

"I love things that are way sentimental and I always wanted to do an action adventure in L.A. Drive was perfect that way."



Drive Photo: SF Film

"A lot of us are leaving to make films in English because, let's face it, it's the dominant language. But that doesn't mean we don't take something Scandinavian with us. In that sense, it's easy to think of Drive as a Scandinavian film, too, and not just an American film."



Ryan Gosling and Nicolas Winding Refn on the set of *Drive* Photo: SF Film

NICOLAS WINDING REFN

Born 1970, Denmark. Writer, producer and director. Lived in New York between the age of 8 and 17. At age 24, Refn wrote and directed his feature film debut *Pusher* (1996), winning him instant critical acclaim. *Bleeder* (1999) premiered at the Venice Film Festival and won the FIPRESCI Award at Sarajevo in 2000. John Turturro starred in *Fear X* (2003), Refn's English-language, Canadian-Danish coproduction, selected for Sundance. In just one year, Refn wrote, directed, and produced the two follow-ups to his now cult-classic *Pusher: With Blood on My Hands – Pusher II* (2004), and *I Am the Angel of Death – Pusher III* (2005). *Bronson* (2009), described by critics as a modern-day *Clockwork Orange*, was a British production. His Viking epic *Valhalla Rising* (2010) premiered in Toronto and Venice and was highly commended by British and French critics for its mesmerising imagery and original take on the genre. Refn's Hollywood production *Drive* (2011) with Ryan Gosling and Carey Mulligan is selected for the Official Competition in Cannes and is scheduled for US release in September 2011, and the Danish *Only God Forgives* will release in 2012.



Director Nicolas Winding Refn Photo: Jan Buus



Out of Bounds Photo: Nordisk Film

Ever since *Happy Now* earned her the Premier Prix de la Cinéfondation at Cannes in 2004, Frederikke Aspöck, a graduate of NYU, has been feeling the pressure of expectation. The award came with a guarantee that her first feature would be shown in Cannes, and so it is that the Danish director is now debuting for the second time at the Cannes festival, this time with *Out of Bounds*.

BY NANNA FRANK RASMUSSEN

"The first thing they taught us in film school was, Don't work with animals or kids. If something can go wrong, it will go wrong," Frederikke Aspöck recalls. Still, it should come as no surprise that the director included a dog in her first feature *Out of Bounds*, which is reflected in the Danish title *Labrador*. Aspöck seeks challenges and the mantra for her work is "courage".

She has been needing it.

"There is so much pressure on your first feature. It can define your career. Often, it's the film people look back on as crucial to an entire oeuvre. But even though it's so important, it seemed wrong to me to

just go for the obvious and do the things I already knew how to."

THE US TAUGHT ME TO BE BOLD

Aspöck got the courage to plunge into sink-or-swim situations in the United States. She spent ten years in New York, where she trained as a director at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.

"The US taught me to be bold," she says. Her years in New York influenced her in other ways as well. "Americans are very good at complimenting and encouraging each other. So, a fertile community emerges where everyone is fighting for the same thing, and that's hugely important to the collective process of filmmaking. Besides, it comes naturally to me, because I'm deeply grateful for the work people do for me."

"It's important to be courageous in your work and not play it safely. That certainly goes for *Out of Bounds*. In this film I leapt into something I'd never tried before. It's a chamber play with long scenes and very few characters, with the main focus on the acting. I never did that before. *Happy Now* was almost wordless, while my other short film *Sheep* had a lot of dialogue and a lot of people in it. The task this time was to distill the dialogue between very few people."

ON A WIND-BLOWN ISLAND

Out of Bounds is a chamber play set in the open air. A young couple, Stella and Oskar, are visiting her father, Nathan, an artist who lives alone with his dog on a wind-blown Swedish island. When Stella reveals she's pregnant, the new information drives a wedge between the three characters, making their relationships even more precarious than before. Soon, the two men are at each other's throats, because they both think they know what's best for Stella.

The screenplay is by Daniel Dencik, with contributions by Aspöck. Her particular concern was weaving nature into the story almost like a separate character in itself.

"I love it when outside circumstances force inner change. Also, we use the wild, unforgiving landscape to illustrate the theme in *Out of Bounds* – that we humans are fragile, isolated and utterly alone in the world. There's no one we can trust. You may feel connected to a community or your boyfriend, friend or family, but you can't trust anyone 100 percent. The sweeping Swedish landscape helps drive that home."

It was Aspöck's strategy of challenging herself that compelled her to do a film with such a bleak



Director Frederikke Aspöck Photo: Mikkel Tjellesen



Out of Bounds Photo: Nordisk Film

"I love human absurdities, when people look silly or goofy. I'm not so much into slickness or perfection. I never aim for that."

worldview. The feeling of isolation she saw in Antonioni's *L'Avventura* inspired her, though she never personally subscribed to the notion that we are alone in the world.

"I'm familiar with the ideology, but it doesn't belong to me. But I decided I could do a film that presented a worldview that's not my own. In fact, in the process what happened was I found myself thinking, 'It's true, we are alone!' But I find that to be such a cynical view of humanity and it runs against everything I am. I'm a really optimistic, positive and idealistic person. I always made a point of insisting that humans aren't alone. I believe in love and community. But can we ever really trust anyone? That's true for the big questions, like 'Can you trust your partner not to cheat on you?' But it's also true anytime you're crossing the street at a green light. Will the car that's approaching you stop? That's a question of trust. The same is true for a conductor conducting a large orchestra. Will they all set in or will one of them run a saw across the strings?"

WISHY-WASHY

Aspöck is fascinated by miscommunications between people. In *Happy Now*, *Sheep* and *Out of Bounds* the characters all have trouble

"We use the wild, unforgiving landscape to illustrate the theme in *Out of Bounds* – that we humans are utterly alone in the world. There's no one we can trust. You may feel connected to a community or your boyfriend, friend or family, but you can't trust anyone 100 percent."

FREDERIKKE ASPÖCK

Born 1974, Denmark. Holds an MFA in Filmmaking from Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, and a BA in set design from Wimbledon School of Art in London. She has directed several short films, including her thesis film from Tisch, *Happy Now*, which amongst numerous other awards won the Premier Prix de la Cinéfondation in Cannes (2004). Since directing the short *Sheep* (2008), Aspöck has been working on her first feature *Out of Bounds* (2011).

NORDISK FILM

Founded 1906, making it one of the world's oldest production companies. Part of the Egmont media group. From 2008 co-owner of Zentropa with a fifty percent sharehold. Catalogue from recent years include Christoffer Boe's Camera d'Or winner *Reconstruction* (2003), Paprika Steen's directorial debut *Aftermath* (2004), Asger Leth's DGA Award winner *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* (2006), Niels Arden Oplev's Berlin contestant *World's Apart* (2008), veteran filmmaker Nils Malmros' *Aching Hearts* (2009), and Birger Larsen's *Super Brother* (2009), also in Berlin. Michael Noer and Tobias Lindholm's prison drama *R* was selected Best Danish film 2010 and won the top award in Göteborg. Releases in 2011 include Frederikke Aspöck's feature debut *Out of Bounds*. www.nordiskfilm.dk



Out of Bounds Photo: Nordisk Film

communicating with each other. They live fairly normal lives, but Aspöck comes in and shows us that the characters are all really confused about what's expected of them. Perhaps that's why they can sometimes seem a bit wishy-washy.

"I love characters with flaws, when you can't tell who's the hero and who's the villain. I'm very interested in people's weaknesses and the comedy inherent therein. I love human absurdities, when people look silly or goofy. I'm not so much into slickness or perfection. I never aim for that. I once did a commercial where the set designer tried to get a handle on my intentions by going, 'Okay, so you want it ugly in the cool way?' But no, never in the cool way! Everyone has flaws and I find that charming. I want to bring that out."

Does that mean you like flawed films?

"Yes! That's why it's so cool to watch first and second features. I love it when you can spot the mistakes. The films are sometimes wildly sophomoric, and that's okay, too. One of my favourite films is Mike Nichols' *The Graduate* where he's messing around with zooms, the sound is sometimes way out there and he is playing around with all these crude effects. But it works, because it's super fresh. You can tell the guy has leapt into the

abyss, but his courage holds him up. His enthusiasm for the film provides the uplift."

RUNNING IN CANNES

Clearly, Aspöck loves filmmaking. Her New York friends had an expression for the times when she would disappear from the outside world and enter the world of cinema. "Freddie Friday" they called it when Frederikke (Freddie) began and ended her Fridays at the movies.

"I pulled out the plug, went to the movies and watched four or five films in a row," she says.

Aspöck caught the movie bug early and first went to Cannes to watch movies at age 20 – when she could get away from her job as a runner at the Scandinavian stand. The festival is close to her heart and not just because of the history.

"Cannes has a tradition of picking experimental and brave films that push the limits – the same kind of films that fascinate me. So, of course it fills me with joy, pride and gratitude to get to show my debut feature at Cannes" ■

Out of Bounds is produced with support from the talent fund New Danish Screen. For further information on the film, see reverse section.

ERUPTION



Volcano Photo: Fine & Mellow

“Volcano is a love story with conflicts most people will recognise. In every one of my characters – it doesn’t matter if it’s an old man or a young girl – I can see traits of myself.”



Volcano Photo: Fine & Mellow

“Hannes represents an outdated model of masculinity that today seems almost archaic. He is from a time when there was no such thing as the ‘sensitive male’.”

Complex emotions are played out in Rúnar Rúnarsson’s first feature film *Volcano*, a Danish production selected for Directors’ Fortnight. The Icelandic director’s uniquely condensed style attracted attention early on in his three award-winning short films *The Last Farm*, *2 Birds* and *Anna*.

BY KATRINE SOMMER BOYSEN

Rúnar Rúnarsson was just in his teens when he decided to go for a career as a film director. At age 17, he and a friend made the short film *Toilet Kultur*, a single continuous shot of absurd events witnessed from the depths of a public lavatory bowl.

The film was accepted to the Nordisk Panorama festival and the young Icelander was stoked. Soon, he was applying to the National Film School of Denmark.

What ultimately got Rúnarsson into the Film School in Copenhagen was *The Last Farm* (2004), his short film about a 83-year-old Icelandic farmer whose wife dies just a few days before they were supposed to leave their farm and go into a retirement home. Unable to deal with the reality of his loss, he keeps her death a secret. The film, which was nominated for an Oscar, struck the singular note that has since become a Rúnarsson hallmark: his rare ability to depict people at vulnerable crossroads in life.

Other fateful junctures are found in Rúnarsson’s two award-winning student films, *2 Birds* (2008) and his graduation film *Anna* (2009), which in separate ways describe the necessary but tough losses of innocence in childhood and youth. *2 Birds* was nominated for a host of awards, including a Palme d’Or at Cannes in 2008.

A RETIRING JANITOR

Like *The Last Farm*, *Volcano* tells the story of an elderly man. Hannes, who has worked his whole life as a janitor at a public school, is now facing retirement and he doesn’t like what he

sees. Why would a young director choose to make his first feature about a retiring janitor?

“As I see it, there’s not much distance thematically between my short films and *Volcano*. Each in its own way is about crossroads. One of the things that interest me most is how people navigate the transition from one stage in life to the next, whether from childhood to adolescence or adolescence to adulthood. Or, as in this film, someone is heading into the final phase of life. Someone who, as long as he can remember, has been defined by his job and now has to come to terms with a whole other set of circumstances,” Rúnarsson says.

“*Volcano* is a love story with conflicts most people will recognise. In every one of my characters – it doesn’t matter if it’s an old man or a young girl – I can see traits of myself.”

In *Volcano*, it is not just Hannes’ approaching retirement that turns his life upside down. An unexpected event forces him to step up and take charge, even as no one in his immediate circle has much faith in him.

EMOTIONAL OUTBURST

Are you looking to portray a particular image of masculinity in Hannes?

“In a lot of ways Hannes represents an outdated model of masculinity that today seems almost archaic. He is from a time when there was no such thing as the ‘sensitive male’, which creates friction with the new generation that his son and daughter belong to,” Rúnarsson says.

The generation gap is evident in things like Hannes’ inability to show his feelings around people, which can make him seem like a cold, hard man.

“On this point he’s different from today’s norm. Today, it seems like any declaration of love is supposed to have as large an audience as possible. In the film, though, we quickly see that Hannes is anything but emotionally crippled. He just doesn’t like to share his private love with others,” Rúnarsson says.

“This generation gap causes a lot of communication conflicts between children and parents. Hannes’ son, who’s divorced, can’t see why his mother should put up with the tone Hannes uses around her. But, of course, they are shaped by such different traditions that it’s impossible to compare their norms, much less determine whose are best.”

Choosing to shoot in Rúnarsson’s native Iceland was no coincidence. The volcano of the title is obviously hard to translate to a Danish context. It serves both a specific and a metaphoric purpose.

“*Volcano* is set on the outskirts of an Icelandic town where everyone was evacuated because of a volcanic eruption 38 years before. Hannes and his family were among the evacuees, but they never returned once the danger passed, which gave the family a certain rootlessness,” Rúnarsson says.

Metaphorically, the volcanic element is also expressed as the emotional outburst building up steam under Hannes’ hard shell.

“Hannes’ inner life is so chaotic, probably because he never learned to be in touch with it the same way we do today. So, when his world collapses, certain repressed emotions come gushing out that he finds himself unable to articulate. And that’s a formidable thing” ■



Volcano Photo: Fine & Mellow

*“As I see it, there’s not much distance thematically between my short films and *Volcano*. Each in its own way is about crossroads.”*

Volcano is produced with support from the talent fund New Danish Screen. For further information on the film, see reverse section.



Photo: Fine & Mellow

RÚNAR RÚNARSSON

Born 1977, Iceland. Graduated in direction from the National Film School of Denmark, 2009. Has won scores of international film awards for his three short films: *Last Farm*, Oscar nominated in 2006, *2 Birds*, nominated for a Palme d’Or in 2008, and his graduation film *Anna*, chosen for Cannes’ Directors’ Fortnight in 2009. Also in Directors’ Fortnight is *Volcano* (2011), Rúnarsson’s debut feature.

FINE & MELLOW

Founded 2002 by producer Thomas Gammeltoft. The company’s first feature film was the drama-comedy *Stealing Rembrandt* (Jannik Johansen, 2003). Hella Joof’s *Oh Happy Day* (2004) sold to Disney for a US remake. *Chinaman* (2005), starring US-Chinese diva Vivian Wu, was award-winning director Henrik Ruben Genz’ second feature film. Another Jannik Johansen feature is *Murk* (2005), a thriller co-written with Oscar winner Anders Thomas Jensen. *Terribly Happy* (Henrik Ruben Genz, 2008) won the Grand Prix in Karlovy Vary, and expected to release in 2012 is Ruben Genz’ next film *In Heat*. Three feature debuts in 2010-11: *Rosa Morena* (Carlos Oliveira), *Skyscraper* (Rune Schjøtt) and *Volcano* (Rúnar Rúnarsson). www.finemellow.dk

IF WALLS COULD TALK

Birgitte Stærmoose's feature film debut *Room 304* is a multi-plot drama in which the visual style and the exploration of the wordless intimacy between characters carry as much weight as the elegantly told story revolving around a mysterious gunshot. Stærmoose's award-winning short film *Out of Love* has screened at festivals worldwide.

BY EVA NOVVRUP REDVALL

What happens between people when they don't say anything? Or when the focus is less on the actual lines than on what happens between them? As a director, Birgitte Stærmoose has explored this territory in such award-winning shorts as *Small Avalanches* and *Sophie*.

More recently, she won a Special Mention at the Berlin Film Festival for *Out of Love*, a short film inhabiting the space between documentary and

fiction. Filmed in Kosovo, *Out of Love* had children from Pristina tell stories of their loss, fear and hope, with the post-war-ravaged city as both a poetic and gloomy presence.

Stærmoose is making her debut as a feature film director with an atmospheric story, *Room 304*, which deftly condenses the world and its complicated relationships into a microcosm in which anything can happen – or can have happened. From the very first frame, blood and a single gunshot loom large in the narratively inventive

story featuring an impressive cast of Danish and international stars.

MULTITUDE OF STORYLINES

Room 304 takes place in a Copenhagen hotel over three fateful days. The ensemble includes the bereaved owner of the hotel (Mikael Birkkjær) and his wife (Trine Dyrholm), a lonely flight attendant (Ariadna Gil), a dishwasher (Luan Jaha) and his wife (Ksenija Marinkovic) who are seeking revenge for past crimes, the lovelorn hotel manager (Stine

BIRGITTE STÆRMOSE

Born 1963, Denmark. MFA in Film and Media Arts from Temple University, Philadelphia. Early work includes the award-winning short films *Now, Look at Me* (2001), *Small Avalanches* (2003), nominated for Best European Short at EFA, *Letters from Denmark* (2006), *Principles of Attraction* (2006), and *Sophie* (2006), which screened in competition at Sundance. *Out of Love* (2009) won the Prix EFA in Rotterdam and received a Special Mention at Berlin. Release 2011: Stærmoose's feature film debut *Room 304*.

ALPHAVILLE PICTURES COPENHAGEN

Founded 2003 by director Christoffer Boe and producer Tine Grew Pfeiffer, who had collaborated at Nordisk Film on *Reconstruction* (2003), winner of the Camera d'Or in Cannes. Today joined by Jesper Morthorst, selected for Danish Producer on the Move 2011. Titles include Boe's *Allegro* (2005), *Offscreen* (2006), and *Everything Will Be Fine* (2010), which showed at Directors' Fortnight in Cannes. Birgitte Stærmoose's documentary *Out of Love* (2009) won the Prix EFA in Rotterdam and received a Special Mention in Berlin. Releases 2011: *Beast* by Christoffer Boe (see page 22) and *Room 304* by Birgitte Stærmoose. www.alphavillepicturescopenhagen.com



“I have always been fascinated by hotels as a secret place outside of time and space. What happens behind all those closed doors?”

Director Birgitte Stærmoose Photo: Jette Jors



Lourdes Faberes and Ksenija Marinkovic in *Room 304*. Framegrab



Ariadna Gil in *Room 304*. Framegrab

in any language. It's not hard to understand people's intentions and feelings even if you don't understand the words that are spoken. I work with a sixth sense, I intuit and feel.”

The film's visual style was developed in close collaboration with the New York-based Croatian DP Igor Martinovic, focusing on the composition of the image as a co-narrator and on a visually subjective style.

“This was my first time working with Igor. It was a rewarding experience, but we also spent a lot of time together watching and discussing films. We talked a lot about composition and framing with negative space, about playing around with subjectivity and focus, and telling about what you don't see based on the notion that it's there the excitement often lies, what makes the audience watch.”

BETWEEN THE LINES

The visual concept was developed over five weeks, and Stærmoose describes the shoot as extremely well prepared overall. Nevertheless, there is more to preparation than just having all the answers. It's about laying a solid foundation that gives you the luxury of allowing things to evolve on set.

“What's in front of the camera must have life. When I work with actors, I always hope they will surprise me. That we, as a team, will surprise ourselves. I'm there to be gripped by emotion.”

The life, Stærmoose says, grows out of everything that happens in between the written lines. The main task for a director in many ways is to bring forth all the things that aren't in the script.

“When you are interested, as I am, in the secret and the intimate, you have to allow it some space. I want to get a glimpse into the soul through my films, to go deeper into people than we usually go. If you want to get close to things, you have to leave room for doubt and vulnerability. That's when a film gets really interesting” ■

For further information on Room 304, see reverse section.

Stengade), and a staff member (David Dencik), who is struggling to smile more at the front desk. Their lives are entangled when they are forced to make momentous decisions.

For Birgitte Stærmoose, the idea for the film began with a desire to do a film that plays with time and uses a multitude of characters to explore questions of intimacy and forgiveness.

“I was drawn to telling a multi-plot story with extended scenes containing all the qualities of a chamber play,” the director says. “The idea was to have different storylines following people who, up to that point, have had strategies for living their lives. The film explodes those strategies, and the characters are forced to change and behave accordingly. I like the ability of multi-plot films to really explore a theme. All the storylines in *Room 304* revolve around intimacy, forgiveness and frailty in the people we meet.”

SLEEPING IN THE SAME BEDS

Stærmoose and her co-writer Kim Fupz Aakeson quickly settled on a hotel as an attractive, secretive framework for bringing people together.

“I have always been fascinated by hotels as a secret place outside of time and space,” she says. “What happens behind all those closed doors? A hotel is at once extremely intimate and strangely anonymous. You're away from home and trying to create an

artificial space that is pressed into serving as a private space. You're so close to other people, sleeping in the same beds that other people just slept in.”

One storyline was written specifically for Luan Jaha, a local actor Stærmoose met when she was making *Out of Love* in Kosovo. The other characters and situations grew out of what she and Aakeson personally wanted to see in a film.

“In some way you are always making films for yourself first,” the director says. “The films I like are films that provoke me visually and make me feel something. I often can't remember the endings of films I've seen, but I remember how I sensed them, how they made me feel – the look, the mood, the acting. As a director, I'm more involved in *how* things are said than in *what* is said. I want to explore the characters' vulnerabilities and be surprised.”

EIGHT DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

The many non-Danish actors give *Room 304* a distinctly international feel. Personally, Stærmoose doesn't consider herself to have a “non-Danish” approach to filmmaking. She simply thrives in international settings.

“My everyday life is very Danish, but I take to international contexts like a fish to water, perhaps because I lived abroad for some years,” she says. “Directing *Out of Love* in Albanian and *Room 304* in eight different languages, I realized that I can work



Stine Stengade and Mikael Birkkjær in *Room 304*. Framegrab



NO SPREADSHEETS, PLEASE!

Producer Jesper Morthorst Photo: Jette Jors

A passion for cinema is what drives Jesper Morthorst, this year's Danish Producer on the Move in Cannes. He believes that a knack for spotting talent and the ability to work in a close creative partnership with the director are cardinal virtues for any producer who wants to succeed.

BY NANNA FRANK RASMUSSEN

"I see my principal task as understanding the talent I'm collaborating with. I have to understand the director's visions and support them. If I can't do that, I'd rather back out of a project entirely than expend a lot of energy trying to change it."

Jesper Morthorst has found the recipe for becoming the best producer *he* can be. In his work, he counts on having an almost intuitive sense of his director and pushing her to dare carry out her artistic ambitions. Unlike the prevailing image of a producer as someone tasked with reining in runaway financial and creative ideas, Morthorst makes a virtue of not being the one who always says no. He would rather nurse talent and supply the courage that can elude even the most dedicated director over the long haul of a film's production. That's where Morthorst thinks his talents lie.

It's important to find out what you're good at, he says. "As a producer, you have to be able to recognise both your strengths and your weaknesses, and then you just have to put the blinds on and power through. Focus is one of the greatest virtues a producer can have."

ARTHOUSE PRODUCER

Ever since Morthorst was 10 or 11 and his parents dragged him to see *Pelle the Conqueror*, *The Last Emperor* and other spectaculars at the local cinema, he has harboured a profound interest in the medium of film. Today, he nurtures that passion both at the cinema and at home, where his collection of films keeps him entertained when he's not working or going to the movies with his girlfriend, who's also a filmmaker.

Morthorst always knew he wanted to work in film, though he dabbled in other areas of the industry before he found his place as a producer.

Initially, he wanted to be a film journalist, allowing him to combine his two great interests, film and writing. But all that changed when he started studying film and media at Copenhagen University. Once he was introduced to the practical side of filmmaking, he was hooked. Armed with his bachelor's, he enrolled at Copenhagen's alternative

JESPER MORTHORST

Born 1977, Denmark. Graduated from the alternative film school Super16, 2006, and holds a BA in Film and Media studies from the University of Copenhagen. Worked at Nimbus Film 2003-2008. Presently at Alphaville Pictures Copenhagen. Morthorst's shorts and documentaries have competed at such major festivals as Cannes, Berlin and Venice, and have won awards in Berlin, Rotterdam, Melbourne, Sydney, Stockholm, Sao Paulo, Los Angeles (AFI) and Rome. Was nominated for a European Film Award for Best Short Film in 2010 for Birgitte Stærmosen's *Out Of Love*. Collaboration with Stærmosen continues on their first feature film *Room 304* with domestic release this fall. Is presently developing new feature projects with directors Birgitte Stærmosen and Louise Friedberg, and is producing a new primetime drama series, *Rita*, for the Danish national broadcaster TV 2, to be aired in the fall of 2011.

"I have to understand the director's visions and support them. If I can't do that, I'd rather back out of a project entirely."

film school Super16 and also started working for the Nimbus production company. Today, he works at Alphaville, the arthouse company founded by the director Christoffer Boe.

At Alphaville he has been able to hone his profile as an arthouse producer. Not that there is any guiding principle behind his dedication to small films, he simply goes where his interests take him. "I have tried launching more commercial projects, but I lost interest in them along the way, so I came to the conclusion that I wasn't cut out for that. I think there's a big connection between what you're into and what you're good at."

READY FOR A FRESH CHALLENGE

Morthorst's reputation as a rising star in Danish film and TV was underscored when he was hired to produce a new TV drama series that will broadcast in the fall. "It's completely different from what I usually do. Here, we have to hit home with a million viewers on a commercial channel. But even though the format and the forum are new, I'm not ramping down my demand for quality."

Morthorst's first reaction was surprise when TV 2 offered him the job but also delight at a fresh challenge. After having spent some years now on refining his skills as arthouse producer, he feels ready to try out the TV series format and its inherent call for reaching out to a broader audience.

"I wrote my bachelor thesis on post-revolutionary Iranian film and thank heaven not a lot of other producers did, because then the film world would probably be too boring," he laughs. Diversity in the film landscape does matter, he says, but more importantly, every aspiring producer must carve out his or her own profile and stick with it.

"There are a lot of people in the world who can work an Excel spreadsheet. A lot of people can juggle 5-6 million euros and go 'No, no, no! No helicopter shots!' A good producer, to my mind, is someone who can do everything else but that. Someone who understands people and can spot talent" ■

Jesper Morthorst is producer on Birgitte Stærmosen's feature debut Room 304. See previous page.



Paprika Steen and Anders W. Berthelsen in *SuperClásico* Photo: Shazia Khan

RESTORING MASCULINE DIGNITY

After his tense WW2 blockbuster *Flame & Citron*, Ole Christian Madsen is back with a light love story about the passion for women, football, tango and wine. Shooting in Argentina, the first time ever for a Danish film crew, turned out to be a blast of fresh experience and inspiration, not least for the director. *SuperClásico* is Madsen's first comedy.

SuperClásico is set in Buenos Aires, a fitting arena for a clash of cultures and a love triangle between an ambitious middle-aged Danish woman, her pathetic Danish soon-to-be ex-husband and her vivacious Latin lover – three

characters that gain colour and depth as their stories unfold.

The film takes its title from the annual Argentine football showdown between archrivals Boca Juniors and River Plate, an event the director describes as passion in its purest form. In diplomatic circles, the title also refers to "un caso clásico" – the Argentine term for the quite frequent cases of European women applying for residency in Argentina after falling for a (usually) younger and very hot Latin man.

LIFE IS A PARTY

Christian (Anders W. Berthelsen), the film's male lead, is a middle-aged Danish man who is going to seed. His wine store is going out of business and he

is steadily drinking his way through the remaining inventory. His wife, Anna (Paprika Steen), a football agent, has met Juan Diaz (Sebastian Estevanez), a superstar player on the world-famous Argentine Boca Juniors team. Anna has now left her husband and teenage son in Denmark for a passionate, uncomplicated life of luxury in exotic Buenos Aires. But Christian hasn't returned the divorce papers and one day he decides to defy his fear of flying, jetting across the Atlantic with his son Oscar, in a last-ditch attempt to win back his wife – and his life.

SuperClásico is the final instalment in the trilogy that started with *A Love Story* and *Prague*, the director says. *A Love Story*, the seventh Dogme film, is a raw, challenging look at the lead-in to a break-up.

Prague, a beautiful, haunting drama, details the actual break-up and now *SuperClásico* looks at the post-break-up period. While *A Love Story* and *Prague* were intense chamber plays, *SuperClásico* mixes drama and comedy on a larger scale.

Madsen says he wanted to do a film about restoring masculine dignity, about a man who has to learn to pick himself up after a crushing blow. The director recently went through the divorce wringer himself. On the shoot in Prague, he fell in love with the actress Stine Steengade and later left his wife and two children.

“Normally, when you tell the story of a divorce, you focus on the time when you sit and nurse your emotional wounds,” the 44-year-old Danish director says. “But after *Prague*, I learned that I had yet to tell the story of all the absurd and funny aspects of my own and others’ lives that I find myself laughing at.

“Essentially, I wanted to tell a story about love. *SuperClásico* is about different kinds of love. Every character we meet in the film has an idea about what love is. The problem with our sorrow over love, divorce and loss is that we tend to make a claustrophobic prison for ourselves. This film tries to open that up, put it into a bigger picture and view it in a highly cheerful light. It deals with very serious matters, but it insists on seeing the positive emotions of the situation.”

Footballer Juan Diaz is a person who focuses on the bright side of life, the director says.

“He has a complete openness, great passion and a sense that life is fleeting and must be lived to the fullest. He has decided that his life is a party. We often make the opposite choice, the easy one. After

all, it’s easier to just nurse your wounds, as Christian has been doing for a year when the film opens.”

FOOTBALL, WINE AND TANGO

SuperClásico is written by the director and screenwriter Anders Frithiof August. Buenos Aires was the perfect location for Madsen to convey the light-hearted tone he was after and capture the sensuality of the Argentine capital.

“Buenos Aires is an amazing city to experience and I wanted the film to communicate that. It’s big, chaotic and overwhelming but also beautiful, absurd and poetic. And passionate! A form of passion that is unfamiliar to my protagonist,” he says.

That changes, however, after Anne lets Christian and Oscar move into her house, where Juan Diaz likes to prance around the house butt-naked and a tango-dancing maid gives them a warm welcome! Christian and Oscar are both seduced and lose themselves in the hot, vibrant city with all its football, tango and wine.

In *SuperClásico*, football is as a sounding board for the marital comedy-drama, which gave Madsen a chance to work with something he enjoys – the director is a devotee of football (and wine!).

“Spending time in Argentina has definitely given me a new perspective on the game of football,” he says. “It’s violent, wild, and crazy. I wanted that kind of passion to be reflected in this marriage. Argentina is a country of great passion, controlled passion simmering just below the surface” ■

Film critic Christian Monggaard talked to Ole Christian Madsen on the occasion of the film’s Danish release.

“The problem with our sorrow over love, divorce and loss is that we tend to make a claustrophobic prison for ourselves. This film tries to open that up.”



SuperClásico Photo: Shazia Khan



SuperClásico Photo: Shazia Khan



The Substitute Photo: Erik Aavatsmark



Applause Photo: Carsten Villadsen

OLE CHRISTIAN MADSEN

Born 1966, Denmark. Graduated in direction from the National Film School of Denmark, 1993. Directed the highly acclaimed 6-part drama series *The Spider* (1999), and episodes of the TV series *Taxi* and *Unit 1*. His feature debut *Pizza King* (1999) was followed by the critically acclaimed *Kira’s Reason – A Love Story* (2001), awarded at Mannheim-Heidelberg and Viareggio. *Nordkraft* (2005) brought home Best Actor and Actress awards at Taormina. *Prague* (2006) was awarded in San Jose. The WW2 resistance drama *Flame & Citron* was a record-breaking boxoffice hit in 2008. *SuperClásico* (2011) is Madsen’s sixth feature film and the final instalment in his so-called Love Trilogy. Currently working with Per Fly on a project about Denmark’s military engagement in the war in Afghanistan.

NIMBUS FILM

Founded 1993 by Birgitte Hald and Bo Ehrhardt. Celebrated for several Dogme films, including Cannes winner *The Celebration* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1998), and *Mifune* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1999), triple winner at the Berlinale. Other films include *Dark Horse* (2005), selected for Cannes’ Un Certain regard, *A Soap* (2006), double-winner at Berlin, and *Flame & Citron* (2008), greatest Danish boxoffice success in recent years. Produced *Valhalla Rising* (Nicolas Winding Refn, 2010) and *Submarino* (Thomas Vinterberg, 2010), selected for Berlin Competition. www.nimbusfilm.dk



Director Ole Christian Madsen Photo: Robin Skjoldborg

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

she is, though numbers don’t tell the whole story. Like most great actors, a hallmark of Steen is her unpredictability and secretiveness. The grey area between tragedy and comedy is infinitely wide to her.

DOGME AND BEYOND

The daughter of an actress and a jazz bandleader, Steen started out in the early 1990s playing for laughs on small stages in a string of musical satire shows.

With major roles in movies still a way off, she made her name as a stage actress. In 1997 she was hired as a regular at the Royal Theatre, where she triumphed in *The Fickle-Minded Woman* by Ludvig Holberg, Denmark’s Molière.

She allied herself with the new wave in Danish cinema, the Dogme 95 movement, making a splash as the blonde daughter with a black boyfriend in Thomas Vinterberg’s *The Celebration* (1998). For the first time, she got a chance to play off her singular mix of irony and touching bewilderment.

This powerful performance linked her name to the Dogme movement in the global mind, perhaps disproportionately so. In fact, her roles in two other Dogme films, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen’s *Mifune* (1999) and Lars von Trier’s *The Idiots* (1998), pale next to her performances in the three films that more than any other made her a star in Denmark.

In *The One and Only* (1999), a comedy by Oscar winner Susanne Bier, Steen played a blonde bimbo with a messy love life. Nearly a million Danes – that’s one in every six – went to see the film and Steen won her first Bodil, the Danish film critics’ award.

Bier and Steen continued their partnership to further acclaim in the 2002 drama *Open Hearts*, as Bier again brought out Steen’s vulnerability. As the wife of an unfaithful husband, Steen lays bare a naked pain that is no less affecting than many of her later scenes in *Applause*. Again, Steen won a Bodil.

STRONG WOMEN

In 2002, Jesper W. Nielsen’s *Okay* finally gave her the starring role that unequivocally put her centre stage.

Okay’s domineering social worker Nete was a change of pace for Steen. Nete is a bit of a petty tyrant who sets the agenda with the men in her life, but the harridan façade never entirely conceals the wounded daughter trying to mend a broken relationship with a father dying of cancer. This stellar performance earned Steen another Bodil.

Over time, Steen has grown to portray strong women. In Ole Bornedal’s 2007 science fiction fable *The Substitute* (2007), she radiated a deliciously vicious sarcasm as a substitute teacher from outer space trying to learn the ways of humanity.

Christoffer Boe’s *Everything Will Be Fine* (2010) and Ole Christian Madsen’s comedy *SuperClásico* (2011) are the most recent showcases for Steen’s finely crafted portrayals of headstrong, in-charge women.

With *Applause* in 2009, Steen finally got her big international breakthrough. The richly faceted nakedness of her performance as a famous actress wallowing in loneliness, vanity and alcoholism reminds us that she early on was a near-fanatical admirer of Gena Rowlands in John Cassavetes and Robert De Niro in Martin Scorsese. Finally an all-eclipsing leading role that gave her a chance to display all her weakness and strength in one character ■

A FACE FOR THE CAMERA

Tragic and comic, empowered and helpless, tough and vulnerable – Paprika Steen can do it all, often simultaneously. Danish cinema’s foremost exemplar of a character actress is centre-stage in *SuperClásico*.

BY MORTEN PIIL

“Paprika Steen has a face for the camera,” an American critic wrote after seeing her as a spiritually battered diva in Martin Pieter Zandvliet’s *Applause* (2009). Once, that was not so apparent to the Danish gatekeepers

who ruled on Steen’s acting potential. She was pronounced unsuitable for film, and it’s a story often told in Denmark that she was rejected half a dozen times by the national acting schools before she finally got her foot in the door.

The hitch, most likely, was her failure to conform to the stereotypical concepts of the day of how a successful actress should look, sound or feel. If she wasn’t your typical ingénue, what was she then? Steen’s career now spans more than 23 big and small roles in feature films and a dozen roles in TV series and short films. That’s one answer to what

BOE AND THE BEAST

“The whole intention was to portray the extreme range of emotions, from revulsion to passionate love that a married couple can go through in a single day.” Christoffer Boe



Actor Nicolas Bro and director Christoffer Boe Photo: Simon Ladefoged

As Christoffer Boe's new feature *Beast* shows, making a film doesn't have to be complicated. With the right idea and the necessary determination, you can start shooting tomorrow. Nicolas Bro, Boe's favourite actor, saw the potential right away.

BY LASSE KYED RASMUSSEN

Beast is the story of a writer, Bruno, played by Nicolas Bro, whose ever-lasting, but destructive love for his wife Maxine transforms him from compassionate husband to bloodthirsty beast.

Before this concept was born, all it took was an ambition and a phone call. “We’re shooting a film in January. I don’t have an idea yet, but I’ll get one.” That’s roughly how it went when Christoffer Boe called his regular producer, Tine Grew Pfeiffer, and told her about his audacious plan to start shooting a feature just six weeks later.

A couple of days later, Boe called up again. This time he had a vision. They were going to make a psycho-horror-drama, kind of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* meets *Alien*.

“The whole intention was to portray the extreme range of emotions, from revulsion to passionate love that a married

couple can go through in a single day. I didn’t want to show any of the in-between stuff, so the film was from the get-go envisioned to be very fragmented.”

UNDER COVER OF THE NIGHT

Boe’s solution to the challenge he had set himself was to pull all-nighters in Copenhagen bars. But he didn’t hang at the bar or play the fruit machines. He sat in front of his laptop and, in just six long nights of writing until he was kicked out, he finished the screenplay for *Beast*. Indeed, the frantic pace was essential to the whole process from concept to finished film. “The project got its energy from everything happening so quickly. It was written quickly and executed quickly.”

The film was shot in three short weeks, in Boe’s apartment, on a bare-bones budget. In his case, it seems, haste does not make waste. Nicolas Bro saw the potential of the ambitious project from the

moment he read the story about Bruno, who loves Maxine so much that he’s ready to destroy her, as seen when her infidelity makes him want to carve her up and make love to her in equal parts.

“The script was a treasure chest, with a lot of literary value in the dialogue,” Bro says. “Poetry can make dialogue un-psychological, but here it makes the portrait of Bruno real. When you’re in the place he’s in, reality has exploded,” Bro says.

A WORKING BROMANCE

Beast is Boe and Bro’s sixth collaboration. They first met so long ago neither can remember exactly how, but they really got to know each other when Bro starred in Boe’s still unreleased slow-motion thriller *Prediction*.

As Bro puts it, back then he was just a piece of fruit who got picked for the role. Now, nearly a decade later, the fruit-picking has obviously matured into a working relationship and a personal friendship.

It shows, in the respect and warmth that permeate their conversations, as well as in Boe’s three films with Bro in the lead. In *Prediction*, *Offscreen* and now *Beast*, the director throws one demanding challenge after another at Bro, including breakdowns in public places, nude scenes and bloody assault.

Their collaboration is anything but sparing. Boe describes their method as a “challenging game” and, despite the challenges and humiliations, Bro finds their partnership extremely enriching.

“Working with Christoffer has peeled so many layers from me as an actor,” he says. “Bashfulness, vanity, lack of courage have been shot to pieces. I’ve acquired a set of tools enabling me to do things I wouldn’t otherwise dare to do.”

These tools also benefit Boe who has gained a lot more than a game playmate in Bro. “We often plunge into the abyss – looking for Atlantis,” Boe says. “I’ll do it even though I’m not much of a diver, because I know Bro’s always going to get us to dry land. That’s also why it’s so inspiring to write for an actor whose potential you know.”

A central scene in *Beast* very clearly illustrates Bro’s skills. When Bruno discovers that his wife is cheating on him with a mutual friend, he ambushes the friend on the street and talks him into having a beer with him. Bruno acts friendly in the scene, but a beast born of jealousy and troubled love is growing inside him and is starting to bare its fangs, forcing him to constantly toe the line between amiability and madness.

The scene only works thanks to Bro’s powerhouse performance, Boe says. “There wouldn’t even be a scene if Bro couldn’t go to those extremes. We see the glassy sheen on his eyes that gives the scene a tinge of true madness.”

A BIG PULSATING LUMP OF FLESH

Despite Bro’s realistic-looking madness and the bloody end to Bruno and Maxine’s marriage, Boe’s not out to scare anyone away from marital love. Quite the contrary.

“*Beast* is my attempt to show the true, human face of love. The heart – and love – is often rendered in this delicate pastel-red hue and polished form, when in actuality it’s a big, pulsating lump of flesh with extreme energy and life-force, pumping blood into the arteries until the final throes of death. That’s why



Beast Photo: My Thordal

CHRISTOFFER BOE

Born 1974, Denmark. Graduated in Film and Media, 1996, and in direction at the National Film School of Denmark, 2001. His feature film debut *Reconstruction* (2003) received the Camera d’Or and the Critics’ Week Youth Jury Award in Cannes. Recipient of FIPRESCI’s Director of the Year in 2003. Second feature *Allegro* (2005) was chosen for Venice Days and Toronto, and won the Prix du Jury Jeunes. *Offscreen* (2006) won the Fantastic Jury Award in Austin and the Altre Visioni Award in Venice. *Everything Will Be Fine* (2010) was selected for Directors’ Fortnight in Cannes. Latest feature is *Beast* (2011), Boe’s fifth feature film.

ALPHAVILLE PICTURES COPENHAGEN

Read more page 17.

Beast is such a positive love story, too, because it shows extreme passion playing out within the otherwise bourgeois confines of marriage.”

In that sense, *Beast* has a clear thematic connection to Boe’s past films, which to lesser or greater extent all revolve around love and obsession. But this time the themes are spun out in a bloodier, less refined form. It’s awkward at times, but that’s exactly the point.

“In films, you’re not supposed to directly address the big emotions. You dance around them and build them up. But here we go straight for the emotions and plough into the themes instead of thematising them,” the director says, concluding with a satisfied chuckle. “It’s gorilla filmmaking – with the blood of the beast rushing through its veins” ■

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

“Working with Christoffer has peeled so many layers from me as an actor. Bashfulness, vanity, lack of courage have been shot to pieces.” Nicolas Bro



Teddy Bear Photo: Ruang Rungruang Rattabunditkul



Director Mads Matthiesen Photo: Laust Trier Mork



Teddy Bear Photo: Ruang Rungruang Rattabunditkul

Teddy Bear is about a Danish bodybuilder who goes to Thailand looking for love. Mads Matthiesen's debut feature is a sign of a new trend in Danish cinema that finds directors of narrative films consciously working in the documentary spirit and style.

BY KIM SKOTTE

Dennis, a bodybuilder, is two metres tall and weighs 140 kg. When he flexes his massive muscles and the veins pop out like chiselled marble, the super-heavyweight is a fearsome sight indeed. But his looks are deceiving. Inside this 40-something mountain of muscle hides a little boy who still lives at home with his pint-sized, tough-as-nails mother. When the shrivelled little woman is upset and acts hurt, her son is instantly reduced to a toothless teddy bear who would do anything to please his mother.

The mother's iron grip on her son has made him timid. There is very little confidence and no machismo in the muscleman's dealings with the opposite, allegedly weaker, sex. Today's demanding women seem beyond the reach of the teddy bear who can never find the right words to say or the confidence to say them. Then, it's a lot easier to just pump iron and at least look 110 percent like a real man.

Maybe Denmark's sharp-tongued, liberated women are the problem? In any event, verging on desperation, the giant goes to Thailand to try his luck with one of the many petite girls in Asia's

candy land. Without telling his mother, of course, who thinks he's at a bodybuilding competition in Düsseldorf to take home another glittery eyesore for the trophy rack in their tiny apartment. Dennis, of course, has his eye set on an entirely different kind of trophy.

THE BODYBUILDER AND THE FILMMAKER

The visual contrast between the colossus Dennis and his diminutive mother, and between him and the delicate Thai girls, is an effective running contrast in *Teddy Bear*. Dennis is rarely out of the frame and he fills it well.

Danish champion bodybuilder Kim Kold lends his body and credible acting chops to the character of Dennis, like he did in Mads Matthiesen's short film *Dennis* from 2007, selected for Sundance, about the tight relationship between a bodybuilder and his domineering mother, a theme now developed in *Teddy Bear*. Matthiesen co-wrote the script with the award-winning Danish director Martin Pieter Zandvliet (*Applause*).

"Thanks to Kim Kold, I've spent a lot of time in the bodybuilding community. The funny thing is that the bodybuilders are really masculine but also very sensitive and quite feminine. Kim Kold has both these qualities, too, strength and delicacy. So he had no problem getting into the character, though in real life he's nothing like Dennis."

Kim Kold is a Hercules, 140 kg of buff muscle. His biceps measure 53 cm and he can bench press 1000 kg.

Kim Kold is a Hercules, 140 kg of buff muscle. His biceps measure 53 cm and he can bench press 1000 kg. The director is his gangly antithesis.

The director, for his part, is the gangly antithesis of pumped-up quads and oiled-up, ripped deltoids.

"Kim and I are polar opposites, but we share a certain vulnerability about some of these issues, so we understand each other. The story I wanted to tell, Dennis' story, mirrors something in me," Matthiesen says. Kold has an extreme psyche and a unique ability to focus on the task at hand, he adds. Before the film, Kold was slowly retiring from bodybuilding on the elite European level. He was ramping down his regimen. But a lot of hard work and sweat got the 45-year-old Kold back in shape. He had to look right. His body fat had to come down so his veins would pop. In terms of both intense focus and the determination to make things look right, the director and his star would appear to have a lot in common.

FICTION INSPIRED BY DOCUMENTARIES

It has been years since the Danish Dogme 95 movement created an effective ritualised framework around exciting low-budget filmmaking. There's

a new trend in Danish films these years. With an extreme focus on the realism of the framework, young directors are making features for little money based on what you might call an unofficial dogma of documented fiction. Like last year's prison film *R*, directed by Matthiesen's friend Michael Noer, with Tobias Lindholm, Matthiesen in *Teddy Bear* largely lets the framework's authenticity dictate the story. While Noer came to fiction from documentaries, however, Matthiesen has a background in fiction films.

"I've been mixing reality and fiction for a few years now, but never in a feature before," the 34-year-old director says. "I think it's awesome to use realism in a way that involves delving into interesting locales. That's a documentary thing. Getting glimpses into these locales and exploring who the people in them really are is one of the most important reasons why I make films. I love watching films when I don't know if the places they portray are fictional or not. There's a lot of this exploring the relationship between fiction and reality going on these days. The lines are blurring," Matthiesen says. In his case, they blur a lot, though we never lose sight of them.

"I operate in a fictional universe. What matters is my experience of reality, not actual reality. When you work in documentaries, I think you have an obligation to keep it real - the way reality is. But I use reality to create my fictional universe, where I get to decide where I want to put the focus."

Though *Teddy Bear* tells a fictional story, almost everything else in it is more real than staged. This

lends a unique credibility, Matthiesen contends. At a time when documentaries are taking great liberties in terms of manipulating reality, new Danish directors like Noer and Matthiesen are taking the opposite tack. Instead of having the documentary approach fiction, they have fiction approach the documentary.

"People should have the feeling of being there themselves," Matthiesen says.

The scenes in his film aren't neatly storyboarded. Shot with a handheld camera, the film is continually inspired by things going on around them in the streets of Thailand. In extension, Matthiesen considers it all but inevitable that an actor's past roles will carry over into the audience's consciousness. So, Elsebeth Steentoft, who plays Dennis' mother, is the only real actor in the film. Typically, all the bar scenes in Thailand were street-cast with non-professionals.

"If you have a real tailor play a tailor, he'll know what to do, and that shows," Matthiesen says, referring to the Thai tailor he cast in his film. "And when we shot the bar scenes in Pattaya, well, the crowd really was drunk!" ■

For further information on *Teddy Bear*, see reverse section.

"The funny thing is that the bodybuilders are really masculine but also very sensitive and quite feminine. Kim Kold has both these qualities, too, strength and delicacy."

MADs MATTHIESEN

Born 1976, Denmark. Holds a BA in comparative literature and rhetoric, 2005. Trained in film direction at the alternative film school Super16. Directed a series of short films: *Mum* (2006) was selected for competition at the Venice Film Festival, *Dennis* (2007), which introduces bodybuilder Kim Kold for the first time, ran in Sundance, and *Cathrine* (2009) competed in Generation 14plus in Berlin. *Teddy Bear* (2011) is Matthiesen's feature film debut and is co-written with Martin Pieter Zandvliet (*Applause*).

SF FILM PRODUCTION

Danish production unit of Svensk Filmindustri AB with fiction feature films as the main activity. Has signed *Arn I* (2007) and *Arn II* (2008), both directed by Peter Flinth and based on Jan Guillou's famous saga about the Swedish crusader Arn Magnusson. These were followed by *Lost in Africa* (Vibeke Muasya, 2010) and Mads Matthiesen's *Teddy Bear* (2011). In development is a Scandinavian feature by Academy Award winner Bille August, *The Passion of Marie*. The company has signed documentary titles such as Pernille Rose Grønkvær's IDFA winner *The Monastery* (2006) and the highly acclaimed *Defamation* (Yoav Shamir, 2009), winner of the Special Jury Mention at Tribeca Film Festival.

BEOFILM

Founded 2002 by Morten Revsgaard Frederiksen and Peter Hyldahl. Were joined last year by Morten Kjems Juhl, producer on *Teddy Bear*. Catalogue includes short films *Squat 69* (Frederiksen, Hornstrup, Kristiansen, Sørensen, 2007), *Mesopotamia* (Fenar Ahmad, 2008), and *Megaheavy* (Fenar Ahmad, 2009), the latter competing in Berlin. *Teddy Bear* (2011) is the company's first feature film. In production is the documentary *Petey & Ginger* by Ada Bligaard Seby. beofilm.dk

THE MAN WITH THE YELLOW HAT GONE BAD



Director Mads Brügger in *The Ambassador* Photo: Johan Stahl Winthereik

In his Sundance winner *The Red Chapel*, media prankster Mads Brügger travelled to North Korea as a communist theatre director. Now, in *The Ambassador*, he has abandoned his role-playing. Or has he? In the Central African Republic on a diplomatic passport, he tries to start up a match factory with a workforce of Pygmies. Per Juul Carlsen asks why.

BY PER JUUL CARLSEN

Please note that this is an exceedingly difficult article to write. The subject is a man role-playing on several levels all at once and exuberantly living out a fetishist fantasy, even while deriding others with similar fantasies. He travels to the heart of Africa disguised as the archetype of an unscrupulous white ambassador circa 1975, claiming that he plans to open a match factory with the unique property that the matches are made by Pygmies – African superstition endows Pygmies with magic powers. But no one he meets has any doubt that what he is really after is diamonds. Ultimately, of course, he is a documentary filmmaker who wants to show Africa from a new angle. But the question remains whether he is not, more than anything, a middle-class Dane living out a fantasy of being an unscrupulous white ambassador in Africa.

It's a balancing act, and describing it isn't all that easy, either. It's one out-there story after another, like how he spent 1,000 euros on a pair of Ann Demeulemeester boots to get that authentic "eccentric-white-ambassador-in-Africa" look. Anyone asking if this man here is really role-playing for the fun of it would face the comeback, "Why would anyone hang around deepest Africa filming characters who are clearly killers, with a concealed camera – just for fun?"

The man doing all this role-playing is Mads Brügger. Over the last 15 years, he has built up a position in the Danish media as a reporter and TV presenter who is constantly challenging the classic role of the journalist. In Denmark, he is best known for his partnership with Mikael Bertelsen, his co-presenter on *The 11th Hour*, a programme that sought to reinvent the talk show and wake viewers up with offbeat anti-stories. In the international media world, he got his 15 minutes of fame when he won the World Cinema Documentary Competition at Sundance for *The Red Chapel*, a bizarre documentary about his trip to North Korea masquerading as a communist theatre director.

Now, in *The Ambassador*, the 38-year-old media prankster is "beyond role-playing", as he puts it. He is an actual diplomat on a mission to another extreme country, the Central African Republic. This civil-war-ravaged former French colony, Brügger

says, is a forgotten time pocket from 1970s Africa or, as he puts it in the film, "If Congo was the heart of darkness, the Central African Republic is the appendix." Brügger travels around the country wearing long boots, sunglasses and a cigarette holder perpetually lodged between his lips. He's "the Man with the Yellow Hat gone bad," Brügger says, referring to the character from the Curious George children's books.

"I found a link to a company on the Web that brokers diplomatic titles between Third World countries and crazy white men looking for a bit of panache and prestige. That seemed like a good jumping-off point for a film about Africa stripped of NGOs, sarongs, Bono, child soldiers and kids with bloated bellies, a film about the kind of people you never see in documentaries on Africa: white businessmen and the diplomats, the fat cats in the urban centres, all the people who are in Africa having a great time," he says.

"That seemed like a good jumping-off point for a film about Africa stripped of NGOs, sarongs, Bono, child soldiers and kids with bloated bellies."



The Ambassador Photo: Johan Stahl Winthereik



"The role of the diplomat is a lot like that of a journalist. They both have to go see everybody, talk to everybody. Only, diplomats can operate far beyond any ethical boundaries and still remain respected members of society."



The Ambassador Photo: Zentropa

"I wanted to break the NGOs' monopoly on Africa. I wanted to make an Africa film that had funny moments amidst all the horror and I wanted to make a documentary that took Africa back to Graham Greene and *The Wild Geese* – Africa of the 1970s. You can find that in the Central African Republic, a country that hardly anyone ever heard about."

So Brügger got the idea of becoming that which he was simultaneously assailing and embracing: a white diplomat, who has become one solely for reasons of personal vanity.

"Going to Africa and *playing* a diplomat wouldn't be a problem for me. Diplomats aren't always asking to see each other's ID. But instead of playacting, I figured I'd go all in. The role of the diplomat is a lot like that

of a journalist. They both have to go see everybody, talk to everybody. They get access to state secrets and a country's most powerful people. Only, diplomats can operate far beyond any ethical boundaries and still remain respected members of society."

Viewed through the lens of traditional journalism, Brügger's method is questionable. He uses a hidden camera and false pretences, but what's less common about *The Ambassador* is that Brügger can rightfully claim that he's not a journalist. He's not operating under false pretences, because he really is the Liberian diplomat Mads Brügger Cortzen. He may have obtained his diplomatic passport through a shady Dutchman, but his papers *are* in order.

"Exactly because I'm beyond role-playing by actually being a diplomat, I can forge a partnership with the very sinister owner of a diamond mine replete with gold teeth and machete scars on his forehead. That would be highly problematic for a journalist. But it's no problem for a diplomat."

But isn't it a problem for a documentary filmmaker? "No, it isn't," Brügger replies after some thought, with a crooked, ambiguous smile. Of course, he's on a slippery slope. It's there, on the slippery slope, that things start making sense to him. That's also why this article is so hard to write. What exactly is Brügger up to in *The Ambassador*? Or rather, how much is he up to at once?

MADS BRÜGGER

Born 1972, Denmark. Journalist with his own distinctive methods. He has gone undercover and infiltrated various milieus. Engaged by the national broadcaster DR in 1996, where he, together with Mikael Bertelsen, created the off-beat talk show *The 11th Hour* and the satirical docu series *Danes for Bush* and *The Red Chapel*. A feature version of the latter has attracted international attention and won the World Cinema Jury Prize in Sundance in 2010. Release in 2011: *The Ambassador*.

ZENTROPA

Read more page 8.

He's acting out a childhood dream, ignoring good form in journalism, dismissing the decades-long efforts of NGOs, prodding political correctness by chain-smoking, using a decadent cigarette holder to boot, but he's also documenting how the colonial days aren't over in Africa and how France, the old colonial power, in particular, is playing a murky game.

"The film is a massive criticism of postcolonial Francafrrique, French Africa. The Central African Republic could be Africa's Switzerland. They have everything – gold, vast amounts of diamonds, oil, cobalt. The state security chief, who was actually murdered while we were there, used the metaphor that, if you want to prevent a man from running, you put a pebble in his shoe. All the resources the country needs to develop are being spent fighting the rebel army. The state security chief told me that the French Air Force flies two planes equipped with motion and heat detectors over the Central African Republic every day, so they know where the rebel army is. Even though the government for three years has been asking the French to share their information, the French are refusing. That's the pebble in the shoe."

Brügger documents this side of modern Africa, while also offering an exposé of the diplomat's life. There's a scene in the film where Brügger visits a village of the Pygmies he wants to hire as workers in his match factory. As he looks on, the Central African minister of the interior gives the Pygmies, including the children, large amounts of alcohol and soon the Pygmies are partying like crazy.

"That's what the NGOs don't get. You can really have fun in Africa," Brügger tells his assistant Paul, tapping his foot to the beat.

"That may be a bit of overkill," Brügger admits, now that the film is done, then adds, "But, when in Rome ..."

The Ambassador is produced with support from the talent fund New Danish Screen. For further information on the film, see reverse section.

APPLAUSE FOR A FUNNYMAN

After a spin around the festival circuit with *Applause*, Martin Pieter Zandvliet set his sights on directing a warts-and-all biopic about Denmark's greatest comedian, Dirch Passer. Three decades after his too-early death, *A Funny Man* tells the tragic story of a man who lived for attention and found himself trapped in his own legend.

BY JACOB WENDT JENSEN

Everyone agreed: director Martin Pieter Zandvliet, screenwriter Anders Frithiof August (*SuperClásico*) and producer Mikael Rieks (*Ghosts of Cité Soleil*). Working on *Applause*, they happened to watch a show about the Danish comedian Dirch Passer on TV and knew they had found the subject for their next movie, *A Funny Man*, out in domestic theatres in August.

Dirch Passer was Denmark's number one funnyman on stage and screen in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s until his premature death in late summer 1980. His heart gave out at just 54, during a performance of a revue in Copenhagen's Tivoli. While Passer had been making Danes guffaw for three decades, he had also been leading a life of hard drinking, multiple failed marriages and constant,

wrenching doubt about his talent, even as everyone in his circle praised him. Including, of course, those who lived off him. Who paid him fat checks before they had even read the script for the movie and didn't flinch at dispatching Dirch to shopping malls to be dunked in barrels of water. No job was too small, as long as the check was big enough.

Zandvliet and his close collaborators were struck by the journey Passer made in his life more than by his revue skits and films, which remain very popular on DVD, TV and YouTube.

"We zeroed in on the stage production of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* as the hinge. That's when Passer put his dream of becoming a serious actor to the test and failed," Zandvliet says.

CRYING REAL TEARS

The year is 1961. After years of making cash registers ring at Copenhagen's ABC Theatre in revue after revue with his comic sidekick Kjeld Petersen, Passer is now playing Lenny, the dim-witted hulk who strangles a puppy and a woman in *Of Mice and Men*.

The reviews are favourable, as critics predict that his career from now on could very well embrace both humour and serious theatre. But that's not how it turns out.

The audiences laugh too much, especially during special performances for school children, and Dirch gets nervous. When Lenny cries in George's arms, that's Dirch crying real tears at the cul-de-sac he is finding himself in. He starts playing for laughs, which there's no basis for in the story. The play is a flop and quickly closes. Ever since, Passer always referred to that play as the moment when he gave up on serious acting, choking back sadness behind his facade.

Passer wanted to reach beyond the audiences he knew loved him. He wanted to be taken seriously, by the critics and by himself, says Zandvliet. It hurt him to the core that the elite looked down at the world of theatrical revues.

"He wanted to be accepted in better circles. Dirch Passer is the class clown who will do anything to get attention. But once he got it, he didn't want it anymore - he wanted to be taken seriously. He always doubted if he was doing the right thing and he despaired at having to live up to his own legend. You can see the laugh-getting gimmicks change over the years. In the beginning, it was enough for him to go on stage in a suit and hat, but later on he wore drag, clown costumes, even bounced up and down in a giant baby bouncer."

"There is a pathological desire to please in how these gimmicks evolve," Zandvliet says.

DREAMED OF MAKING IT BIG

A Funny Man has parallels to the dilemmas that Jerry Lewis, Andy Kaufman and other great comedians have tangled with.

"*Man on the Moon* and *Lenny*, the Lenny Bruce biopic, are amazing films. In general, I love character-driven dramas that take you behind a person's facade.

It's a privilege to get to do a film about an actor who so desperately wanted to play serious roles - and now, in a way, our film is finally giving him that role. It's the story of a comedic duo, along the lines of Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin, and the story of a weeping clown we get glimpses of in Adam Sandler and Ben Stiller. Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* is another reference point for us," Zandvliet says.

Passer dreamed of making it big abroad and he did get several offers, but nothing ever panned out.

"I think it would be great if I was the one to finally take Dirch beyond Denmark. He deserves it. He certainly had the skills. He got a few offers over the years, but he was always afraid to make the leap. Partly, he was worried that his borrowings from other artists would be found out. He outright stole the concept and much of the content for his famous finger show from the comedian Art Metrano, after watching him perform in Las Vegas. Dirch really wanted to make it abroad and he had boundless admiration for Victor Borge, the only Danish comedian who was ever successful in the US."

SON OF A REVUE STAR

From day one, Nikolaj Lie Kaas was mentioned for the lead. We know the actor from such films as Lars von Trier's *The Idiots*, Christoffer Boe's *Reconstruction* and Susanne Bier's *Brothers*. He also played a killer in Ron Howard's *Angels & Demons*.

"Nikolaj is an interesting person, and he's shown that he's both a great character actor and a master of comedy. He has comedic talent and depth. I wasn't out to make a funny film, after all, but a film about the seriousness amidst all the fun. Nikolaj is a child of the revues. His father was a Danish revue star who worked with Dirch Passer. When I offered him the part, I could tell he was thinking, "Wow!" Like everyone else, he approached the task with great awe. Dirch is almost like royalty in Denmark. Everyone still loves him. So you have to be delicate when you start questioning the choices he made. His life may be a kind of tragedy, but we have tried to make the film an ode to life," Zandvliet says ■

For further information on *A Funny Man*, see reverse section.



A Funny Man Photo: Bjørn Bertheussen

MARTIN PIETER ZANDVLIET

Born 1971, Denmark. Completed a film course in editing at the European Film College, 1998. Has edited a number of short films and documentaries. *Angels of Brooklyn* (2002), co-directed with Camilla Hjelm Knudsen, won a Danish Robert for Best Long Documentary and entered Toronto HotDocs and Visions du Réel in Nyon. Zandvliet made his first feature film with *Applause* (2009) with leading actress Paprika Steen winning awards in Karlovy Vary, Mumbai, Pune and Nashville. In his second feature *A Funny Man* (2011) Zandvliet teams up once again with writer Anders Frithiof August and producer Mikael Rieks.

KONCERN FILM

Founded 2008 by producer Mikael Rieks and Koncern TV- og Filmproduktion. Rieks, formerly from Nordisk Film, produced the documentaries *Overcoming* (Tómas Gislason, 2005) and *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* (Asger Leth, 2006) and the feature film *Karla's World* (Charlotte Sachs Bostrup, 2007). The company's inaugural production was Martin Pieter Zandvliet's first feature, *Applause* (2009), an awardwinning critical success with actress Paprika Steen. Out in 2011 is Zandvliet's second feature *A Funny Man* (2011). www.koncern.dk



Director Martin Pieter Zandvliet Photo: Carsten Villadsen



A Funny Man Photo: Bjørn Bertheussen



Anders F. August Photo: Kristian Septimius Krogh

THE DOWNSIDE OF FAME

As the son of an Oscar-winning director, Anders Frithiof August was in a unique position to probe the dark underbelly of fame in his screenplay for *A Funny Man*.

The 33-year-old screenwriter Anders Frithiof August is counted among the younger talents who are expected to keep Danish cinema innovative. In April, he won the Nordisk Film Award, Denmark's top talent prize, for his work on the Oscar-nominated short film *The Pig*, Martin Pieter Zandvliet's *Applause* and Ole Christian Madsen's *SuperClásico*.

August grew up the son of renowned director Bille August who won an Academy Award in

1987 for *Pelle the Conqueror*. A passion for film runs in his blood. August attended the European Film College in Ebeltoft and later graduated in screenwriting from the National Film School of Denmark in 2007.

According to Anders August, the upcoming film about legendary Danish funnyman Dirch Passer raises the question about the cost of fame for the talented and famous.

Famous, successful people are considered lucky. But Dirch Passer fought hard for the career he had. His early death makes you ask how lucky he really was. But it was all he knew - he gave us his all and he burned out much too soon, August says.

A play of social games

Ruben Östlund is back in Cannes, this time in Director's Fortnight. *Play*, a Swedish-Danish coproduction, sees the director returning to the subject of social power games.

Before he started his last feature, *The Involuntary*, Ruben Östlund confidently announced his plan to take the film to Cannes. Indeed, this highly original investigation of five different situations involving intricate social games was selected for Un Certain Regard in 2008 and generated a very favourable response. The Swedish director had met his goal, but his ambitions did not end there.

Ever since his debut with *The Guitar Mongoloid* in 2004, Östlund has been a director who knows what he wants and how to get it. His short films, notably *Autobiographical Scene Number 6882* and the Berlin-winner *Incident by a Bank*, have kept his unique cinematic vision in the public eye in between his features and expectations for his latest effort are high. Presented as a tragicomic study of human behaviour, *Play* is inspired by true events where a group of young boys a few years back



Play Photo: Plattform

repeatedly robbed other children in central Gothenburg by using trickery and role-playing.

Play is produced by Plattform Produktion, a company Östlund founded with the producer Erik

Hemmensdorff after they both graduated from the School of Film Directing at Gothenburg University. As was the case with *The Involuntary*, Östlund also co-wrote the screenplay with Hemmensdorff. The Danish

editor Jacob Schulsinger is also on board.

The Danish coproducer is Philippe Bober for Coproduction Office, which is also the film's sales company. *Play* will open in Sweden in October.

Code Blue in Cannes

Urszula Antoniak's *Code Blue*, a Dutch-Danish coproduction, unleashes an emotionally troubled nurse in Directors' Fortnight. The Danish coproducer is Marie Gade for Zentropa.

Fascinating, mysterious and extraordinarily sensual were a few of the enthusiastic adjectives lavished by critics in 2009 on Urszula Antoniak's first feature, the Irish-Dutch coproduction *Nothing Personal*. The film was named best film at the Locarno Film Festival and won at the Dutch film awards that year for both best film and best director.

Antoniak's new film, *Code Blue*, is playing in the Director's Fortnight sidebar. It is a drama about Marian (Bien de Moor), a nurse who cares



Code Blue Photo: IDTV Film

for – and occasionally terminates – patients in her hospital world. Outside of work, she keeps to herself, but her life changes when she witnesses an assault from her window. A neighbour saw her witness it and they now share a secret she can't ignore.

The title, *Code Blue*, refers to the medical term for a "life-and-death situation". The film is presented in Cannes as a contemporary tragedy about a woman who associates death with intimacy and whose actions embrace both good and evil. The film is produced by IDTV from The

Netherlands with Danish coproducer Marie Gade of Zentropa, who in recent years has been working mainly in international coproductions and financing. Her credits include Thomas Vinterberg's *Dear Wendy*, Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* and Juliette Garcia's *Be Good*.

DFI STRENGTHENS INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Danish Film Institute is implementing a new strategy to strengthen international cooperation in coproduction, export and cultural exchange.



Claus Ladegaard Photo: Robin Skjoldborg

The strong artistic results shown by Danish films in recent years have been inspired by partnerships with artists and production environments in other countries. Acknowledging that, the Danish Film Institute is now establishing a unit to strengthen, coordinate and focus these efforts.

"Truth be told, we have had a 'father knows best' mentality in this country," Claus Ladegaard, the DFI Head of Production and Development, says.

"So we were always going, 'We have the best Film Act in the world, the Danish way is the only right way: small budgets, less is more, intimate stories from the eat-in kitchen sink – films aimed mainly at the home market.' Putting it bluntly, our attitude to the rest of the world has been: We have cracked it, we know how to do it! But that won't cut it. We have to forge real and honest international partnerships. We want to learn. And we want to make films aimed at bigger markets than the Danish."

The Danish film industry is already involved in a number of

coproduction contexts. Also, via its festival activities and other efforts, the Danish Film Institute supports the ambitions of Danish filmmakers to reach international audiences. A third target area is cultural outreach and exchange. A current example of that is the Youth & Film Uganda project of mobile cinemas, film festivals, and film-production training.

These target areas will also be found in DFI's future international strategy. A strategy aiming at strengthening the coordination between the three tracks: DFI's new international office with the main task of consulting in international development, financing and coproduction; support for festival activities with, among other things, an eye to exports and sales; and finally DFI's efforts in general concerning cultural outreach and exchange. In all, the gathering of knowledge and the stronger coordination will boost DFI's international efforts.

The new Danish Film Policy Accord moreover provides a very open framework for Danish film engagement abroad.

"The last Film Accord set a cap on the number of films we could enter into as a coproduction partner," Ladegaard says. "The new Accord gives us more opportunities and more funding. We can now support non-Danish-language films as well as Danish films, which will give us a much greater international orientation and put even more wind in the sails of Danish films." He is looking forward to welcoming DFI's new international producer in autumn 2011 ■

AUSTRALIA AND DENMARK ARE ENTERING A COPRODUCTION AGREEMENT

The negotiations on the new audiovisual coproduction agreement will give selected Australian and Danish producers new opportunities to try each other on for size.

A new audiovisual coproduction agreement between Australia and Denmark is on the way. In November last year a small delegation from the Danish Film Institute went to Australia for the negotiations. The draft agreement is now ready for administrative and political decision in each country. DFI expects the agreement will be approved by the Australian authorities for the formal signing after the European summer break.

The purpose of the Danish visit to Australia was also to form relationships, get a handle on each other's subsidy schemes and create a framework for what will hopefully be a mutually fruitful partnership in potentially all areas of audiovisual content: Film, television and games. Traditionally coproduction agreements are mainly targeted at film production, but this one will broaden the perspective to all kinds of audiovisual works.

The agreement states that the governments of the two countries are

- Seeking to enhance cooperation between the two countries in the area of audiovisual work
- Desirous of expanding and facilitating the coproduction of audiovisual works which may be beneficial to the audiovisual industries of both countries
- Desirous that their two countries share the risk and cost of productions, whilst increasing the output of high quality productions
- Seeking to facilitate the cultural, creative and economic exchanges between their two countries
- Convinced that these exchanges will contribute to the enhancement of relations between the two countries

But, why is it even necessary to make a bilateral coproduction agreement of this kind?

"We do it to strengthen our relationship," Marianne Moritzen, Head of Unit for Feature Film, says. "We are, after all, inviting another country to come in and take advantage of the Danish subsidy system. Historically, we have been very cautious about doing that. We are a small country with limited subsidy funds that we have sought to protect. Accordingly, we have been reluctant in committing to mutual agreements.

"What's so good about our partnership with Australia, and this agreement, is that their motives, like ours, are not primarily financial. We have a mutual interest in creating high quality audiovisual content. The agreement will give us a better framework for merging our talented film professionals and knowhow. But then again, Australia as well as Denmark has put a strong political and economical priority to the audiovisual field. So, all in all, it's an agreement that should please and inspire both parties greatly" ■

FROM EURO-PUDDING TO CREATIVE COOKING

Tom Hooper's *The King's Speech* and Susanne Bier's *In a Better World* have at least two things in common: They are both Academy Award winners, and they have both received distribution funds from MEDIA.

European cinema seems to have come a long way since EU's flagship programme to boost European cinema handed out its first grants 20 years ago. FILM marks the occasion by asking head of MEDIA Desk Denmark and a selection of film people for their view on the current state of European cinema.



Head of office Ene Katrine Rasmussen and assistant manager Ditte Cohn Photo: Henrik Ohsten

20 YEARS OF MEDIA

Lars von Trier's *Europa* was the first Danish film to receive support, after MEDIA Desk Denmark opened in 1992. Head of office Ene Katrine Rasmussen takes a look at the most significant changes within MEDIA's 20 years of existence.

"When MEDIA began European coproductions were nicknamed 'Euro-pudding'. The sort of film where

everybody spoke a strange English and there always seemed to be a 'foreign cousin' forced into the story. Producers back then were mostly motivated by the financial aspect," says Ene Katrine Rasmussen, who has been with the Danish MEDIA office since 2005 and became in charge in 2009.

Referring to MEDIA's objective to foster creativity and competitiveness in the European film sector by encouraging coproduction partnerships, the 44-year-old MA in

Film, Media and Rhetoric notes how the scene has changed.

"Today these collaborations show proof of being much more productive. Actors from different countries playing together don't stand out like a sore thumb as they used to. They are integrated more gracefully in the production. The European film industry has definitely matured."

When the EU launched MEDIA in 1991, one of the main ambitions was

to fight the downturn of European cinema attendance for European films by introducing support programmes for distributors.

"Coproductions today mean easier access to distribution in the coproducing countries. This has led to a wider circulation of the films over the years," says Ene Katrine Rasmussen. "No doubt," she adds, "that coproductions also get more attention from the audience, once

they reach the cinemas. When you realize that a foreign film features a national actor, for instance, you tend to be more easily drawn to it. You get more curious."

At MEDIA Desk Denmark Ene Katrine Rasmussen and her colleague Ditte Cohn advise film, TV and multimedia professionals on how to find financing, how to find European partners and, not least, how to make a good MEDIA application.

"We have been challenged by the paperwork demands of the European Commission, but over the years it has become more simple and as national and regional film funds also demand more and more paperwork, the professionals have become used to writing these kinds of applications," says Ene Katrine Rasmussen ■

MEDIA

MEDIA is the European Union's support programme to strengthen the competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry and to increase the circulation of European films. MEDIA encourages professionals to collaborate across borders and exchange knowhow through support for project development, distribution, promotion, festivals and training activities. MEDIA 2007-2013 is the fourth round of the programme and has a budget of 755 million euro. Danish companies and films have received a total of 17 million euro within the current MEDIA 2007 framework.

WHAT'S EUROPEAN CINEMA TO US?

European cultural and linguistic diversity, intercultural dialogue, and the accessibility of our cinematographic heritage – these are key words in the MEDIA 2007 charter. We asked a journalist, an academic, an importer and a producer to take a broad view on European films and the industry right now.



Peter Aalbæk Jensen Photo: Stephan Camilla

THE JOURNALIST:

"The making of Lars von Trier's films is the prime example of the European idea."

Martin Blaney, correspondent for Screen International:

"When the MEDIA Programme was launched in 1991, the national film industries in Europe were largely operating independently of one another. Thanks to the networks built up over the past 20 years, it is not unusual nowadays to see a coproduction being structured from, say, Ireland, Sweden and Macedonia. Such partnerships would have been inconceivable before 1991. The making of Lars von Trier's films is a prime example of the European idea. At the same time, MEDIA's goal to improve the transnational circulation of films within Europe has some way to go. The market share for non-national European films has hovered between 7-8% over the past 20 years. But still, without MEDIA, it would have been only 1-2%. Without some form of support, European cinema would be left to market forces and the overwhelming competition from US films."

THE ACADEMIC:

"European films are well-crafted, successful reactionism."

Peter Schepelern, associate professor of film studies, Copenhagen University:

"Europe has hardly been a shining beacon of pioneering, significant film in the last 20 years. Dogme 95 was an example of a European wave that really succeeded, and we've had magical figures like von Trier, Almodóvar and Haneke. But otherwise, nothing major has been going on in Europe. What distinguishes European cinema most right now is a desire for traditional storytelling. A film like *The King's Speech* is utterly conventional. I don't think it would have been made much differently in 1937. The films are made with today's tastes in mind, of course, but in essence they are well-crafted, successful reactionism. There has been a realisation that Europeans have to think mainstream, too. We've learned a few things from American filmmaking."

THE IMPORTER:

"There were some real lemons!"

Kim Foss, director of the Grand Teatret cinema and Camera Film, an importer of European films for Danish cinemas:

"In my view, European cinema is doing just fine at the moment. We are getting a steady stream of quality films, and it's nice to see some of them breaking through, like *The King's Speech*. I don't think that MEDIA has brought more uniformity to European cinema over the 20 years the programme has existed. In fact, the most successful films have tended to be those that kept their national flavour intact. And we're not being served Euro-pudding like we used to. There was a time when everyone was trying to bring together financing from different countries but hadn't learned yet how to gather everything into a homogenous expression. There were some real lemons!"

THE PRODUCER:

"Without MEDIA Zentropa wouldn't exist in Denmark."

Peter Aalbæk Jensen, head of production company Zentropa:

"I would say that, being an expansive film company in a small country, we wouldn't even exist if it wasn't for MEDIA. There, I said it! A German producer in Germany or a French producer in France might make out okay, but with our profile we couldn't make it without MEDIA. We would have to move to a bigger country with better boxoffice potential. Over the years our films have really benefitted from MEDIA's ambition to distribute European films, and we've been supported in developing our stories to have a more international appeal. Also, there have been some special support programmes that could help us with bridge financing. So, we actually benefit from the MEDIA system on many levels – from the very first idea to the finished film comes on the big screen."

NORDIC

NOIR



Headhunters Photo: Yellow Bird

In novels, films and on TV, Scandinavian mysteries are everywhere these days. Around the world, people are lapping up the Scandinavian chills that paint a more complex picture of “the world’s happiest people,” Danish producers say.

BY NANNA FRANK RASMUSSEN

The Killing was an unexpected hit on British BBC4 last winter. The Danish TV series drawing more viewers than *Mad Men*, even though it was shown

in the original language with subtitles, not usually something that attracts English-speaking audiences.

In the USA, AMC, the channel that airs *Mad Men*, has remade *The Killing*. The series that asks, “Who Killed Rosie Larsen?” premiered on 3 April to a very favourable reception by critics and viewers.

20 DAYS, NOT 24 HOURS

This, despite the fact the series has no car chases, explosions, serial killers or sexy, hard-hitting stiletto detective in the lead – just a chief investigator who “barely ever changes her sweater,” as a New York

Times critic wrote about the Danish original.

The attraction of *The Killing*, many say, is its leisurely pace and rooting in reality. Piv Bernth, who produced the original series for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR, says the difference between the US and Europe is that, whereas a series like *24 Hours* spent just one day unspooling a criminal intrigue, European series take their time. *The Killing* unwinds over 20 days, shortened to 13 in the American remake.

“We take time to reflect. We are concerned about what the crime that’s committed in the series means

“We have been considered ideal societies. We have gender equality, social safety nets, free education and so on. But the crime films also show another, darker side.”

to society and those directly affected by it. We get to immerse ourselves in the characters and I think that’s very appealing to international audiences,” Piv Bernth says.

THE MILLENNIUM WAVE

Arguably, the runaway success of the films from Stieg Larsson’s *Millennium* trilogy has blazed a trail for Scandinavian mysteries on TV and for the more ambitious and pricier mystery films with broad international appeal that are in the pipeline. An adaptation of the Norwegian writer Jo Nesbø’s *Headhunters*, starring Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, is in production and has already been picked up by Magnolia, the major North American theatrical distributor. Moreover, Lasse Hallström is returning from Hollywood to direct the adaptation of the Swedish bestseller *The Hypnotist*, which will be the director’s first Swedish film since 1987.

Rikke Ennis, chief executive of TrustNordisk, which is handling the international sales of *Headhunters*, is convinced that the film, with a format and appeal similar to the *Millennium* trilogy, will be the next big hit in the Scandinavian noir genre.

“We are obviously riding a wave after the success of *Millennium*. Those films showed that we have a special touch with mystery productions in Scandinavia and a long-standing tradition. Hence the big focus on Scandinavian mysteries right now,” Rikke Ennis says.

Peter Bose, a producer at Miso Film, which brought us the adaptations of the Norwegian writer Gunnar Staalesen’s *Varg Veum* series of detective novels and the Danish TV series *Those Who Kill*, sees Scandinavia making a new mark on the international map.

“I believe that the success of Scandinavian noir will open up opportunities in the same way that the Dogme concept once did,” he says. Ennis shares that expectation, “Mystery films are a new niche for us and I can see it developing into a new wave.”

SUSPENSE ETCHED IN ICE AND COLD

Søren Stærmoose, executive producer at Yellow Bird, which brought us the *Millennium* films, sees several reasons for the booming interest in Scandinavian mysteries. “We can make films with high production values for four to five million euros, which is a lot of money for a film in a Scandinavia context but not so bad compared to English-language productions,” he says. “We can keep costs down because we don’t have to pay stratospheric star salaries, like they do in the US. Our crews are smaller and work across functions, shoots are generally shorter and we have really well-trained film workers and good screenwriters. Together that makes for an efficient system.”

Moreover, he says, it is interesting for international audiences to get glimpses of real life in Scandinavia, a way of life that’s unfamiliar to most and tinted by preconceptions. “Thanks in part to the *Millennium* trilogy, people now have a new way of looking at Sweden, and at Scandinavia in general. We have traditionally been considered ideal societies. We have gender equality, social safety nets, free education and so on. But the crime films also show another, darker side of our everyday life,” Stærmoose says. In fact, he asserts, this is right along the lines of the Scandinavian film tradition of taking up painful subjects, as seen in Bergman, von Trier and others.

Bernth seconds Stærmoose’s observation, “We have long been told that Scandinavians were some of the happiest people in the world. But the mysteries paint a more complex and conflicted picture.”

Gunhild Agger, professor of media studies at Aalborg University, also points to the international appeal of the Scandinavian settings. “The Swedes, in particular, have excelled at exploiting spectacular sceneries of ice and cold that set an excellent tone for a mystery,” she says.

Apart from the realism of the locations, major reasons for the current popularity of Scandinavian noir are their top production values and skilful acting.

“We have learned from successful well-made mysteries from abroad and we have added our own touch,” Agger says. “So, our series and films are traditional enough to seem familiar to people elsewhere in the world and just new enough to surprise us. They’re a suitable blend of new and old” ■

UPCOMING THRILLERS

Those Who Kill – Shadow of the Past

Denmark
Director: Birger Larsen
Production: Miso Film
Release: September 2011
 Detective Katrine Ries Jensen and legal psychiatrist Thomas Schaeffer form a special unit at the Copenhagen Police investigating serial killings. A case from Schaeffer’s past crops up. As a young psychologist, he held back from sending a patient, who was manically drawing the details of a traffic accident, to a secure hospital. Now these bloody scenes resurface, enacted as real killings. Theatrical version of TV series. See reverse section for further information.

Headhunters

Norway
 Based on a novel by Jo Nesbø
Director: Morten Tyldum
Production: Friland Holding and Yellow Bird
Release: August 2011
 Roger is a successful headhunter who finances his extravagant lifestyle by way of risky art thefts. When he is introduced to the Dutchman Clas Greve who happens to be in possession of a priceless Rubens painting, Roger decides to risk it all to get his hands on it. But soon he finds himself in deep trouble.

ID:A

Denmark
Director: Christian E. Christiansen
Production: Zentropa
Release: November 2011
 Aliena wakes up in a river in France with no memory, a bag with 2 million euro and a scar across her chest. She soon discovers that she is being stalked. Realizing that her accent is Danish she decides to go to Denmark and find out who she is. See reverse section for further information.

The Hypnotist

Sweden
 Based on a novel by Lars Kepler
Director: Lasse Hallström
Production: Sonet Film, Svensk Filmindustri
Release: 2012
 Stockholm detective Joona Linna calls on psychiatrist Erik Maria Bark, retired hypnotist, to ask for his help in communicating with a young boy who is heavily traumatised after witnessing the brutal murder of his parents and sister.

Nobel’s Last Will

Sweden
 Based on a novel by Liza Marklund
Director: Peter Flinth
Production: Yellow Bird
Release: 2012
 The first film in a series of six based on Liza Marklund’s novels about crime reporter Annika Bengtzon. Agneta Fagerström-Olsson and Ulf Kvensler will direct the remaining five films which will be released straight on DVD.

In the Interest of the Nation

Sweden
 Based on a novel by Jan Guillou
Director: Kathrine Windfeld
Production: Pampas Production
Release: 2012
 Swedish Mikael Persbrandt, who stars in Susanne Bier’s Academy Award winner *In A Better World*, will play intelligence agent Carl Hamilton in three screen adaptations of Jan Guillou’s spy novel trilogy *In the Interest of the Nation*, *In her Majesty’s Service* and *But Not of it Concerns Your Daughter*.



Nikolaj Arcel directing Mads Mikkelsen in *A Royal Affair* Photo: Jiri Hanzl

Zentropa embarks on new historical film

Mads Mikkelsen and Alicia Vikander star in royal drama by Nikolaj Arcel.

The shoot for Nikolaj Arcel's historical period film *A Royal Affair* started up last month in the Czech Republic.

The film centers on a dramatic love story that changed the course of Danish history in the early 1770s – a love story between Johann Struensee, the German physician of the insane King Christian VII and a man of enlightenment, and the English-born queen of Denmark, Caroline Mathilda.

A Royal Affair is Zentropa's first historical period film and one of the company's most ambitious feature film productions to date.

The film is shooting on location in the Czech Republic, where the

production has been granted access to a number of historical buildings from the period.

Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen, a familiar face from recent international productions such as *Casino Royale* and *Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky*, plays the lead as Johann Struensee. He will be joined by Alicia Vikander, Sweden's young emerging talent, in the role of Caroline Mathilda.

Nikolaj Arcel has scripted *A Royal Affair* with Rasmus Heisterberg. The two were also behind the

international thriller hit *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*.

A Royal Affair is backed by an experienced producer team: Sisse Graum Jørgensen (*In a Better World*), Meta Louise Foldager (*Antichrist* and *Melancholia*) and Zentropa founder Peter Aalbæk Jensen.

The film is produced by Zentropa in cooperation with Trollhättan Film AB and Film i Väst in Sweden, Sirena Film in the Czech Republic and Zentropa Entertainments Berlin. Domestic release is set for 15 March 2012.

Danish production company thinks big

In April Nimbus Film announced their plans for an ambitious international biopic about the later years of author Karen Blixen. The announcement created the interest we were looking for, producer Bo Ehrhardt says.

"We've already been approached by several US and UK based companies that we would like to collaborate with," says Nimbus producer and cofounder Bo Ehrhardt.

Nimbus Film's international adventure includes the securing of rights to two novels with an eye on English-language adaptations for the big screen:

One is Danish poet Thorkild Bjørnvig's memoir *The Pact* about his stormy relationship with author Karen Blixen. The other is the best-selling Scandinavian thriller *The Worms of Carmine Street* by Swedish writer Håkan Nesser.

"The companies in question are exactly the kind of players who can bring the necessary financial and distribution opportunities to the table to get our film in the air."

"Some we know from past productions and some are promising new ones. The task now is to find out who shares our vision and what kind of cofinancing structure we might be looking for," Bo Ehrhardt says.

Nimbus sees great potential in *The Pact*. In 1950 Baroness Karen Blixen met fledgling writer Bjørnvig. Despite an age difference of 33 years the two authors developed a deep friendship and a legendary literary pact emerged between them.

"We have the highest ambitions for the project envisioning it as a kind of hauntingly beautiful, natural sequel to *Out of Africa*," Nimbus producer Lars Bredo Rahbek states. "We intend to produce the film in English language with top level American and European talent," Bredo Rahbek says.

Regarding the second adaptation, *The Worms of Carmine Street*, Nimbus aims at making a psychological thriller in the tradition of Roeg's *Don't Look Now* and Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.



Karen Blixen



The Weight of Elephants

Time to develop in Paris

New Zealand-born Daniel Joseph Borgman, who has visited Cannes twice with his short films, is to shoot his first feature film, *The Weight of Elephants*. A film developed at the Cannes Residence in Paris and the first ever Danish-New Zealand coproduction.

"Apart from giving me the time to work on the script, my Residence stay also opened my eyes to the range of possibilities in terms of financing, marketing and distributing my project," Borgman says.

Daniel Joseph Borgman, who won the Grand Prix in Semaine de la Critique last year for his short film *Berik* and who competed in the short film competition with *Lars and Peter* in 2009, was selected as one of six young writers and directors to participate in the Residence programme, run by the Cannes Cinéfondation under the leadership of Georges Goldenstern.

The programme is a four-and-a-half-month stay in Paris, where young talents live together in a big apartment and are offered the time and space to work on their first or second feature film project.

"The programme gave me the opportunity to meet with lots of great European and international industry people, especially producers and financiers."

Borgman plans to shoot his first feature film project, *The Weight of Elephants*, at the end of the year. The film is a coming-of-age drama about 14-year-old Jess, a local paper boy, whose life is turned upside down when a horrific murder occurs in the street where he delivers newspapers.

"At the moment I am in New Zealand and Australia meeting key crew, the film commission, and my New Zealand coproducer, Leanne Saunders. I am also looking at locations."

The Weight of Elephants has received script support from the Danish Film Institute and two rounds of development support from the New Zealand Film Commission. It is the first ever Danish-New Zealand coproduction.

MEET US IN CANNES AND ON DFI.DK/ CANNES



In a Better World Photo: Per Arnesen

Bier passes the 10 million mark

Boxoffice numbers for Susanne Bier's Golden Globe and Oscar winner *In a Better World* have just passed the 10 million mark – in dollars. European audiences have been the most keen to buy tickets to Bier's drama on justice and revenge.

Denmark	\$ 4,988,786	Belgium and Luxembourg	\$ 117,138
Sweden	\$ 2,269,634	Finland	\$ 114,601
Spain	\$ 860,551	New Zealand and Fiji	\$ 90,463
Italy	\$ 762,930	Netherlands	\$ 51,056
Germany	\$ 664,919	Turkey	\$ 21,448
Israel	\$ 472,886	Hungary	\$ 18,736
USA	\$ 292,001	Hong Kong	\$ 13,356
Norway	\$ 213,389	Lithuania	\$ 11,466
Brazil	\$ 163,375	Thailand	\$ 7,381
Greece	\$ 158,628	Czech Republic + Slovakia	\$ 1,471
Australia	\$ 154,517	Total	\$ 11,448,732