

FILMLAND FOR CHILDREN

"Everybody's good at something. You just have to discover what it is." (*Rubber Tarzan*) - in Danish cinema childhood is valuable in itself and not just a preparation for 'real life'.

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COARSE LINES

A new trend in Danish children's films is in the offing. Directors are turning to genre films and new media, turning out irony and imagery that are far from politically correct.

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WHO'S KIDDING WHO?

Inexpensive and convenient production methods are the best tactics in the struggle against splatter, violence, blood, pooh and teddy bears. QUERY on pic's for kids.

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./FILM./

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Front page: *Miracle*
Photo: Lars Høgsted

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The Danish Film Institute (DFI) is the national agency responsible for supporting and encouraging film and cinema culture. The DFI's operations extend from participation in the development and production of feature films, shorts and documentaries, over distribution and marketing, to managing the national film archive and cinematheque.

This special issue of FILM spotlights Danish children's films: we portray a handful of dynamic personalities in the world of Danish children's cinema, provide a state of the art discussion, describe paths taken through the children's filmscape, sound out where we are headed, illuminate Danish children's films from a non-Danish perspective, tell the story of how we got here and why, present facts and figures – and last, but not least, we talk about who is currently holding the floor on the children's film scene in Denmark and which films are available now and in the near future.

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THE CHALLENGE

CHARLOTTE GIESE

Centre for Children & Youth Film

Children keep up with the times. They *are* the times. Is the same true of the films they watch? Are the artistic ambitions grand and passionate enough to make films that astonish and challenge? Are the films challenging the full potential of moving pictures at child's eye level, or is the genre devoid of prestige and visions?

Are we in a situation where films for children and young people are either pursuing the Serious Epic or sufficing with the cheap thrills of the family film? Could the Danish tradition for humanistic stories move in new directions with more humour, more visual intensity and more daring stories? Are film companies and their

crews capable of infusing snug family films with more gravity, more insanity, more adventure? Do they have the courage to believe that modern children are competent human beings who will grow up – accustomed to and delighted by the steady flow of electronic imagery – to be the adult film-goers of tomorrow? Is there general faith in the fact that children are interested in everything that occurs within and close to them – as well as in events that take place in the big wide world? Do we remember that children have a sense of and right to high-quality cinematic narratives; that documentaries are also fascinating to children; and that teenagers can be seduced by other factors than Hollywood?

Children and young people must be respected

as an audience with a variety of experiences and film tastes. All films – the sensationally popular, the deeply existential, the genuinely beautiful, the profoundly emotional and the effectively action-packed – are justified. Films of all genres must be produced and shown and they must astound their audiences as a consequence of original artistic choices. The films must be in contact with their times and avoid conformity.

Since 1982, Denmark's Film Act has ensured that 25% of the government film support is earmarked for children's films. This provides production continuity. DFI's two children's film consultants have the artistic responsibility for choosing film projects that are worthy of support, and the creative, talented film industry must see to it that the films are worthy of their audience ■



Palle Alone in the World (1949) / Photo: Dfi film archive



Photo: Jan Buus

ANARCHY AND OFFBEAT HUMOUR

He loves funny words and hates admonishing pedantries. He turns the adult world upside down so children and adults alike can learn something. Writer Kim Fupz Aakeson is one of the most popular storytellers in Denmark. It all started with the thought, “To hell with children.”

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN

A down-and-out, unemployed king in his Copenhagen council flat, a mother who encourages her son to play truant from school and watch porn movies, a kid who eats oatmeal and becomes so big and strong that he seizes power from his parents and serves them liquorice-allsorts layer cake every morning.

Nothing is sacred to his sizzling storytelling craft when hardworking writer Kim Fupz Aakeson turns reality and fantasy topsy-turvy and skewers adult norms and habits. Fupz, as he is called, views the adult world through the wondering eyes of a child and tries to imagine what would happen if the law of gravity governing our daily routines was abolished, unleashing anarchy. What would happen if adults woke up one morning and had forgotten what they usually do? Or what if a child was given an angel licence that allowed him to perform medium-grade miracles?

“The unique quality of children is their openness to everything. Whenever they wonder, ‘Why are we doing this – and not that?’, adults quickly start slamming doors, replying, ‘Because I say so,’ without considering whether they’re happy with the current state of affairs or whether they could improve their own situation,” he says.

PSYCHEDELIC FAMILY FILMS

Fupz (b. 1958) entered the film world at a late age. He initially worked as an illustrator for magazines and newspapers in the early 1980s. He soon had the urge to illustrate books, but since he didn’t know any authors that he could collaborate with, he wrote his own stories. More than forty books have flowed from his pen over the years – including four comic

strips and many children’s books, some books for young people and a little stack of novels and collections of short stories for adults.

But the life of a writer is a lonely one, so in 1995 Fupz applied to the National Film School to study screenwriting. His timing was perfect. A new Danish film wave was approaching, bringing with it a demand for dynamic, modern stories, and Fupz had what it takes: a feeling for the spirit of the times and absurd daily situations, combined with an ability to make simple, human dramas and powerful dialogues inspired by the brevity of the comic strip.

His manuscripts for feature film successes such as *The One and Only / Den eneste ene* (1999), *Minor Mishaps / Små ulykker* (2002) and *Okay* (2002) almost make you forget that Fupz entered the film industry by way of the children’s film. He collaborated with directors Wikke & Rasmussen to write *Hannibal & Jerry* (1997), based on his original book of the same name, a screwy story about an evil toy manufacturer and a little boy and his dog who live in a pastel-coloured suburban neighbourhood. The film mixes a children’s film, a musical and a devil-may-care satire into what Fupz himself describes as a “psychedelic family film”.

He wrote thirteen short animated stories collectively entitled *Sallie’s Stories / Sallies Historier* (1998), again based on his original book. They include the story of a boy who has to learn to lie in order to become a real good little boy. Each story ends with a moral that is either ironic or pure nonsense. But Fupz’s best film manuscript to date is *Miracle / Mirakel*, a feature film that unites a serious story about the grief and insecurity of a 12-year-old boy with insistent MTV-like imagery and colourful musical sequences.

“If I get the urge to tell a story, it doesn’t matter whether it’s a children’s film or a film for adults,” says Fupz. “When I started to write children’s books, my basic assumption was that the work had to be inspiring and to hell with the children, so to speak. I think this approach is healthy, because you’ll never be able to figure out what the target group wants anyway. But if you get in touch with the basic emotion – such as loss

– you can easily write about an 8-year-old girl whose canary just died.”

FOUL FOOD AND BLITHERING BANANAS

Fupz has an unusual flair for children’s repartee; he assimilates modern slang, but makes up his own, too. He loves to invent funny, offbeat words and phrases, such as: up your royal highness; blithering bananas; foul food; whack in the woolly wigwam, to name a few. He also loves to write funny dialogue. Like in *Miracle* when little Dennis P. gets raked over the coals by his hysterical mother who asks, “Where have you been? I was beside myself with fear, Dennis. I’m talking knife victim, I’m talking road-kill, I’m talking sexually deranged paedophile...”

The favourite objects of Fupz’s satire are self-important, conceited adults, and he allies himself with children to write about the strange things we adults do to act civilised. For years, Fupz lived in Copenhagen’s Christiania, and its anti-authoritarian philosophy has definitely rubbed off on his fiction for children. But Fupz never hesitates to skewer himself or his “own kind”, and his favourite objects of malice are well-meaning children’s films.

“Children are tough, they have a tough sense of humour and they stand up to a lot. It’s impossible to tell a story without trying to improve somebody’s mind, without lifting the lid on your personal view of humanity. That is exactly the reason for not admonishing anyone. You’re better off if you just sit back and relax, because there’s usually some sort of moral at the end anyway.”

Fupz would like to see more daring, challenging children’s films that “give us a few scratches and bumps along the way instead of the widely appealing, entertaining children’s film.” A varied diet is best – also when it comes to culture for children. He would personally like to make a totally realistic children’s film – without guardian angels or miracle licences. He is generally hopeful on behalf of the children. “They’ll be all right, at least until they grow up and take leave of their senses” ■

FANTASTIC TALES

“Children are a fantastic target group. They’re more open than adults to off-beat storytelling. Children just get up and leave whenever they get tired of something. I like that a lot. It’s a gut reaction - instead of being overly logical about how they ought to react,” says director Natasja Arthy who has no trouble finding her inner child - in spite of her 34 years.

BY LISELOTTE MICHELSEN

She has a string of cinematic gems – and film awards – to her credit, and those around her generally agree that her films are some of the most promising (children’s) films of recent years. They are funny, sparkling, musical, visually striking, and they’re filled with good points and especially show respect for their audience.

Natasha Arthy started out in children’s television where she directed short, fantastic tales for the youngest age group. Her first short film, *Penny Plain / Fanny Farveløs* (1997) is both a dream and a fairy tale about a girl who lacks joy and colour in her dreary everyday life. In many ways, the film foreshadowed Arthy’s feature film debut, *Miracle / Mirakel* (2000), an everyday drama, a musical and a modern fairy tale rolled into one about 12-year-old Dennis P. who has big problems with his love life, his mother and dealing with the loss of his father. Natasha Arthy most recently directed the Dogme film *Old, New, Borrowed and Blue / Se til venstre, der er en svensker* (2003), which like *Mirakel* was written by Kim Fupz Aakeson and is a comedy for adults about a woman who has difficulty taking responsibility and being honest with herself and those around her.

WILD AND COLOURFUL

Many view *Miracle* as a beautiful consummation of an unmistakable ‘Natasha Arthy Style’. The film has its origins in the tradition of magic

realism of Danish children’s films, but also takes a giant step into something wilder and more colourful. Brimming with humour and affectionate irony, the film is an unfaltering combination of the musical and realism – and scenes where magic takes over. One of them allows Dennis P., the main character, to talk to an angel who is the spitting image of his deceased father. The many forms of expression are not used as entertainment in themselves, but are meticulously arranged to express Dennis P.’s different emotional torments and gradually lead up to the film’s point: by learning to stand on his own two feet, he can survive and take care of himself in the real world.

In Natasha Arthy’s opinion, making the form of *Miracle* secondary to the story and the film’s characters is an enormous difference compared to her television work. She willingly concedes that she loves scenography and long dresses. However, *Miracle* was fundamentally different from her previous television projects up to then, in that she wanted her focal point to be the film’s characters – who should come alive in flesh and blood – instead of form, which she demoted to serving as a vehicle for delivering the story.

“I was very fond of form in my television days,” she says. “But when I made *Miracle*, obviously an extravaganza of sorts, I had an opportunity to make something that went a little deeper, and it was essential for me that the children and adults who saw the film would get under the skin of the main character. And when I made the Dogme film, the form was even more of a tool for serving the story than before.”

ADAPTING TO THE FRAMEWORK

Natasha Arthy does not at all reject working with a film’s form. To her, the issue is more the fact that she’s focusing on other aspects now, and that form no longer serves as the very basis of the production, as it did in several of her television productions and in *Penny Plain*, too, for that matter, where the dresses were already part of the film before the story had even been

written. “It’s important to make use of the framework you’re working in,” she says. “When I made children’s television, the budgets were so low and the working conditions so primitive that we couldn’t start making a socially realistic, profound, poignant drama, because we just didn’t have the time or money for that sort of thing. On the other hand, however, because it was video, it was very inexpensive to work with in the sense that we could do a lot of finishing work that didn’t really cost very much.”

The particular stage of one’s life is also important, and right now, Natasha Arthy is more interested in her stories and characters. But working with form has become so deeply ingrained in her that she automatically includes it in her work. “I’ll always be very fond of visual expression, I’m just trying to get better at thinking along different lines.”

EXPERIMENTING AMONG LIKE-MINDED

Arthy doesn’t view herself as a director of films for adults or children. Each story determines its own target group, but she is interested in working more with and for children with whom she feels it is very easy for her to identify.

Like many other Danish directors of children’s films, her formal education included an opportunity to experiment among like-minded persons at the Children and Youth Section of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR TV. But like several directors from her own generation, she is increasingly turning her attention to genre films and other types of films in the big wide world, and away from the ‘classic’ tradition of Danish children’s films. And she believes that after a prolonged era of politically correct films, a number of very different children’s films will appear, films that match the numerous, diversified reference points of children – ranging from awful cartoons to sophisticated animation, *fantasy* and adventure films ■



Natasha Arthy - Photo: Jan Buus / *Miracle* - Photo: Lars Høgsted



Jannik Hastrup - Photo: Jan Buus / *The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Bear* - Photo: Jannik Hastrup

VIBRANT CLASSICS

A divinely blessed, impassioned storyteller. Jannik Hastrup is a fiery advocate of a unique Danish animation tradition and style that couldn't be more remote from the rest of the Disney-dominated Americana school prevailing throughout the world.

BY ULRICH BREUNING

In the early 1960s, Jannik Hastrup (b.1941) started as a trainee for director, animator and producer Bent Barfod together with Hastrup's friend and colleague Flemming Quist Møller. They jointly broke out on their own and made small, provocative, daring films with titles such as *Concerto Erotica* (1964) and *Scoundrel / Slambert* (1966) ending with the 45-minute stroke of genius *Benny's Bathub* (1971) that used humour and musicality to capture the essence of the youth revolution through high-spirited, inspired storytelling and healthy social criticism. The child's eye-level film depicts the little, slightly neglected main character with love and compassion, making the film a vibrant classic that doesn't seem dated.

LIGHT, CHEERY, PLAYFUL

Before this major work, Jannik Hastrup and Hanne Hastrup, his spouse at the time, had made the brilliant *Circleen* television series, which soon became a fixed term in the Danish children's film culture. *Circleen* is a thoughtful, meditative figure, yet quite the anxious mother when it comes to hammering some common sense into the heads of her two lively, cheeky and foolish mouse friends named Frederik and Ingolf (names used by Danish royalty). Almost a dozen *Circleen* films were made from 1968 to 1970, enchanting audiences with their light, cheery and playful tone and winning great admiration by dealing with daily chores that are important and recognisable to children: birthday parties, going to school, tobogganing, snowball fights and frivolity in general. Yet the films have political undertones as well, and profound world problems do surface. Compared to fully

animated American cartoons, for instance, this 'primitive', 'slipshod' stop-motion animation technique in which the animator moves a few body parts – like a jumping jack – instead of animating the entire figure, became nothing less than a political statement on culture for children: stories could be told to children on film without big budgets. The only requirement was feeling deeply about something, because if the story was all right, it didn't matter if it was slightly out of focus – like modern Dogme! The short *Circleen* films are now viewed as cultural heirlooms, and after three decades of enchanted sleep, Jannik Hastrup polished them off to make two new films, this time in cinematic format. The characters in *Circleen – City Mice / Cirkeline – Storbyens mus* (1998) and *Circleen – Mice and Romance / Cirkeline – Ost og kærlighed* (2000) are as refreshing and funny as ever, and *Circleen's* antics radiate the same urge to communicate an important message as their predecessors. It's obviously no accident, for instance, that the gallery of characters includes a strange, slightly darker mouse with exotic eating habits!

THE WORLD'S FOLLY

In the 1970s Jannik Hastrup focused on political subjects. He depicted the history of the world from a distinctly socialistic viewpoint with nine short films under the collective title *The History Book / Historiebogen* (1972-73). This was followed by *The Slaves / Trællene* (1978-80), also a series of nine autonomous, short animations, which harrowingly draw artistically convincing parallels between the living conditions of slaves of the past and those of modern-day wage earners. Two impressive, controversial, and therefore widely discussed, series.

These films paved the way for making complete feature-length animated films for cinema distribution. Jannik Hastrup saw the stories he wanted to transform into pictures in Bent Haller's work, and their collaboration started with *Samson and Sally / Samson og Sally* (1964), a free interpretation of Bent Haller's novel *Kasketotternes sang / Song of the Whales*.

The story about the two adventuresome young whales Samson and Sally who fight against whalers and pollution alike was a well-deserved hit, and is now a classic. Ever since, Bent Haller has written the screenplays for Jannik Hastrup's feature-length animated films: *Subway to Paradise / Strit og Stumme* (1987), *War of the Birds / Fuglekriegen i Kanøfleskoven* (1987), *The Monkeys and the Secret Weapon / Aberne og det hemmelige våben* (1995) and *The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Bear / Drengen der ville gøre det umulige* (2003). The common feature of these films is their depth of meaning and their desire to tell children good stories – within the framework of the fable and the fairytale – about our world's folly which can only be vanquished by the uncompromising miracle of love. In between the full-length animations, Jannik Hastrup has had fun making frolicsome short films and brief stylistic exercises about the history of jazz. In 1998 he made the important Hans Christian Andersen film – together with Bent Haller – entitled *Hans Christian Andersen and the Long Shadow / H.C. Andersen og den skæve skygge*.

UNCOMPROMISING TEMPERAMENT

When viewing a film by Jannik Hastrup you always know who made it. Although the good old days of stop-motion animation are a bygone era, the director's films always have an unusual style and a unique *Hastrup'ian* design. Jannik Hastrup says, with characteristic modesty, that he doesn't draw the figures and backgrounds, and besides, the budget determines the style of any given film. Even so, audiences experience Hastrup's desire to create an original artistic universe far from the beaten path of mainstream animation and bearing the unmistakable stamp of an uncompromising, artistic temperament. His design is often reminiscent of simple, beautiful watercolours with their own sense of beauty that harmoniously capture the spirit of the story. Going to the cinema to watch a film by Jannik Hastrup is an event I always look forward to with enthusiasm ■

A DARKER SHADE OF CHILDHOOD

Jesper W. Nielsen thinks it's absurd to distinguish between children's films and films for adults, because childhood is the foundation of adult life - for better or for worse.

BY LISELOTTE MICHELSEN

Children's thrillers, dream fantasies and a scenography bordering on surrealism. Jesper W. Nielsen makes exceptional children's films that stand out from the crowd, visually and plot-wise. He also makes it clear that he doesn't want anyone to describe his films as 'children's films'. Although the main characters are children and young people, they are just as much films for adults as for children, because childhood and adulthood are inseparable components of every person's existence, emphasises Jesper W. Nielsen.

LIFE IS INTERCONNECTED

"It's absurd to distinguish between children's films and films for adults," he says. "The very idea that adults should only watch films about adults is ridiculous. It is just as important and interesting to see films about childhood - who in the world ever conned us into thinking otherwise?"

"Childhood is the foundation of adult life, yet an utterly dreadful pretension dictates there's less prestige in watching films where the main characters are children."

"A gigantic gap separates the essence of children from the preferred adult view of children. Making snug, cute children's films has never appealed to me. I like to overstep the marks of the permissible and be far out where I can't quite touch bottom.

"Unfortunately, the avant-garde, slightly mad, limited-appeal children's films aren't made any more because they don't do well at the box office. In spite of the fact that children like the films shown at cinema clubs and the like. It would be wonderful if more limited-appeal children's films were made, especially because future audiences could get used to watching something else besides mainstream."

Jesper W. Nielsen set a tone already in his early films and this he continues to develop

and strengthen. Childhood and early adolescence are no bed of roses - thus Jesper W. Nielsen is clearly absorbed by the darker side of childhood.

Watching his films reminds you of the depth and power of children's feelings, problems and joys, which as we all know are profound human emotions and not a pale foretaste of adult life.

LITTLE BIG SISTER

His three short films (two of which also make up a feature film) about siblings Ida and Skrubsak are the cornerstones of his overall production of films starring children. The first was *The Bogeyman / Buldermanden* (1996), an effective little thriller about 8-year-old Ida and her baby brother Skrubsak who have to be taken care of by their grandmother in a large old flat. Grandmother gets the children to behave by telling them that the mysterious Bogeyman will come and take them away if they don't mind their manners. In a fit of sibling jealousy, Ida sends Skrubsak down to the basement which is allegedly haunted by the bogeyman. But she soon bitterly regrets she did this and sets out on a nerve-wracking mission to rescue her brother. The film is in black and white and employs classic, dramatic - and virtually expressionistic - sound and lighting effects to make the audience shudder.

The critically acclaimed *Southern Comfort / Lykkefanten* (1997) and *The Noodle Poop / Ogginoggen* (1997) - which were given a combined cinema premiere entitled *Little Big Sister / Forbudt for børn* (1998) - are also about Ida and Skrubsak. In the first part, Ida experiences the flip side of love when her parents get a divorce and her mother starts drinking. Ida is forced into becoming a much too grown-up child who tries to keep the family's everyday life on track. Her mother doesn't wake up from her alcoholic slumber until Ida finally and dramatically falls apart.

In the second part of *Little Big Sister*, Ida encounters her first puppy love - but wonders whether she has the courage to let herself go. To rediscover her belief in love, she has to overcome the trauma of her parents' divorce and re-establish her trust in the notion that

love can also lead to something wonderful and beautiful. The battle ends up being waged on the dance floor of her grandmother's dancing school where Ida has to run the entire gamut of emotions ranging from jealousy and uncertainty to grudging infatuation. *Little Big Sister* burns into your soul with its infallible sense of visual expression, colour-saturated scenography, dreamlike and sometimes nightmarish scenes, and a story that goes beyond realism. It is a modern fairytale, a fantastic, fantasy-borne story about the loss of innocence and a budding awareness.

THE LAST VIKING

The scenography and visual expression in Jesper W. Nielsen's feature film debut *The Last Viking / Den sidste Viking* (1997) will also be indelibly etched on your memory. This is a historical drama about a Viking boy named Harald who is left behind with the women and children of his village when his chieftain father joins a group of rebels in protest against the king who has taken over his ship. But the king takes revenge by letting a group of warriors occupy and tyrannise the village. So now the chieftain's son has to fulfil his destiny.

Jesper W. Nielsen originally graduated in editing from the National Film School of Denmark (in 1989) and has edited feature films for several directors, including Thomas Vinterberg. But even while Jesper W. Nielsen attended film school, he was working as a director at the same time. He directed the short film *Suburban Warrior / Ligusterkrigeren* in 1987, and over the next ten years, he made a series of films starring children and young people. His next two short films - a Christmas tale entitled *The Knight of Justice / Retfærdighedens rytter* (1989) and a love story *Veiled Hearts / Hjerter i slør* (1992) - established him as a significant director with a unique style.

In 2002, Jesper W. Nielsen directed his first feature film for an adult audience, entitled *Okay*, an overwhelming success with the audience and critics alike. His film *The Bouncer / Manden bag døren* (2003) will be followed by *Big Plans*, for release in 2004. ■



Jesper W. Nielsen - Photo: Jan Buus / *Little Big Sister* - Photo: Birger Vilén-Petersen



Henrik Ruben Genz - Photo: Jan Buus / *Someone Like Hodder* - Photo: Erik Aavatsmark

CONQUERING FEAR

He empties his pictures of superficiality to make room for feelings and thoughts.

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN

At first glance, Henrik Ruben Genz's (b. 1959) filmography may seem modest. In addition to several short documentary portraits, he has only made three fiction films, two of which are short films at that: *Cross Roads*, a graduation short from the National Film School (1995), the award winning short *Teis & Nico / Bror, min bror* (1998) and the feature film *Someone Like Hodder / En som Hodder* (2003).

Yet these three films reveal such great sensibility and pictorial genius that Henrik Ruben Genz is rightfully considered to be one of the biggest talents in Danish filmmaking. His films are nourished by details, by the moods of the scenes and by the small psychological subtleties, and one is spontaneously enthralled by Genz's profoundly human stories told so obliquely and artfully. The fact that his first two films after graduating from the National Film School have been children's films is surprising – especially to Genz himself.

"I didn't go looking for children's films, they came to me." I was struggling in vain to get a feature film project to work," says Henrik Ruben Genz. "All of sudden, Michael W. Horsten showed up with a screenplay for a children's film: *Teis & Nico*. Whenever I get a manuscript, I always try to imagine the images. Oftentimes they never appear, but in this case they came pouring out."

CLASS SHOWPIECE

Henrik Ruben Genz trained as a graphic artist at the Designskolen Kolding, Denmark, which is where he held his first video camera. Weary of working in cramped drawing offices designing plastic shopping bags, he established a base at the Danish Video Workshop in Haderslev where he made a series of unconventional documentary portraits of persons living on the edge: lonely, isolated men seeking some sort of meaning in their lives.

Henrik Ruben Genz was admitted to the National Film School in Copenhagen in 1991

where he became aware of fiction in earnest. His black-and-white graduation film *Cross Roads / Omveje* (he also wrote the screenplay) was the class showpiece. The film depicts a country-boy-turned-urban-dude named Bjarne who is confronted with his repressed past when he meets an old – and anything but urban – childhood friend from Herning, Jutland.

"*Cross Roads* is about fear – the fear of reality. Bjarne wants to disown his past and is afraid to make a commitment to his girlfriend," says Henrik Ruben Genz. "He is ambiguous, can't say yes or no and always keeps a back door open. But when past and present meet, he starts to realise that in order to have a future, he has to own up to his past."

LONER TRILOGY

Offhand, his leap from the wry deadpan comedy *Cross Roads* – inspired by Jim Jarmusch's cult classic *Stranger than Paradise* – to children's films seems great. But not to Henrik Ruben Genz.

"I knew nothing about children's films, I had never seen the *Amazon Jack* films, never seen *The World of Buster* or other famous children's films. It's even hard for me to remember my own childhood. But when I read the screenplay for the two children's films I've made, they suddenly reminded me of the desolation and loneliness.

Cross Roads, *Teis & Nico* and *Someone Like Hodder* can be viewed as a trilogy – according to Genz – about male loners who are confronted by their own fear and overcome it.

In *Teis & Nico*, this is true of 9-year-old Teis. He lectures his younger brother on the art of kissing, but hands become full when he falls in love with Giinjha and has to kiss her. This is the story of two brothers and one infatuation, of jealousy and the fear of performance, a small cinematic pearl entirely deserving of its Oscar nomination.

In *Someone Like Hodder*, based on Bjarne Reuter's novel and screenplay by Bo hr. Hansen, 9-year-old Hodder is visited by a fairy one night who asks him to save the world. This is quite a tall order for a little boy whose mother has died, who lives with his daydreaming father and who has no friends at school. But the indomitable Hodder is not easily unsettled.

STYLISTED IMAGERY

The three films share more than a common theme. They all move in a highly stylised world of imagery, where the key to Genz's special touch lies, by the way. He cleanses his images of superficialities like extras and knick-knacks. He drains the pictures, so to speak, to let us fill them with something invisible: feelings and thoughts.

"I'm trying to see through the eyes of the main character. I shut out reality and take the audience into a mental universe instead of a physical, realistic world. All my films describe a condition – the main character's," says Henrik Ruben Genz.

In *Cross Roads*, a naked, bleak and almost unrecognisable Copenhagen becomes a mental allegory of the main character's roaming loneliness.

In the equally stylised *Teis & Nico*, the atmosphere surrounding the main characters has been surgically removed. We never see the brothers' parents or schoolmates, and when they play on the playing field they're totally alone. Genz concentrates on the psychological drama. Just as in *Someone Like Hodder* where we are sucked into the inner world of the main character. We take over his view of the world. When he goes to a bicycle shop, for instance, the shop window isn't filled with bicycles, trailers or anything else – just the one bicycle that means something to him.

"Up to now, Hodder is the most active of Genz's main characters," the director notes with satisfaction.

"If you give the imagination too much elbow room, you run the risk of losing control. Yet in my opinion, the difference between reality and imagination is more vague to children. The human maturation process involves the growing awareness of what's what," says Genz, who is currently working on a television series, entitled *The Chronicle / Krøniken* for the Danish Broadcasting Company, DR TV. He hasn't decided on his next feature film yet.

Who knows? Maybe he'll get his hands on another good manuscript that inspires a flood of images – and enrich us with another children's film ■



Rubber Tarzan / Photo: John Johnsen



Catch That Girl / Photo: Jens Junker-Jensen



Eye of the Eagle / Photo: Jens Junker-Jensen

FILMLAND FOR CHILDREN

Film critic Kim Skotte (*Politiken*) gives his view of the directions taken in the children's filmscape.

BY KIM SKOTTE

"Everybody's good at doing something. You just have to discover what it is." This comforting assertion comes from *Rubber Tarzan / Gummi Tarzan* (1981), directed by Søren Kragh-Jacobsen.

Apart from the fact that this film is one of the best Danish children's films ever made, the film's democratic moral can also be used as a motto for the underlying philosophy of Danish children's films over many years.

Whereas the rest of the world have mainly defined children's films as entertainment for children, the ambitious commitment in Denmark to children's films is underpinned by a dominating humanistic philosophy: the perception that children and childhood are valuable in themselves and not just a preparation for 'real life'.

Although Danish children's films have plenty of imagination, they relatively rarely resort to magic and miracles. Because in a humanistic children's film, the true miracle is expressed by the fact that even kids have the power they need to change their lives.

Danish children's films deal with reality and are very rarely outright fantasy. They have by and large been swayed between Danish *hygge*, i.e., cosy pleasantries, and humanism. They have almost always had familiar real-life settings, regardless of whether their purpose has been to tell exemplary stories or merely to entertain.

When Astrid Henning-Jensen made the film version of Martin Andersen Nexø's *Ditte: Daughter of Man* in 1946, she set the standard for the caring film about the Danish child. Important, internationally renowned Danish directors such as Bille August, Nils Malmros, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Thomas Vinterberg, have lived up to this very same standard later on.

When the Film Act of 1982 ensured the unique status of films for children and young people, it manifested that the Danish society felt a specific responsibility to ensure the quality of films made for its future citizens. Through stories about children who change, mature and develop. Guided by this dominating spirit, the 1980s became a golden age for Danish children's films.

This situation changed slightly in the 1990s, however. The budding momentum of Danish films for adults overshadowed children's films. The ideal of the children's film as a history of development and a helping hand to daughters and sons lost ground to increasing commercialism.

New subsidy principles made it possible to increase the number of commercial projects. As in the rest of society, the political involvement and educational ambitions of children's films have had to give ground to entertainment value as an ideal. Speed, pace and particularly a style that was technologically up-to-date were seen as the key to an audience generation who were already heavy AV consumers by the time they were pre-schoolers.

ACTION!

This trend had its preliminary culmination when *Catch That Girl / Klatretøsen* (Hans Fabian Wullenweber) was premiered in 2002. It was the first unadulterated Danish action film for children.

The film is about 11-year-old Ida who loves to climb. She has inherited this trait from her father, who is succumbing to the after-effects of a climbing accident. Only immediate, prohibitively expensive surgery can save his life. Together with her friends Sebastian and Jonas, Ida decides to rob the CCT, a high-security bank tower, to get enough money for her father's operation. The popular and familiar child detectives of yore are transformed with ease and elegance into action heroes and criminals with honourable motives. The fast-paced, well-motivated plot resulted in a film that was received like a breath of fresh air by critics and the target group alike.



Beyond / Photo: Henrik C. Ploug



Hannibal & Jerry / Photo: Birger Vilén Petersen



Anton / Photo: Sebastian Henriksen

FROM 'HYGGE' TO HUMANISM

Catch That Girl is a continuation of sporadic attempts to make thrillers and detective films for the youngest members of society. One of the few successful attempts was Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *Shower of Gold / Guldregn* in 1988. Although *Catch That Girl* hailed the dawn of a new era of blatant adherence to unmistakable entertainment, it hadn't exactly appeared out of nowhere: there had already been several tentative efforts to make action films for children.

In 1995, Jørn Faurschou made the successful thriller for young audiences entitled *Body Switch / Farligt venskab*, and its Danish title, which translates as 'Dangerous Friendship', was an omen of things to come when Faurschou made the film version of *Albert* written by Ole Lund Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard's wry sense of humour had caused his books about brazen kids who successfully grapple with big, strong and awful Goliaths to become cherished objects for the screen - national treasures even - as the epitome of the lovable, audacious and non-conforming child. A good example is *Rubber Tarzan*, which is the film version of a Kierkegaard story. Faurschou took a very firm grip on this ingenious author with the built-in chuckle. He transformed a droll story about 'four-eyes' Albert into an action adventure film with brawny humour. It became a condensed

version of a knee-level, Danish-style Indiana Jones transplanted to the serenity of provincial Denmark. The family silver was starting to be sold off in earnest for the hard currency of the entertainment industry.

IMAGINATIVE ENTERTAINMENT

The land of children is a world of make-believe abounding with tribal natives and swashbuckling adventures in thick jungles on mysterious volcanic islands. This land of children is surrounded and patrolled by disgusting teachers, bullying cops and indifferent grown-ups. In the age of digitalisation and mobile phones, however, the unmarked regions on the map and the adult authorities just ain't what they used to be. Perhaps in reaction to - and in parallel with - the increasingly adult-like, media-dominated trends of children's daily lives, Danish films have become increasingly dominated by external suspense and mystery.

Peter Flinth was able to deliver the goods in his captivating boys' film about the Middle Ages, *Eye of the Eagle / Ørnens Øje* (1997): Prince Valdemar and his redoubtable kitchen boy have to fight for their lives when a vile bishop and his brutal one-eyed helper try to get rid of them. The one-eyed assistant has an eagle. The bandit can 'see' through the eyes of the eagle soaring like a spy satellite over the film's events enabling this clever storyteller to

slip in contemporary technology by the back door. Yet all this blood and action was a new world for the hitherto prevailing humanistic approach in Danish children's films - and it was handled with great caution. Yet *The Last Viking / Den sidste viking* (Jesper W. Nielsen) swung a bloody axe in 1997 with such a vengeance that audiences fled in panic.

A mixture of holiday romance, exorcism and cruel Nazi experiments on children prevented the submarine drama *Beyond / Dykkerne* (Åke Sandgren, 2000) from ever surfacing. The pirate tale *Jolly Roger* (Lasse Spang Olsen, 2001) walked the cinematic plank inspired by *Time Bandits*, but few children understood how the future was transformed into a pink octopus in a goldfish bowl.

It is a common adult delusion that unleashing one's imagination is a sure-fire method for getting childlike results. Children are not fond of imaginative anarchy, however. Like everybody else, they prefer a structure to jump off from.

IRONY AND KITSCH

The encroaching tendency to streamline and the waning interest of talented directors weakened children's films in the 1990s. But in 1997 Natasha Arthy entered the scene as a dynamic young talent with the short film *Penny Plain / Fanny Farveløs* that radiates Arthy's unusual, lively childlike imagination combined



Zafir / Photo: Per Arnesen



The Boy Who Walked Backwards / Photo: DFI Film Archive



Little Big Girl / Photo: Nille Leander

with her sophisticated love of storytelling and stylistic sensibility. Natasha Arthy simply legitimises the use of childishness in children's films. *Penny Plain* is a charming girls' story about a little girl whose everyday life is a little too plain, so she is sent to a 'princess academy' to be livened and brightened up.

It used to be universally accepted that children did not understand irony. But no more. Irony and kitsch gradually became the very backbone of a new generation of Danish humour that was especially fostered and nurtured by the Department for Children and Young People at the Danish Broadcasting Company, DR TV. Natasha Arthy did a term of duty in her youth at the organisation before establishing her reputation as the new trump card for Danish children's films with *Penny Plain* and the colourful kitsch comedy *Miracle / Mirakel* (2000).

In many ways, *Miracle* was the film everyone had been waiting for. It embodied the humanistic, humorous spirit of *Rubber Tarzan* reborn in contemporary dress and tone with magic, everyday realism wrapped up in a kitsch musical. The main character is puny Dennis P., the only one in his class without any pubic hair. Not fun. Nor is it fun that Dennis's dad died after falling off the roof in the middle of an air-guitar solo.

Wonders never cease, however, in a film

whose screenplay was written by Kim Fupz Aakeson, a novelist and author of children's books who has become one of the most important screenwriters of Danish films.

Directing duo Wikke & Rasmussen also used deadpan irony (and Kim Fupz Aakeson) in their musical comedy *Hannibal & Jerry* (1997), whereas they painted a disarming, ironically romantic picture of Denmark in *The Flying Granny / Flyvende Farmor* (2001), a film that quick-wittedly and patriotically advocates open-mindedness in an era of rapidly advancing xenophobia.

Irony and kitsch were the surprising, yet powerful allies for this re-emergence of humanism.

HUMANISM

This is not to say that humanism had been totally absent. Assimilating and adjusting to grief and trauma have been recurring themes, for instance. Aage Rais made his confident, sensitive debut in 1996 with the film *Anton*, a beautiful synthesis of realism and symbolism in a film about a boy who builds an aeroplane to reunite with his father who died as a fighter pilot.

Two of the most important works, however, appeared in the short film genre. Before *The Celebration / Festen* (1998) made him world-famous, Thomas Vinterberg made one of the most finely felt achievements in Danish

children's films: *The Boy Who Walked Backwards / Drengen der gik baglæns* (1994). Vinterberg exhibits exceptional care and touching insight into child psychology in this story of a boy named Andreas who tries to recover his big brother, killed in a traffic accident, by trying to walk backwards in time.

The decade's most interesting, controversial, yet at the same time overlooked feature was also forged on the short-film hearth: *Little Big Sister / Forbudt for born* (1998) about 10-year-old Ida who takes care of her little brother, while their world comes tumbling down around them. It is a bleak story of alcoholism and neglect incorporated into the formal fairytale structure and told with great empathy and intense expressionistic imagination.

Little Big Sister was originally two, loosely connected short films that were merged into one feature-length film under a suicidal, but fitting Danish title which translates as *X-Rated*.

The film is trying to say that life itself should be X-rated if it causes children this much pain. An X-rated children's film is absurd however. But this was actually the highly controversial fate (in the children's film world) that befell Jesper W. Nielsen's film whose final title – equally understandable and foolish – was determined out of spite after it had been rated "X" by the film censorship board. Not surprisingly, *Little Big Sister* was initially ignored by audiences, yet



The Crumbs / Photo: Henrik Petit



My Sister's Children / Photo: DFI Film Archive



Father of Four / Photo: DFI Film Archive

it is exceptionally engrossing for the children who have seen it. From an adult perspective, it is also a stimulating and in many ways a ground-breaking challenge to conventional social realism and some of the overly pedantic children's films.

COSY PLEASANTRIES AND "THE STRANGERS"

Zafir (Malene Vilstrup, 2003) is a film about girls who love horses and one of the relatively few girls' films whose rough Dogme aesthetics titillate only briefly in an all too recognisable story of a morose girl trying to find herself on the back of a black stallion.

The black stallion turns out to be a pony of integration uniting the blonde Danish girl and the dark stranger in mutual understanding.

Danish children's films only rarely confront the increasingly profound divisiveness caused by Danish immigration policy with anything more than pale support of non-committal tolerance.

The exception is *Wallah Be / Kald mig bare Aksel* (Pia Bovin, 2002) about a boy named Aksel who thinks Muslims are cool.

The film makes a precise point: the fact that Muslims have a distinct identity makes a little boy green with envy if he lives in a country whose inhabitants are basically suspicious of foreigners because they are increasingly

incapable of defining the essence of their own national identity, with the exception of football fans perhaps. But then one can always resort to Danish 'hygge', that illustrious ideal of cosy pleasantries, which – humanism and progressiveness aside – has truly left its massive mark on Danish children's films: films about small, funny stereotyped families where all problems are fleeting and are in reality nothing but good excuses – following a lot of drama and entertaining antics – for reuniting around a well-provided dinner table.

It all started in 1953 with the first of the popular series of films entitled *Father of Four / Far til Fire* (made between 1953–1961) by Alice O'Frederiks and these *hygge* films have demonstrated their indestructible popularity time after time.

Two of the most successful concepts are entitled *The Crumbs / Krummerne* (Svend Methling, 1991–1994) and *My Sister's Children / Min Søsters Børn* (Annelise Reenberg, 1966–1971 & Tomas Villum Jensen, 2001–2002), both series have repeatedly been solid top scorers at the Danish box office.

Back when the Danish cultural elite were leftists, this sort of film was denounced as commercial rubbish. But gradually the attitude has become tolerant, if anything. Now that the American-dominated agenda is based on non-committal entertainment anyway, it's all right

if state-subsidised Danish family films get their share, too. A divorce rate of fifty percent in the real Danish world has hardly made such films less popular either. Regardless of whether Danish children's films have been epitomised by daughters of man or action girls, there has always been room for *hygge* films that idealise the family.

There is every indication that *hygge*, frivolity and action are being challenged once again, however: *Wallah Be, Someone Like Hodder* by Pia Bovin and Henrik Ruben Genz as well as Morten Kølbert's film version of Cecil Bødker's renowned children's book *Hungerbarnet* entitled *Little Big Girl / Ulvepiggen Tinke* are three current films which show that the dream of making children's films that make a difference is starting to rear its head once more ■

(The Danish animated film tradition, which has been of great importance in the overall context of Danish children's films is represented and dealt with elsewhere in the magazine. – ed.).

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QUERY

WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL OPINION OF THE CURRENT SITUATION?

FILM's editorial staff asked a handful of relevant persons to appraise the immediate situation of the children's film genre by writing the following letter to them:

"Dear ...,

How would you like to write a brief article for the Danish Film Institute's FILM magazine?

We are currently preparing a special issue in English in which we report on the current situation of Danish children's films – and possibly even look at the situation a few years down the road.

We have requested two film consultants, a screenwriter and a distributor to reflect on the current situation – a 'state of the art', if you will – and to present their wishes and ideas for the children's and youth films of the future.

And you are one of them...

Take the floor!

Kind regards,
FILM's editorial staff

Read their replies on the following pages...

WHO'S KIDDING WHO?

Inexpensive, clever series and simple, convenient production methods are the best tactics in the struggle against splatter, violence, blood, poo and teddy bears.

BY PER NIELSEN

Swedish Film Institute / Feature Film Consultant

One of the most terrifying things an adult can witness – in terms of Children's insatiable consumption of images – is their seemingly unfiltered absorption of virtually everything that flickers across the screen. They swallow the whole caboodle, so to speak, in one big gulp. From Japanese, computer-animated, monster splattered, Ninja-killer types to pink, overweight ponies with fluorescent, metre-long tales. The world is saved in the same beat as a baby bee cannot find its mother, after which an entire city is demolished by a natural catastrophe and a larva turns into a butterfly. Atom bombs juxtaposed with sparklers and a song about holding hands with a true friend.

BLOOD, TEDDIES, VIOLENCE AND FRIENDSHIP

An average four-year-old consumer of world-wide TV swallows this media hotchpotch of blood, teddy bears, violence and friendship apparently without a murmur. Especially because many parents gave up long ago and are busy with other business. These same parents don't always have any idea about the peculiar stories and unprincipled, perceptual excursions with which their children are being bombarded. When asked, most parents think Disney is okay and in effect want their children to watch the same familiar TV puppets and out-of-date series they themselves watched when they were children. No one got hurt, as far as we remember.

The power of habit and the daily humdrum of pressured-for-time and makeshift measures to keep a modern, nuclear family more or less intact are the conditions that make it possible for children to ever get access to such pitiful stories. And they are pitiful. Try finding a so-called children's channel from time to time and then

sit down and watch for an hour or two. If you aren't either put to sleep or shocked and infuriated by the standard fare, then stay tuned. However, if you find anything that deepens the furrows in your brow and makes your anxiety thermometer skyrocket, just consider the number of hours, days, weeks, months and years your own child will be spending here. Does it make them happy?

Since changing the pace or habits of most modern families with children is next to impossible, the problem should be tackled elsewhere: at the source. Television and film stories don't write themselves. Someone wants them, so others make them. And this is the tiny window of opportunity still left for heightening the quality. It won't be easy. Because the reams of cheap sludge for children are produced from the same mould that gives us the frequently nonsense-pandering reality series for adults. The basic need to pass the time in front of the TV set is apparently stronger than the critical filter applied to the objects of our glare. This applies to most people, statistically speaking, so the media choose to follow this path, economically speaking. After all, television is big business, not an art museum.

It does seem hopeless, perhaps particularly because children are not opinion-pollled to the same extent as adults are, and perhaps because they usually eat whatever they're served. The discriminating child is a myth or in any case an exception to the two-hour rule in front of the tube with its daily dose of splatter, violence, blood, poo and teddy bears.

BEAT THEM WITH THEIR OWN WEAPONS

The utopian possibility of heightening television quality for the youngest viewers is not something to be taken seriously in practice, given the current media landscape. But before my pessimism turns into paralysing apathy, before we douse the last fiery idealist with a bucket of cold facts about the general situation of the industry – i.e., film and television for our youngest viewers – then let's console ourselves at the small oases of gems and bright spots in the midst of this media darkness.

Because we founded film institutes and children's departments at television stations to take up the fight with this very world of hopelessness. Not against, mind you, but with. Because only by making, or rather producing the stories just as inexpensively, just as simply and just as conveniently can we ever really believe that we will be anything more than a-holier-than-thou, know-it-all appendix to the broad selection of available programming. In order to market a mass-media product, we must tenaciously use the same strategies and apply the same commercial values. Quality alone does nothing. A media product has to have the same urgency as a Harry-Potter fever and be just as trendy as Britney Spear's navel. Ideas with clout, reaching far beyond a single gem, have to be strengthened and developed. Examples here are *Pingo*, *Wallace & Gromit*, but are not limited to animation. This is one path – comprising clever serialised products struggling against the same odds as the computer-generated, mass-hysterical, junk series. Because they will be bought and seen in the reality outside the fine, elitist film festivals.

In short, quality – if it exists – has to be made accessible. Not only as something to be purchased on a DVD or video, even if this is the only alternative available. A good alternative, I might add. This is where you make an outright – albeit expensive – quality-related choice for your children. This is preferable but still expensive for a young family.

In limited language areas such as Scandinavia, this type of children's film and television initiative are only made on the basis of government support. Quality costs more than the calculable market value. Somewhat like motorways: they have to be top quality – but rarely turn a profit. Poor roads are noticed, if only the same were true of poor children's fiction.

The awareness of what constitutes good or bad children's film must naturally be elastic. It should neither lecture nor streamline. It should neither be politically corrected nor follow fixed formulas. It should be based on a genuine desire of the filmmaker to say something, not merely fill a void of time with a void of images. Unfortunately the voids still outnumber the rest ■

TODAY'S CHILDREN TOMORROW'S

The children's and youth films are solely responsible for the cinema prosperity of the new millennium. In the early and mid 1990s, children's films accounted for every sixth ticket sold at the cinema. Today it is every fourth!

BY LOKE HAVN

Managing Director / Sandrew Metronome Filmdistribution

In panning the market for children's films from the early 1990s up to the present, some highly positive trends are encountered on all fronts:

- production volume has increased
- admissions have increased
- market shares have increased
- and the quality has improved.

QUALITY

As the last observation is naturally more subjective, let's look at it first.

All eras have engendered excellent films, but in my opinion the genuine treasures in the field of children's films are fewer and farther between the further you go back in time.

Good heavens, I cried too when *Lassie* came home, and I enjoyed the Danish *Father of Four* films. But even so, I don't miss any of them. Probably because their bona fide replacements, which are in reality just as one-dimensional and sentimental, are still being made today.

In a shortage situation, which has existed in the market for children's films for far too long, the willingness to tolerate poor quality is often inversely proportional to the supply.

The most important thing, however, is that the volume of good to excellent films for children and young people completely overshadows the more questionable ones. In my view, therefore, we are currently in the midst of a 'golden age' of films for children and young people.

It wasn't until the last decade that the Disney Group's otherwise well-deserved dominance was challenged from all sides, thereby enriching the amount, spectrum and versatility of the supply. The passion for storytelling goes hand in hand with the improved financial and technical conditions and is almost always used in the service of the imagination and on the children's own terms.

During this period, foreign filmmakers have given us such wonderful children's films as *Babe*, *Toy Story*, *Shrek*, *Harry Potter*, *Ice Age* and many, many more. And Disney still has a powerful and even increasing production of animated films, such as *Aladdin*, *Mulan*, *Beauty and the Beast*, et. al. Danish films have made an excellent showing in this market, as we'll see in just a moment. First, I would like to concentrate plainly and objectively on the actual volume of films made for children and young people.

PRODUCTION VOLUME

For the sake of clarity, I will concentrate on the

last twelve years from 1991 to 2002 and divide them into four three-year periods. For example, Table 1 shows how an average of almost nine children's films a year were released from 1991 to 1993, while during the first three years of the new millennium, twenty children's films were released each year, more than six of which were Danish. This is an enormous increase. (Table 1)

BOX OFFICE SALES

An increase in film volume is absolutely no guarantee that box office sales will also increase. We've learned this from the film market for adults. This is not the case for children's films, however, where ticket sales have soared almost as much as the number of films. Table 2 shows how the average number of tickets sold from 1991 to 1993 was 1.7 million a year, while this average figure had increased to more than 3.1 million a year from 2000 to 2002. (Table 2)

By comparison it should be noted that the box office figures for the so-called films for adults almost stagnated during the same period. On the whole, the children's films are solely responsible for the cinema prosperity of the new millennium. Now there's something to think about!

In the early and mid 1990s, children's films accounted for every fifth ticket sold at the cinema. Today it is every fourth (see Table 3)! This same trend is evident in a number of the other European markets. (Table 3)

Obviously, film professionals are very

SHAPE GROWTH

pleased by this trend. Because in a larger perspective, we have reason to believe that the higher attendance frequency by the youngest segments is laying the groundwork for a greater interest in films when they grow up (an analogy that is easily transposed to the far more deliberate strategy of a global family restaurant chain, suitably designated as the 'McDonald's Effect').

MARKET SHARE

Denmark is one of the European countries with the most striking success in the production of its own films. This is true quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Danish children's films are no exception.

As the three tables show, the volume of Danish children's films has increased significantly and this trend has been mirrored in their box-office sales and market shares. However in percentages, this trend has not been as striking as the trend for foreign children's films. But even though the total amount spent on making all the Danish children's films produced during the period in question – including fiction and animated films alike – has not been anywhere near the cost of producing just one of the wonderful Hollywood productions from the Pixar or DreamWorks studios, several of our home-grown films have nevertheless been able to match the foreign films both in terms of critical acclaim and box office figures. This period has given us such enduring classics as *Eye of the Eagle* / *Ørnens Øje*,

Amazon Jack 1 and 2 / *Jungledyret, Miracle / Mirakel, Help! I'm a Fish / Hjælp! Jeg er en fisk* and *Catch That Girl / Klatretøsen*, if I may venture to name just a few.

The latter film, by the way, has just been sold for remake in the US, and will be released in Easter, 2004, under the title *Mission Without Permission*.

THE INSATIABLE

Obviously a child's urge to be told and re-told a good story is difficult to satiate, regardless of whether the source comes from moving pictures

or books – fortunately, I might add. It is just as gratifying to see that films have not replaced books as the vehicle for good stories. On the contrary, these two narrative forms form a mutually inspiring symbiosis in which books are made into films and films are made into books and magazines.

Denmark is a small Scandinavian country whose storytelling tradition has sublime terms and where good, imaginative stories are constantly being developed for children and young people, who will always remain faithful to us, as long as we remain faithful to them ■

TABLE 1 / AVERAGE NUMBER OF RELEASES: CHILDREN & YOUTH FILMS

	PERIOD 1 (1991-93)	PERIOD 2 (1994-96)	PERIOD 3 (1997-99)	PERIOD 4 (2000-02)	INCREASE PERIOD 1-4
Danish	3,0	5,0	4,7	6,3	111%
Foreign	5,7	4,7	9,0	14,3	153%
Total	8,7	9,7	13,7	20,6	138%

TABLE 2 / AVERAGE NUMBER OF ADMISSIONS (1000s): CHILDREN & YOUTH FILMS

	PERIOD 1 (1991-93)	PERIOD 2 (1994-96)	PERIOD 3 (1997-99)	PERIOD 4 (2000-02)
Danish	902	547	631	1.260
Foreign	830	1.392	1.357	1.847
Total	1.732	1.939	1.988	3.107

TABLE 3 / AVERAGE MARKET SHARE: CHILDREN & YOUTH FILMS

	PERIOD 1 (1991-93)	PERIOD 2 (1994-96)	PERIOD 3 (1997-99)	PERIOD 4 (2000-02)
Danish	9,7%	5,8%	5,7%	10,6%
Foreign	8,9%	14,4%	12,4%	15,6%
Total	18,6%	20,2%	18,1%	26,2%

Source: Industry figures

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN

Imagine if we could make films that appealed to children and adults alike (which I think the best children's films actually do) and that these films had the audacity to take a stand about something! Films that entertain but also challenge their audience that people talk about afterwards. Will this type of film ever appeal to a wide audience? Are adult audiences mature enough to take their children to the cinema to see such a film? Or are adults generally just a little too childish and immature for this to ever be possible?

BY BO HR. HANSEN

Scriptwriter

I'll admit I'm rather childish. I'm 41 years old but not very mature for my age, I'm sorry to say. Many of the films for adults I've written – as well as my plays and books for adults – revolve around immature persons who grope their way through life as though they were blind, trying to find their place in life. Confusion, loneliness, self-deception, egoism, faintheartedness and incompetence have been the primary personality traits of these characters. Only humour and irony have made them bearable to watch. Hard pressed, I would probably describe myself as a humorist.

Obviously I've had an urge to tell about these adult figures, otherwise I never would have. But I'm also fortunate to have had an opportunity to write for children, both alone and with others. And the characters who do emerge when I write for children seem more mature. Stronger. Almost more grown-up, actually. Even if I never think of them as adults. I feel sick when I occasionally hear a film director or screenwriter refer to a child character as a "strong woman", for instance. It sounds disgraceful to me. Let children be children.

Just because they're children doesn't mean they can't have more mature personalities than the adults around them.

My own childishness is sometimes a joy and sometimes a curse. But I clearly feel that I express

the best sides of this childishness when I'm actually writing for children. My childishness helps me when I enter the world of my main characters. I've never had a direct feeling of lowering myself a couple of degrees or trying to think of how a child would react. But – I'm in the process of praising myself, immensely childish in itself – I have basically felt that I was always at eye level with my characters. This includes Andreas in *The Boy Who Walked Backwards* who tries to go back to the time before his brother died. And Aksel in *Wallah Be* who tries his luck at being a Muslim because he wants to be like the hip immigrant boys in the neighbourhood. And the lonely boy named Hodder of *Someone Like Hodder* who is visited by a fairy who gives him the impossible task of saving the world. And Josefine from *Jesus and Josefine* (a television Christmas programme for children to be shown in 2003) – which I wrote together with screenwriter Nikolaj Scherfig. Josefine is so tired of celebrating her birthday on Christmas Eve that she tries to abolish Christmas.

They are all very strong-willed characters. At the same time, their projects seem rather flighty. Perhaps even flightier than those of the main characters in films for adults.

There are lots of good children's films whose characters have very specific projects they're striving to fulfil – like getting money for dad's operation or winning a horse race or whatever. But I am particularly fond of the more imaginative and even philosophical stories, and this is undoubtedly both a strength and a weakness, because it's easy for this type of story to run out of steam.

I realise that film is an alarmingly objective medium demanding movement and action. Therefore it's important never to let the characters get swallowed up by their own world in the story, but have them confront an external reality. And a film like *Wallah Be* also has a very specific event that Aksel and his friends relate to i.e., a local song contest for children, while Aksel, basically an atheist, tries to live like an orthodox Muslim. The tension in *Someone Like Hodder* starts when Hodder tries to involve the dominating boys from his class in his fantasy and they fool him. And in *Jesus and Josefine*,

Josefine gets a purely physical opportunity to change the course of history and perhaps actually abolish Christmas when she finds a time gate that takes her back to Nazareth where she meets Jesus as a 12-year-old boy.

As I mentioned before I consider my child characters to be more mature than my childish adult characters. This does not mean that "my kids" are flawless, well-scrubbed heroes and heroines, though. Children have their own quirks and less attractive sides, too. Aksel is not the best friend in the world. Josefine is certainly self-centred. But they're people who can grow and develop. And they are daring enough to do the right thing after all. They are small heroes and heroines.

I hope I get an opportunity to write more films for children. I don't know what they should deal with offhand. I have to finish writing some stories about immature adults first. I hope and believe that a need for children's films still exists, even though children seemingly want to see the same as adults. I really think it's important that there are also films which try to enter the realm of children, though. Try to see the world from a child's point of view.

I'm not blind to the fact that the so-called family films have cornered the biggest audiences for the past many years, whereas outright children's films have usually had a more limited appeal. I also nurture a certain respect for the totally non-committal family films because I realise they fulfil a need, but I have also grown tired of their emptiness.

Just imagine if we could strengthen the family-film genre. Imagine if we could make films that appealed to children and adults alike (which I think the best children's films actually do) and that these films had the audacity to take a stand about something! Films that entertain but also challenge their audience. That people talk about afterwards. Will this type of film ever appeal to a wide audience? Are adult audiences mature enough to take their children to the cinema to see such a film? Or are adults generally just a little too childish and immature for this to ever be possible? ■

MORE VISUALS AND A COURSE AT THE FILM SCHOOL, PLEASE!

Films are made of images: use them!
- Film consultant calls for more visual
courage and more experiments in
Danish documentaries for kids.

BY BODIL COLD-RAVNKILDE

DFI / Film Consultant / Short and Documentary films

Every year, some fifteen short and documentary films are made with support from DFI's film consultant for children and young people.

As a film consultant, I'm interested in directors who have a desire to tell a story to the most receptive audience around, i.e., children and young people, who are untiringly inquisitive about the world and its diversity.

Hopefully a director's imagination and enthusiasm for imagery should jump out at you from the screen and draw children into a story of moving pictures - the strongest media by far for this age group.

WANTED: VISUALS!

A film starts somewhere in the director's mind, and as a consultant, I want the images that emerge here to be shared with me so I can understand the director's intentions and how he or she envisions the final film. But to be honest, this effort is often lacking. Or perhaps the task of making one's ideas perfectly clear is simply too difficult. After two years as a consultant, I still open my mail with great hopes and expectations of seeing *images*, lighting suggestions, paintings that have inspired the proposer, pieces of colour samples, music filled with imagery, VHS shots of scenarios that could be included in the film documentary-like photos or an inspiring drawing made by a child.

In reality, I've only had this experience roughly four times in two years, and the last time I received a folder of photographs, drawings and sketches, it was a real eye-opener. Mostly I only receive words on paper describing a story, though. The proposals usually appeal to a broad target group - such as five to ten-year-olds - making it almost always doomed to failure from the outset. Very rarely do five and ten-year-olds have the same interests: their stages of development are light years apart.

ANIMATED ANIMATION

There is one big delightful exception: animated films. This is where things are jumping, where wild ideas and fantastic imagery are being produced. Imagination is flourishing! I had an even deeper understanding of this after attending the animation festival in Annecy in June, attended by a fantastic, dedicated audience - young and old film freaks alike, many of whom were budding filmmakers. Here I experienced how infectious imagination and lunacy can be. Only one thing had brought these thousands of people together: animation. And it was thrilling to observe that many of the programmes weren't divided into animation for adults and children, but were shown in the same category.

Animation is also the field in which the largest Scandinavian co-productions are found, and although co-production may smooth the path for this expensive genre, this cooperation can be developed even more, in my opinion.

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Is everything really so cut and dried? No, fortunately not. This coming autumn and spring 2004 will see the advent of several ground-

breaking films, films combining documentary and fiction, for example, depicting a demographic theme in a south Copenhagen suburb, and there's also a heavy film on the drawing board dealing with moral codes or lack of them for children and young people.

Even so, pessimism casts a dark shadow across my desk: Is it really true that making films for children is still not very prestigious? Even when the Danish Film Institute makes a strong commitment on many fronts to get children's films into the limelight and give them exposure? Yes, this is apparently a widely held attitude among filmmakers. Is this caused by a lack of press exposure? Or a lack of simple knowledge about the audiences for children's films?

The film school doesn't have a special module that answers the question: How does one make films for children, and why is it so important? It's still important, however as we all know, because any child who has seen wonderful films - short and feature-length, animation, fiction and documentary - and who keeps them in their own treasure chest or hard disk will grow up to be the critical, alert, member of an audience whom every film director must long for.

So my wish is this: Make an even stronger commitment! This also applies to the film schools and the children's film genre in general - so we can keep producing films we are proud of and can add to our libraries, videotheques, schools, DFI's distribution network, etc., as unique treasures. We need children's films with the stamp of quality: relevant, powerful, meaningful, visual films made by up-and-coming talents and by older, proficient filmmakers who share a common belief: the profound importance of making films for children and young people ■

COARSE LINES



Terkel in Trouble / Framegrab

A new trend in Danish children's films is in the offing. Young directors are increasingly turning to genre films and new media, offering up irony and imagery that are far from politically correct.

BY BARBARA SCHERFIG

"The biggest hamper on an artist's style is money, I always say. The more you have, the greater the restrictions. The cheaper you can make a project, the more creative freedom you have." This sounds like unadulterated Dogme twaddle and is also somewhere in that direction - for children. These are the words by Stefan Fjeldmark, the

director of a new, wild and rowdy animated Danish children's film, *Terkel in Trouble* which resembles something of a trend in the offing for Danish children's films.

By comparison, Stefan Fjeldmark's previous directing project *Help! I'm a Fish / Hjælp jeg er en fisk* had a budget of DKK 100 million, whereas the budget for *Terkel in Trouble* is only DKK 10 million. So he ought to know what he's talking about.

NEW MEDIA AWARENESS

In recent decades, Danish children's films have been enriched by a proud tradition that has given us many fine film ideas, served with equal portions of magic and realism.

The tradition emanated from a media

landscape featuring one nation-wide television station with accompanying children's programming. In the course of a few years, the entire landscape has totally transformed, however, and is now bursting with new television stations and brand new media.

Children have embraced it all and move with ease from one medium to the other - hand in hand with fictional characters and "dirty words" that adults didn't even know existed. So while the grown-ups have been discussing Dogme rules, children have been having fun with computer games, mobile phones, surfing the Internet and American-made series and genre films.

Some of the young directors may have been doing all these things, too - or perhaps their careers have made it easier for them to navigate

the waters of a new and different media awareness. In any event, they are not reluctant to put well-meaning pedantry on the shelf and fill their films with a tough, devil-may-care ironic attitude, subscribing to genres like fantasy, and making general use of cross-media references.

This is evident when films like Hans Fabian Wullenweber's *Catch That Girl / Klatretøsen* dare to be an outright genre film for children, providing good, professionally-crafted entertainment. Or when Natasha Arthy's *Miracle / Mirakel* radiates genuine freshness precisely because it unabashedly dares to refer to musicals, adventure films or hip hop culture, with a solid point of departure in the 'good old' tradition of magical realism.

TERKEL - COARSE COMEDY

A.Film and Stefan Fjeldmark are not afraid to admit that they want to help push Danish children's films in a new direction:

"The renewed genre awareness and the Dogme movement made a big impact on Danish films for adults. Yet strangely enough, 99 per cent of all children's films keep returning to an old, stale concept. So I really hope that *Terkel in Trouble* will be a film that helps to give children's films a breath of fresh air," says Stefan Fjeldmark, who spent his early animation career working on A.Film's first productions, such as *Amazon Jack*, 1 and 2.

Most children already know the story about the deeply troubled schoolboy Terkel, a cult series written by stand-up comedian Anders Matthesen and broadcasted on the Children's Radio slot by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR). Since then, a CD version of the series has been released, arousing anger and astonishment in many adults, yet joy and delight in children. The story is not for the squeamish who adhere to the educational theories of the '70s. It is coarse black comedy that pokes fun at well-meaning teachers, child labour in poor countries, obesity and in general areas hitherto untouchable in the name of political correctness.

Violence is clearly present when Terkel receives anonymous death threats, when 'child advisor' Uncle Stewart dishes out blows right and left and when Terkel's friends carry lead pipes in their pocket – and it's funny, at that. Yet the very fact that the story of 11-year-old Terkel – and his many troubles with bullying friends and narrow-minded and incompetent grown-ups – is packed with irony and flippancy is also why the story under its grotesque

surface facilitates genuine understanding and sympathy for its characters. That is if you, like Stefan Fjeldmark, think that modern children can handle irony and empathise with the characters.

"If you don't have a sense of humour, and take it very seriously, this obviously makes you incapable of understanding why it has to be so repulsive," he says and expects the film to be controversial. "We're not making the film to be provocative, of course. We're making it because we think it's a good, funny story. But it would help from a marketing angle if the film provoked a few people," he laughs.

He insists that the story – rumoured to be banned at some youth recreation centres and performed as a play at others – is neither cynical nor heartless, but uses a form of exaggeration that actually makes children think about the film's point. "It's so immoral that it ends up being ethical," says Fjeldmark. "I'm sure that other cynical, immoral films have been made, but they aren't like this one, because ours deals with how children feel about each other. It's a thriller and a story about bullying at the same time. It's a story in which they ridicule a girl so much that she jumps out the window and dies – and then they joke about it afterwards. It's taken to such extremes that you can't help but form an opinion of it."

Fjeldmark emphasises that the film does not try to stimulate children's urge to be disobedient, i.e., to listen to and see things that grown-ups don't want them to. Their aim is to take children seriously by dealing with their feelings and conflicts.

NEW TECHNIQUE, NEW POSSIBILITIES

When Stefan Fjeldmark says that the biggest hamper on an artist's style is money, he means it. His attitude is a direct consequence of his experience in large-budget animation projects. And he thinks that in general expensive films are simply not as good as low-budget films. Though he concedes that it depends on the story in question, of course, and that he won't exclude the possibility of working on expensive films. "Right now I'm affiliated with two projects: *Asterix*, for DKK 160 million, and *Terkel*, for DKK 10 million. One is a little jazz band while the other is a large symphony orchestra." Even so, Stefan Fjeldmark reiterates the importance of laying the groundwork for making low-budget animations.

It stands to reason that one should never do anything that might distance a film from a

commercial audience, and the big budgets also go hand in hand with big demands for success. On the face of it, a film like *Terkel in Trouble* couldn't be made on an international budget, because "they smoke, drink and swear in our film. There's actually no limit to what they do. If we knew, for example, that we had to stake our success on the American market, then we would remove such things immediately."

If low-budget animations turn out to be a new trend, it will presumably be due to several factors, such as a sparkling group of talented professionals with an accumulated need to tell crazy, creative stories combined with the potential enabled by the latest technological developments.

The people at A.Film haven't deliberately considered revolutionising Danish children's films. But they have had a definite wish to find new storytelling methods and deliberately tried to depart from habitual approaches. In light of these considerations, they have now created a technique that enables them to make *Terkel in Trouble* on a low budget – but without compromising the aesthetic qualities:

"The technique involves several different methods we have developed to simplify the animation process, the set-building process and the character-building process," explains Stefan Fjeldmark. "It can rightfully be called a Dogme animation technique. Because in a way it's similar to Dogme when they shoot on video tape instead of on 35 mm film with artificial lighting. Some of the things we do differently involve purely mechanical techniques that make the film less expensive."

The drawback is that this technique isn't suitable for all films. "It's well-suited for films that revolve around the story and the dialogue and which aren't visual extravaganzas. This is another slight similarity to Dogme," says Fjeldmark. He is proud of the technique and hopes that it can help set some things in motion – even though it wasn't conceived as a Dogme technique for children's films.

"We are *really* breaking new ground by doing this. *Terkel* costs only DKK 10 million. Many children's films "only" cost DKK 10 million, but it's very difficult to find an animated film of comparable quality. I really don't think anyone has ever done it before. In other words, if this succeeds, it will smooth the way for future film-makers who can also tell unusual stories with more of an edge, because they don't have to be sold all over world," concludes Fjeldmark ■

THE RIGHT TO SEE GOOD CHILDREN'S FILMS

Professionalism, skilled actors and actresses and a unique approach to childhood: these are some of the reasons behind the current success of Danish children's films, according to Thomas Hailer, director of the children's film festival in Berlin.

BY THOMAS THURAH

Thomas Hailer (b. 1959), director of the Berlin children's film festival, Hailer has been professionally engaged in drama, dance and music theatre for fifteen years, before channelling his energies into children's films in the mid 1990s. Since then, he has been working as a screenplay consultant and dramaturge on a variety of projects, and is currently in the midst of the long run-up to the next Berlin festival.

It's still too early to ask the festival director which Danish films will be on next year's programme. But it's not too early to ask Thomas Hailer to give us his opinion of Danish children's films.

MANY GENRES

"A children's film audience wants to be taken just as seriously as an audience who attends a film for adults. And this means that the film must be told from a child's perspective. When I review the films of recent years that I like and which have also been successful, they are all films that don't underestimate or talk down to these young cinemagoers. Children hate this approach like poison. One of the things that has impressed me about Danish films in this context is that many of the films also appeal to adult audiences. *How would you characterise Danish children's films?*

"It's my impression that people who work in the Danish children's film sector take great pains and are highly professional. The large selection of films has also made an impression on me. As a festival organiser it's difficult to choose just one. Also because many more genres have been added in recent years. Some films have daringly tackled otherwise difficult subjects, but there have also been films, such as *Catch That Girl*,

that have obvious commercial potential." *Weren't the three Danish films at the children's film festival in Berlin last February also very different from each other?*

"Yes, we had a broad spectrum: Pia Bovin's *Wallah Be*, Jannik Hastrup's wonderful animated film *The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Bear* and Henrik Ruben Genz's *Someone Like Hodder*. Three very different films showing that children's films are more than just telling fairytales. They can deal with other issues, too.

To me, the decisive feature of Nordic and Danish children's films is that it's a matter of course to make films for children in all genres – adventures and fairytales, yet also stories based on children's everyday lives."

EUROPEAN TRADITION

Conditions for animated films are unfavourable. Should we even bother making them when they do such a good job of it in the US?

"Yes, of course we should. Jannik Hastrup's film clearly showed the rich potential waiting to be discovered and the innovative ways of discovering it.

His films have their own imagery and are animated according to high artistic standards.

The film also tells a Nordic myth, and a brutal one at that."

But isn't the influence of animated films from the US obvious in other areas?

"Yes, it is. Many European animated films try to copy their American counterparts. These attempts are futile, however, without exorbitant production funding at one's disposal. But *The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Bear* is the best conceivable example of a European narrative tradition and an animation style that we have every reason to maintain and develop.

THE RIGHT TO A CHILDHOOD

"The way I see it, and this is very important, childhood plays a different role in the Danish society, and Danes have a different awareness of childhood than in most other countries. Danes also have concepts such as "the right to a childhood", for instance.

In Germany we have a tradition for old-fashioned teaching methods that go a long way back to previous centuries. According to this

tradition, childhood is a time of life when you're unfinished, imperfect. Not yet grown up.

In my impression, Denmark has something as simple as the right to be a child. Childhood is a non-reducible, integral part of human growth. In this context, it may also be relevant to speak of *the right* to have children's films."

Does this have consequences for the films: is it noticeable?

"In my experience of Danish films – regardless of genre – I find an immediacy, a directness. And they embody a view of children that I like, whether I like the films or not. But primarily it's noticeable because the films are well made, adequately funded and, as a result, with satisfactory terms of production. And it's also noticeable by virtue of the fact that the children are excellent actors and actresses. Even though they're not professionals. The opposite is often true in other countries. I often think, 'Cute story, hopeless performance.' This has something to do with the production conditions, but also with how they view childhood."

A GOOD STORY

Do you think children's films are art?

"Yes, of course they are!"

Does art matter to children?"

"Yes, absolutely. And in this respect, children are no different than adults, so just look at your own needs that you fulfil by going to the cinema. Of course, you might be looking for nothing but entertainment, but you may also want to form a picture of the world. Like whenever we watch children from other parts of the world work out their problems and then learn something about our own in the process. I don't think it's any different for children than it is for adults. An immediately captivating, good story is an indispensable, cultural milestone of life on a par with a good book, a good play or a fine painting, like an abstract one you don't understand at first.

There's something very positive about a society that gives its children this opportunity and right as a matter of course – and that also has a film industry which establishes a milieu for the children's film culture" ■



The World of Buster / Photo: Jan Richter-Friis

FEATURES FOR KIDS

THE DANISH WAY

BY ULRICH BREUNING

The words ‘children’s films’ first appeared almost in passing in Danish legislation in the Film Act of 1972. The act empowers the Danish Film Institute, which allocates public funding to Danish films, to give import subsidies to quality foreign children’s films. Ten years later, the film law reform of 1982 transformed Denmark into a trailblazing country for children’s films, because the act clearly stipulates that at least 25% of all public film funding is to be earmarked for films for children and young people.

This was justified by the obvious fact that Danish is spoken in a relatively small area, and seeing that the production of Danish children’s films is a broad-based political priority, then preferential treatment is required, because it is economically impossible to produce children’s films in Denmark, or any films for that matter, without government assistance.

A children’s film consultant was hired to manage the public funding, by selecting and supporting the best projects from an artistic viewpoint – feature films, shorts and documentaries alike.

A new reform of the film act in 1989 not only upheld the compulsory 25% for children’s and youth films, but also established two consultant positions for children’s film: one for feature films and one to manage shorts and documentaries.

The children’s films’ cause was additionally strengthened by the new film act of 1997, as the Danish Film Institute established the Centre for Children and Youth Film, whose primary task is to ensure high-quality dissemination of films to schools, institutions, etc. The Centre also supports Buster, the international children’s film festival in Copenhagen, which has been a recurring annual event since 2000.

THE BEGINNINGS...

Needless to say, films for children have been around before the concept was officially sanctioned, and in this context it is remarkable that Denmark has taken children’s films seriously right from the start, whereas many other countries have viewed children’s films as synonymous with relatively cheap productions pursuing the most oft-used genres, i.e., children’s thrillers and films about children and animals.

The ‘children’s film’ concept came into being after the Second World War, when the first ventures into Danish children’s films started in earnest. An old world had crumbled, and a

new one had to be built, based on wholesome interests for future generations. The primary trendsetter in Danish children’s films is *Those damn kids / De pokkers unger* (1947), by Astrid and Bjarne Henning-Jensen. Although the ravages of time have nastily frayed the film, it is currently viewed as an elegant classic depicting the plight of children in a poor urban environment. *Those damn kids* has a serious message to impart and tells it in a realistic tone. The film is widely honoured as Denmark’s first actual children’s film, even though this title could also rightfully be conferred on Astrid Henning-Jensen’s following film, the 25-minute short film entitled *Palle Alone in the World / Palle alene i verden* (1949). It is still an exceptional film that uses charm, wit and grace to dispense a pleasant dose of light philosophic existentialism at child’s eye level.

In 1959, Astrid Henning-Jensen directed the epoch-making *Paw* that prophetically depicts the encounter between the idyllic Danish lifestyle and a foreign culture, when a dark-skinned boy lands in this little, self-sufficient society. The film dealt with racism before the word even existed in Danish.

MAGIC REALISM, AMBITION & NECESSITY

This traditional desire to tell children something important runs like a red thread through the best children’s films, peaking in 1981 with *Rubber Tarzan / Gummi Tarzan* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen) and *The Tree of Knowledge / Kundskabens træ* (Nils Malmros). *The Tree of Knowledge* is an outstanding film that poetically and authentically depicts and reminisces about individual and collective growth and the painful loss of innocence among a group of classmates.

In reality, *Rubber Tarzan* is a very bleak film about a little boy who can’t do anything right and is therefore bullied. But with a little help from an adult and a touch of magic he discovers that all of us are good at something. It’s just a matter of finding out what!

The film’s mixture of harsh realism and magic (and refreshing humour) is referred to as ‘magic realism’, which may be the best definition of the unique Danish tone and children’s film tradition, also exemplified in works such as *Otto the Rhino / Otto er et næsehorn* (1984, Rumlé Hammerich), *The World of Buster / Busters verden* (1984, Bille August), *Miracle in Valby / Miraklet i Valby* (1989, Åke Sandgren), *Dance of the Polar Bears / Lad isbjørnene danse* (1990, Birger Larsen), *Anton* (1996, Aage Rais), *Little Big Sister*

/ Forbudt for børn (1998, Jesper W. Nielsen) and, most recently, *Miracle / Mirakel* (2000, Natasha Arthy) and *Someone Like Hodder / En som Hodder* (2003, Henrik Ruben Genz).

Although magic realism, artistic ambitions and necessity are the keywords for trendsetting Danish children’s films, this genre is difficult and its films often appeal to a relatively limited target group. As a result, many production companies prefer to go for popular, ‘family films’ with broad audience appeal, and ever since the gigantic success of *Father of Four / Far til fire* (1953), ‘true’ children’s films have always been paralleled by cheerful films about rather silly families and their incessant, harmless escapades in an idyllic world devoid of danger and change.

ANIMATION

Danish animated feature films for children took off in 1984 with *Samson and Sally / Samson og Sally*, and resulted in the continuous production of Danish animated films even today. Jannik Hastrup (renowned for his short *Circleen* animations, produced from 1968 to 1970 and reappearing in 1998 and 2000 as two feature-length animations) made a film version of a book by Bent Haller, marking the start of an unusual, rewarding collaboration between director and author that culminated in five animated films later in *The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Bear / Drengen der ville gøre det umulige* (2003). Although this duo’s films have a serious ring to them and take on major world problems, their stories are always told with refreshing humour and solidarity with the underdogs of our world.

Today, Denmark has another productive animation company: ‘A. Film’, which emerged after the release of *Valhalla* (1986, Peter Madsen), a major international venture. Whereas Jannik Hastrup has created a personal style and design, A. Film’s familiar Disney Americana style is more internationally oriented, producing films such as *Amazon Jack 1 and 2 / Jungledyret Hugo* (1993 and 1996, Flemming Quist Møller, Stefan Fjeldmark and Jørgen Lerdam) and *Help! I’m a Fish / Hjælp, jeg er en fisk* (2000, Stefan Fjeldmark and Michael Hegner).

The saga of Danish children’s film continues, which is certainly a happy ending to an enthralling fairy tale: there’s more to come! ■

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Circlean - City Mice / Photo: Dansk Tegnefilm Kompagni

SHORTS & DOCS FOR KIDS

THE DANISH WAY



A Loose Tooth / Framegrab



Sweethearts? / Photo: Lars Høgsted

BY ULLA HJORTH NIELSEN

The success story of Danish children's films does not start in the darkness of the cinema, but somewhere else entirely: It emerges from the history of Danish short films. The children's film concept is closely affiliated with the development of Danish film organisations ranging from The Censorship Board (founded in 1913 to monitor violent or immoral film content) to Dansk Kulturfilm, (founded in 1932 for the production of primarily children's short films) and Statens Filmcentral (the National Film Board of Denmark founded in 1939). All three institutions were founded to develop and promote the film medium in an informative and educational context.

EARLY POLICY FORMULATION

After the fear of this new, dangerous medium had subsided (which took a few decades) and after the futility of trying to keep children away from the silver screen had become obvious, visionary teachers started laying down the standards for the dissemination of still photographs and, later on, moving pictures. Soon after the founding of the Teachers' Lantern Lecture Society in 1912, the first demand for government support was formulated by chairman Christian Brogaard: "...and all of this can soon be drafted into a permanent plan and become as common a classroom fixture as board and chalk ... and any teachers who are fond of the educational process will enjoy giving the pupils distinct, fixed sensory pictures, instead of the pale, scrubby counterparts

previously engendered by geography, history and religion lessons." (Folkeskolen, 19 September 1912, Carl Nørrested et al., *Kortfilmen og Staten* [The Short Film and the State], p. 37).

The earlier a policy is formulated, the greater its impact in the long term!

A. Nicolaisen, a teacher, founded the School Film Board (a forerunner of the National Film Board of Denmark) on his own initiative in 1925, but like any other pioneer effort, the school film issue demanded great patience, and the initial support given by the Danish Teachers' Union was inadequate.

Nicolaisen paved the way, however, and his rather sluggish colleagues who believed that attending school was never meant to be overly enjoyable, changed their outlook slowly but surely. One man who made the greatest impact in challenging the traditional school film was the first director of the National Film Board, Ebbe Neergaard, who says in his policy statement, "Otherwise, I believe that short films are something to enjoy, they should not only be instructive, but funny and inspiring, and they should not be made according to a stiff scheme. I will buy a foreign short film the moment it has an artistic, humane or ideological idea. Or whenever it deals with entirely new, stimulating subjects in the fields of culture, science or general interest." (Carl Nørrested et al., *Kortfilmen og Staten* [The Short Film and the State], p. 303).

VIEW OF CHILDHOOD

In other words, the short film had outgrown pure visual instruction, in the opinion of visionary, aesthetically grounded Neergaard.

Even if his viewpoints were not complied with by conservative educators who viewed the short film as an expedient teaching method, he was well received by two young, enthusiastic filmmakers who were highly aware of childhood's crucial influence on whether a person is allowed to develop into a compassionate, well-balanced human being: Astrid and Bjarne Henning-Jensen.

The hallmark of these two film directors comprised the psychological stories, the interhuman drama, the sparse outer dramatics, the fervent issues of our era and the powerful humanistic approach found far from the classrooms and close to reality. Astrid Henning-Jensen's *Palle Alone in the World* / *Palle alene i verden* (1949), based on Jens Sigsgaard and Arne Ungermann's popular book, was a point of no return for the perception of children's films in Denmark – and the first modern short film in which the imagination and inquisitiveness of children are given full reign. Palle can do whatever he likes, but because he doesn't have anyone to share his amusing adventure with, it soon becomes dull. This enables the film to work as a psychological process of formation as well.

Another heavyweight from this era, and one of the most outstanding Greenland films, is Bjarne Henning-Jensen's colour film *Where Mountains Float* / *Hvor bjergene sejler* (1955) about a boy named Mikisoq who suffers from tuberculosis and is cured by Europeans, the same people who originally brought TB to Greenland.

The standards set by Astrid and Bjarne Henning-Jensen for the children's film genre are of international format and had a great impact



Hands Up! / Photo: Susanne Mertz



The Children of War / Photo: DFI Archive

on the desire of subsequent filmmakers to make humanistic film stories for children. An invisible but strong thread runs from the directing couple to their younger colleagues, such as Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Bille August, Anja Dalhoff, Brita Wielopolska, Hans Henrik Jørgensen and Anne Regitze Wivel – directors who started their careers in the 1970s in an era when film subsidies was systematised in earnest by the National Film Act of 1972, the founding of the Danish Film Institute and the National Film Board of Denmark, which assumed the role of co-production partner for the short film sector on this same occasion.

25 PERCENT AND MORE WOMEN

As of 1982, the provision earmarking 25 percent of all government film support to children's feature films started to apply to children's short films as well, which in the 1980s received a gigantic boost in terms of the actual number of productions but also in terms of artistic quality. Children's short films were led by their own consultant and ambassador – who from 1989 was no longer forced to divide his/her time and budget between the Film Institute and the Film Board, but was solely devoted to children's short films. This meant that interesting, relevant stories were rediscovered in the short film genre which, like films for adults in these years, adhered to social realism – such as Elisabeth Rygård's empathetic film on sibling jealousy *Cuckoo in the Nest / Gøgeungen* (1984) or the same director's *Heart of Glass / Glashjertet* (1988) about divorce-stricken Denmark seen from a child's perspective. Women directors were able to establish themselves, and girls

were more frequently depicted in the films.

In the mid 1970s, consultants from the Danish Film Institute and the National Film Board collaborated on the Karla Kanin Bio project. A series of short films for the youngest children were produced under this initiative, and launched in Danish cinemas under a motto that roughly translates: From Nappy to Flick. Although the concept wasn't a big success in Danish cinemas, a few of the films received awards at many international film festivals, such as Birger Larsen's *Sweethearts? / Ska' vi være kærestes?*, Morten Henriksen's *Hands Up! / Hænderne op*, Henrik Ruben Genz's *Teis & Nico / Bror min bror*, and Natasha Arthy's *Penny Plain / Fanny Farveløs*.

National resistance jelled against the animation style of Disney and Warner Brothers, and the resulting short animated films demonstrated great creativity and originality, thanks to massive government support. Animation is such an expensive genre that television stations have generally been cautious in their approach. One of the few exceptions is Flemming Quist Møller and Jannik Hastrup's series about *Circleen* (1967–70) and her mouse friends from the early 1970s. Anders Sørensen and Tønnes Nielsen – aka 'The Drawing Boys' – who made their breakthrough with *The Tale of the Wonderful Potato / Eventyret om den vidunderlige kartoffel* (1986), followed by puppet-filmmakers Laila Hodell, Jørgen Vestergaard and Mihail Badica, have all blazed trails for the genre. Liller Møller's trilogy on sex led by *Sex: Instructions for Young People / Sex en brugsanvisning for unge* (1987) is virtually a

compulsory teaching aid in the sex education curriculum and is still sold abroad.

OPENING UP REALITY

The documentary film has been the traditional hallmark of Danish films, but the production of documentaries specifically targeted on children did not start till the 1990s. Some sixty titles have been made over a decade or so, based on themes relating to the world of childhood. This includes films on the first existential and physical change expressed in Klaus Kjeldsen's *A Loose Tooth / Rokketanden* (1994), on mastering the difficult art of balancing in Anker Li's *Bicycle Hero / Cykelhelten* (1995) or on such an important theme as war's toll on children in Lizzie Weischenfeldt's trilogy *The Children of War / Krigens Børn* (1994–2000).

Next to library lending and sale to schools, the television window is the best distribution channel, and most of these films are also produced in cooperation with a television station.

Children's influence on the films as photographers – because small, lightweight cameras make it possible – is becoming more and more widespread at present. One example is the *Wonderkids* series by Tine Katinka Jensen, Sisse Stauholm and Aage Rais (2001), in which the main figures talk to the camera every evening and say goodnight in a totally different way than if a photographer had been present.

Children have already been rapping at the door. Soon they will be breaking it down and be some of the innovators and writers of the films targeted on their very same age group ■

THE DANISH FILM INSTITUTE

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION

BY CHARLOTTE GIESE & FLEMMING KASPERSEN
Centre for Children & Youth Film

Since 1982, the Danish Film Institute (DFI) has administered the national Film Act, which dictates that at least 25% of the government funding for film production must be allocated to films for children. This contributes to ensuring the quality of Danish films for children.

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

DFI has two children and youth film consultants – one for feature films and one for shorts and documentaries – to select the films that are artistically worthy of government support. Television stations, Nordic film institutes and various trusts and foundations contribute towards the costs incurred in making the films. The consultant scheme is supplemented by another subsidy measure: the 60/40-scheme whereby the DFI may supplement the producer's share by up to 60% of the film's budget. This support is typically given to films of a more commercial, mainstream nature.

DFI handles the distribution of DFI-supported shorts and documentaries on non-commercial terms. The feature films are distributed through various commercial distributors in Denmark.

CENTRE FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH FILM

In 1998, DFI established the Centre For Children & Youth Film to consolidate the strong position of Danish films in this field by strengthening the dissemination of films for children, within and outside the framework of the Danish school system. This task is also effectuated through an ongoing sector dialogue with the professional film industry.

FILM-X

In 2002, FILM-X opened in the DFI. FILM-X is a computer-based, interactive film studio where children can explore the world of film and experiment with the various facets of a film production. FILM-X embodies a unique concept

in the presentation of the film medium to children and youth. The FILM-X CINEMA will be opening in 2004, providing children with an opportunity to see new films and classics on the big screen.

DFI INITIATIVES FOR CHILDREN

- Support for producing and launching features, shorts and documentaries for children.
- Purchase of and import support for films with artistic value.
- Non-commercial distribution of films to libraries and schools: 2500 shorts, documentaries and features, more than 500 of which are in the school distribution system.
- Film festivals for children.
- Films for children at the cinema: *A School Outing to the Cinema* (DFI's school-cinema scheme), *Children's Cinema* and *Summer Cinema for Children* (for preschoolers).
- Development and dissemination of teaching materials about film.
- Courses, seminars and conferences for teachers and media instructors.
- Seminars for the professional film industry.
- General consultancy services for teachers and the film industry on films for children and on media education.
- Support for the publishing of books and publications.

In addition, the subsidy allocated to the Centre For Children & Youth Film makes it possible to support a number of activities designed for children, which include the following:

BUSTER

Buster Copenhagen International Children's Film Festival has existed since 2000 and screens a wide selection of feature films, shorts and documentaries to children. From 2003, BUSTER also hosts New Nordic Children's Film for the purpose of screening the best Nordic films for children and organising a seminar

for an international sector audience. Read more at www.busterfilm.dk.

FILM CLUBS FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

More than 70 film clubs for children are spread throughout the country. The DABUF (Danish Association of Film Clubs for Children and Young People) celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2002. Over the years they have given children throughout Denmark an opportunity to see a wide selection of films for children and youth from Denmark and abroad, and by so doing DABUF provides an alternative to television programming, home videos and the general cinema repertoire. Read more at www.dabuf.dk (Danish only).

EKKO

EKKO is a periodical on films, media and education providing background articles, interviews with film professionals, film analyses and teaching materials. It is written by film experts and teachers in order to ensure that it is inspiring and useful in the classroom. Read more at www.ekkofilm.dk (Danish only).

STATION NEXT

Station Next is a film production milieu for children at Filmbyen in Avedøre. Filmbyen also houses Danish production companies such as Zentropa and Nimbus Film. The aim is to give children with varying cultural backgrounds and levels of education a chance to understand and to express themselves through film. Station Next provides film camps for school children, film powerhouses for talent development and teacher courses. The instructors include professionals from the Danish film industry. Read more at www.station-next.dk

Further information:

www.dfi.dk - website of the Danish Film Institute.
www.undervisning.dfi.dk - website of the Centre For Children & Youth Film.
www.film-x.dk - website of the film studio FILM-X.

DANISH CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH FILMS POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS

1913 The National Censorship Board is founded to monitor violent and immoral contents.

1925 The National School Film Board is founded.

1932 Dansk Kulturfilm starts producing primarily short films for children.

1939 The National Film Board initiates nation-wide distribution to schools.

1972 The National Film Act introduces import subsidy for significant foreign children's films.

1982 Reform of the national Film Act earmarks 25% of all government subsidy funds for films for children and young people.

1989 Reform of the national Film Act creates two positions for children's film consultants: one for feature films and one for shorts and documentaries.

1997 The National Film Board merges with the Danish Film Institute, and the National Film Centre for Children and Young People is founded. The primary task of the centre is to ensure the high quality distribution and dissemination of films to schools, institutions, etc.

2000 'Buster', an international children's film festival, is founded in Copenhagen.

FEATURE FILMS FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH

PRODUCTION		1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number of Danish feature films released	number	11	14	13	20	16	18	16	17	19	19
hereof Danish films for children & youth	number	2	4	5	6	6	4	3	5	9	6
	in percent	18	29	38	30	38	22	19	29	47	32
Total productions costs 'all' Danish feature films released	DKK million	124	128	121	244	258	203	198	375	221	228
hereof Danish films for children & youth	DKK million	34	47	58	71	107	73	39	132	90	70
	in percent	27	37	48	29	41	36	20	35	41	31
EXHIBITION											
Number of admissions to 'all' films	million	10,2	10,3	8,8	9,9	10,8	11	10,9	10,7	11,9	12,9
Number of admissions to 'all Danish films'	million	1,8	2,3	0,8	1,7	2,2	1,6	3	2	3,6	3,5
hereof Danish films / first releases / market share / children & youth *	million	0,5	0,8	0,3	0,3	0,8	0,9	0,6	0,7	1,6	1,1
	in percent	28	35	38	18	36	56	20	35	44	31

* Figures for the years 1993-1995 include a 'spill-over' from the previous year (= titles released in the final quarter having a significant effect on admissions of the following year).

Source: DFI booklet *Facts & Figures*; anthology *Dansk Film 1972-97*; Statistics Denmark

1993: JUNGLE JACK (*Jungledyret Hugo*) / THE TROLL MOVIE - VIKTOR AND VIKTORIA (*Troldefilmen Viktor og Viktoria*) **1994:** FEARLESS FRIDA (*Frække Frida*) / THE RASCAL (*Vildbassen*) / SNOOKS IN THE LIMELIGHT (*Snøvsen ta'r springet - Snøvsen 2*) / DAD'S BRIGHT IDEA - THE CRUMBS 3 (*Fars gode idé - Krummerne 3*) **1995:** CARMEN & BABYFACE (*Carmen & Babyface*) / THE MONKEYS AND THE SECRET WEAPON (*Aberne og det hemmelige våben*) / OPERATION COBRA (*Operation Cobra*) / BODY SWITCH (*Farligt venskab*) / CIRCUS HILDEBRANDT (*Cirkus Ildebrand*) **1996:** WATCH ME FLY (*Tøsepiger*) / THE FLYER (*Anton*) / THE BALLAD OF HOLGER THE DANE (*Balladen om Holger Danske*) / BUNNY'S TALES 1 (*Karla Kanin Bio 1*) / FLEAS BARK TOO, DON'T THEY? (*En loppe kan også gå*) / JUNGLE JACK - THE STAR (*Jungledyret Hugo - den store filmhelt*) **1997:** THE LAST VIKING (*Den sidste viking*) / HANNIBAL & JERRY (*Hannibal & Jerry*) / EYE OF THE EAGLE (*Ørnens øje*) / THE ISLAND ON BIRD STREET (*Øen i Fuglegaden*) / BUNNY'S TALES 2 (*Karla Kanin 2*) / SUNE'S FAMILY (*Sune's familie*) **1998:** ON OUR OWN (*Når mor kommer hjem ...*) / LITTLE BIG SISTER (*Forbudt for børn*) / ALBERT (*Albert*) / CIRCLEEN - CITY MICE (*Cirkeline Storbyens mus*) **1999:** BUNNY'S TALES 3 (*Karla Kanin Bio 3*) / KATJA'S ADVENTURE (*Falkehjerte*) / LOVE AT FIRST HICCOUGH (*Kærlighed ved først hik*) **2000:** BEYOND (*Dykkerne*) / CIRCLEEN - MICE & ROMANCE (*Cirkeline Ost & Kærlighed*) / HELP! I'M A FISH (*Hjælp! Jeg er en fisk*) / MIRACLE (*Mirakel*) / PIXIE PANIC (*Pyrus på pletten*) **2001:** PROP & BERTA (*Prop & Berta*) / JEWEL OF THE DESERT (*Ørkenens juvel*) / THE FLYING GRANNY (*Flyvende farmor*) / BUNNY'S TALES 4 (*Karla Kanin Bio 4*) / SEND MORE CANDY (*Send mere slik*) / ANJA & VIKTOR (*Anja & Viktor*) / MY SISTER'S KIDS (*Min søsters børn*) / JOLLY ROGER (*Jolly Roger*) / THE OLSEN GANG JUNIOR (*Olsen banden junior*) **2002:** CATCH THAT GIRL (*Klatretøsen*) / LITTLE BIG GIRL (*Ulvepiggen Tinke*) / JOYSTICK NATION (*Slim Slam Slum*) / WALLAH BE (*Kald mig bare Aksel*) / MY SISTER'S KIDS 2 (*Min søsters børn i sneen*) / BERTRAM & CO (*Bertram & Co.*)

SHORT PORTRAITS



Photo: Jan Buus



Anja After Viktor / Photo: Thomas Petri

ASSERTIVE AND EMANCIPATED *Charlotte Sachs Bostrup (1963)*

“Four dynamites (edit, Danish beer), a bottle of cherry wine and three green Looks (edit, brand of Danish cigarettes) in the toilet for the handicapped at the City 2 mall and then down to the club with my girlfriends. I was a vulgar, banal chick from the suburbs, and I’ll never – never – get away from it. So I’ve decided to make it my strength.” (Charlotte Sachs Bostrup)

Charlotte Sachs Bostrup concentrates on the profound drama of everyday life: “I aim for capturing the thoughts in the characters’ eyes and telling the story through little subtleties. Plot is important, of course, but I’m particularly interested in everything else that’s happening.”

She made her debut in 1997 with the highly acclaimed short film *Frida’s First Time / Fridas første gang*: The story of two budding teenage girls’ bittersweet experiences in Copenhagen’s night life as they try to find a man to help them lose their virginity. The slang of the two girls is a vital feature of the film that uses assertive, emancipated imagery to get its points across.

“The main character comes home after losing her virginity, which she actually feels is a triumph. Many girls feel this way. It’s neither very serious nor very tragic, they just want to get it over with.”

She released her first feature film in 2001, the teen comedy *Anja & Viktor*, which was a sequel to the successful *Love at First Hiccough / Kærlighed ved første hik* (1999). 571,000 (more than 10% of the Danish population!) saw Bostrup’s well-told love story of Viktor, a slightly awkward, immature, upper secondary pupil, and his girlfriend Anja, a couple of years older than Viktor, and she moves to downtown Copenhagen from the suburbs and gets a job after finishing school. It is difficult for Viktor to follow suit, and their love is threatened by their different phases of development.

This same combination of young love and family pleasantries – seasoned with charming comedy – typifies the sequel *Anja After Viktor / Anja efter Viktor* (2003), also a box-office success. (MP)



DEALING WITH MULTI-ETHNICITY *Pia Bovin (1963)*

"I expected it to be difficult. Low budget, heavy shooting schedules every day, children, amateurs – and a dog. Regardless of what happens and how it goes, shooting a film is very important to the children. It really means something. This is an enormous responsibility. My worst fear was that I would end up shouting at the children, but I also had a nightmare entitled 'How to throw a child's birthday party and play Russian Roulette for seven weeks on end!' Both fears were put to shame." (Pia Bovin)

Pia Bovin graduated from the National Film School of Denmark in 1999. She immediately set to work winning her spurs on the television series *The Hotel / Hotellet* and also made a short film entitled *The Funeral / Begravelsen* (2002), before making her feature film debut with a children's film. But Bovin didn't want to make 'just' a children's film, but a film dealing with a social issue – a film that probed the multi-ethnic society of modern Denmark. She developed the film's plot together with Zentropa producer Ib Tardini, screenwriter Bo Hr. Hansen, production designer Tine Jespersen and actor Fashad Kohlgi. It was important that the story about little Aksel, who decides to become a Muslim, not only correctly described the milieu and the actual complexity of the conflict – but was also a good story at every turn. *Wallah Be / Kald mig bare Aksel* (2002) is a milestone in recent Danish children's films. Not since 1959, when Astrid Henning-Jensen prophetically foresaw how the idyllic Danish way of life could shatter when confronted with a foreigner in *Paw* (1959), has a children's film tried to depict the ulcer of racism that is so inflamed in the current debate. Yet the satisfaction of watching this film does not emanate from its politically correct theme, but from the spontaneous charm and familiarity of all the scenes. Although information on the Muslim way of life gets a lot of footage in the film, it is basically yet another version of the universal story about a little, neglected kid who has to endure many trials and tribulations to get just a little measure of happiness. Either that or just accept the way things are and hope for the future. (UB)

Photo: Jan Buus



Wallah Be / Photo: Per Arnesen



ACTOR-DIRECTOR *Jørn Faurschou (1946)*

"It takes an equally interesting story, the same enthusiasm and the same degree of professional know-how to get the best product." (Jørn Faurschou)

Jørn Faurschou spent the first half of his adult life as an actor before making his debut as a feature film director in 1995 with the genre-specific youth thriller *Body Switch / Farligt Venskab* about an old doctor with little time left who discovers a way to make a 'body switch'. He uses this method to transfer his old, worn-out cadaver to a 15-year-old boy so the doctor himself can move into this boy's young, healthy body. It becomes a race against time for the lad in the old body to switch back to his own before his newly assigned mantle totally breaks down. The film's credibility is crucially dependent on whether this premise works – a young actor has to convincingly portray an old man and an old actor a young man – yet this is where Faurschou's own acting skills shine through. The actors are so brilliantly directed that in spite of the film's rather intricate plot there's never a shred of doubt about who's who, regardless of whose skin the actors are performing in.

It was an astonishingly unerring debut, but Faurschou had already demonstrated his ability to get young amateurs and professional actors to work together in *Too Far / Over stregen* in 1987. This 35-minute film focuses on the great shift in values that took place in Danish football clubs whereby carefree boys' play with a ball was replaced by a more professional demand for victory at any price.

Faurschou made a short feature *Secrets / Hemmeligheder* in 1997, a bleak chamber play about two teenage girls, drugs and sexual abuse. In 1998, Faurschou directed *Albert*, based on a children's book by Denmark's esteemed writer Ole Lund Kierkegaard, whose stories laid the groundwork in the 1980s for some of the best Danish children's films ever made. Faurschou develops Kierkegaard's universe into an action-packed adventure film in an attempt to capture the spirit of the times. (UB)

Photo: Suste Bonnén



Albert / Photo: Lars Høgsted, Rolf Konow



Photo: DFI Film Archive



The History of the World

ARTISTIC COLLECTIVE *Filmforsyningen & Tegnedrengene*

"Films made by the 'Drawing Boys' can do precisely what film educators have otherwise renounced: replace the teacher in the classroom" (*Tue Steen Møller, Director of the European Documentary Network*)

Although all film productions are based on teamwork, the long animation process in particular appeals to those working in an artistic collective. Filmforsyningen is one of these.

This drawing office gradually grew during the '70s, and with *Bass Lake / Aborresøen* (1978) initiator and teacher Svend Johansen created an effective environmental series for young children about the food chain and the threat of pollution from bass eye level.

Johansen was assisted by two animators: Anders Sørensen and Per Tønnes Nielsen, who became the big names of the 1980s in short animation, calling themselves Tegnedrengene (The Drawing Boys). Anders Sørensen was usually the director and Tønnes Nielsen the head animator, a few times in reverse roles, like in the funny, yet quite thought-provoking *The Bottle / Flasken* (1985) about the scourge of alcoholism.

The Drawing Boys made their breakthrough with the high-profile *The Snooks / Snuden* (1980), a fantastical, pink creature whose counterpart doesn't exist in the real animal world, but who was soon held very dear by a multitude of young fans.

The historical film *The Tale of the Wonderful Potato / Eventyret om den vidunderlige kartoffel* (1986) marked the convincing start of more outstanding works adhering to the same formula, such as *The Tale of Wonderful Music / Eventyret om den vidunderlige musik* (1991) followed by *The History of the World, parts 1 and 2 / Verdenshistorien 1-2* (1993-1994), that tell the history of the world for better or for worse, in fun and earnest, but sustained throughout by distinct opinions and a satiric sting.

The work produced by Filmforsyningen is generally characterised by its enduring capacity to accommodate both criticism of our civilisation and self-scrutiny - yet never with suffocating pedantries.

This is true of Liller Møller, for instance, who made a name for himself with three educational films bubbling with joie de vivre and erotic drive: *Sex: Instructions for Young People / Sex: en brugsanvisning for unge* (1987) in which young people themselves do the voiceover, *You're putting me on / Ska' jeg på nu* (1989) starring a condom and *How Children Are Made / Sådan - får man altså børn* (1990). The films are still used in the national sex education curriculum and are sold abroad because they've never been surpassed and because they're just as fresh as the day they were made.

For years Anders Sørensen was the head animator and the director's assistant on the *Amazon Jack / Jungledyret Hugo* series (produced by A. Film and directed by Flemming Quist Møller), but Svend Johansen is the only member of Filmforsyningen's permanent staff who also has feature films on his directing CV. This includes the tale of *The Redheads and Tyranos / Rødtotterne og Tyranos* (1985) about the struggle between good and evil, with good winning out in the end, as is customary in children's films.

In 1991 Svend Johansen used a stringent, classic narrative form to make the remarkable short film *Goodnight: the World Grinds to a Halt When I Sleep / Godnat - går verden i stå når jeg sover*. The film's main character is a prop - a bank note - that changes hands all night long and provides insight into the workings of urban life while children are asleep in bed. After its night-long odyssey, the bank note returns to the room of the little girl where it started.

Filmforsyningen's productions are all brilliant educational tools, without anyone feeling they've been lectured to and everyone feeling they've learned something. The company has demonstrated that no theme is too overwhelming and no format too insignificant for the animation of life's matters of great importance. (UHN)



Photo: Elisabeth Rønde Kristensen



Help! I'm a Fish / Photo: A. Film

PROFESSIONAL JACK OF ALL TRADES Stefan Fjeldmark (1964)

"Different stories demand different equipment." (Stefan Fjeldmark)

In 1988, Stefan Fjeldmark founded A. Film together with Anders Mastrup, Karsten Kiilerich, Hans Perk and Jørgen Lerdam, and suddenly the Danish animation sector became greatly enriched. They set their sights high from the start. They wanted to be compared to the biggest animation companies around, and so they became – with excellent results.

Stefan Fjeldmark is A. Film's cinematic jack-of-all-trades. He is idea-monger, creative producer, scriptwriter and director. The professional standard of A. Film is demonstrated by the tasks A. Film lands: international productions where Stefan Fjeldmark works as the storyboard artist and sequence director and effortlessly subjects himself to the difficult discipline of congenially processing the style and design of other directors. Stefan Fjeldmark achieved his first widespread fame as the co-director of Flemming Quist Møller's *Amazon Jack 1 / Jungledyret* (1993) and *Amazon Jack 2: The Movie Star / Jungledyret Hugo - Den store filmbelt* (1996) and of the major international venture *Help! I'm a Fish / Hjælp! Jeg er en fisk* (2000). The international air of the drawing style and gallery of characters aims to satisfy international audiences who feel most at home with the Disney-inspired tradition, but the films about Amazon Jack in particular are Danish through and through. Asserting that the rare, playful, food-loving, self-centred and tender-hearted jungle animal reflects the essence of Danish mentality is hardly an exaggeration!

Narrative joy and professionalism are Stefan Fjeldmark's middle names, but in cooperation with Karsten Kiilerich on the Oscar-nominated short film *When Life Departs / Når livet går sin vej* (1996), he demonstrated a new side of his artistic character, indicating passion, sympathy and a rare insight for his subject matter. Fjeldmark is currently working on *Terkel in Trouble / Terkel i knibe* (release 2004) and an Asterix movie. (UB)



Photo: Lars Høgsted



The Olsen Gang Junior / Photo: Rolf Konow

HUMANE ENTERTAINMENT Peter Flinth (1964)

"I tell the stories that are interesting to me personally. In my view, contacting children is a very serious matter. I detest talking down to children. Yet on the other hand, they have to be able to understand the story, too. You certainly have to make an effort." (Peter Flinth)

With only two feature films under his belt, Peter Flinth has demonstrated that he does make an effort. His feature film debut *Eye of the Eagle / Ørnens øje* (1997) is a surprisingly fully-fledged and accomplished work, to use an overworked critics' phrase. It is a magnificent, knightly tale of friendship between the upper and lower classes, between a king's son and a kitchen boy. The story takes place in the thirteenth century, and this era's life, dress and atmosphere are colourfully depicted with a painstaking conviction that truthfulness should never outshine the entertainment value!

Craftsmanship and professionalism are also the hallmarks of Peter Flinth's second film, *The Olsen Gang Junior / Olsen Banden Junior* (2001), which is actually an impossible – or at best, difficult – task. Because the series of Olsen Gang films (1968-81) are a national treasure about three anarchistic jokers who, although getting on in years, are in reality, and also behave like, children. For this reason, depicting these archetypes at "real" child's eye level seems impossible. But Peter Flinth has done the impossible by making a children's film that is faithful to the old series while providing a refreshing prequel depicting the previous history of these three friends.

The entertainment value is high, however there is an air of gravity that is crucial for good children's stories – though difficult to handle without imbalance. Peter Flinth succeeds. (UB)



Photo: Jan Buus



Send More Candy / Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

SPIRITUALITY AND GIGGLING GIRLS *Cæcilia Holbek Trier (1953)*

"Focusing my attention on girls' lives comes natural to me. There is a great need to see films for girls, so it seemed obvious for me to tell stories where they could find some basic affirmation." (Cæcilia Holbek Trier)

Cæcilia Holbek Trier has worked as a still photographer, film editor, editing technician, sound engineer and camerawoman. From 1984 on, she directed a handful of short films before making her debut as a feature film director with *Agnes Dei / Nonnebørn* in 1997. The film tells the story of 11-year-old Johanne who is sent to a Catholic convent school. The religion soon captivates and religiously inspires her. As time passes and Johanne matures, however, she is not quite as devout. The story is based on Holbek Trier's own childhood experiences at a Catholic convent school. The film appeals to teenage audiences and – not least – an adult audience with its rather retrospective angle on the trials of adolescence.

In 2001 Holbek Trier directed her second feature film *Send More Candy / Send mere slik*, specifically targeted on young audiences. The film is a humorous story of two sisters – streetwise to the core – who arrive at a small farm in the depths of the country. Here, they are to be taken care of by an ageing farm couple during the holidays while their parents are travelling. It is a culture shock – for young and old alike.

In between her features, Holbek Trier has made two, fine short films. *Ditching Dummies / Slut Slut Finale* (1999) is a sweet, subtle short film on how hard it can be to stop using a dummy. In this film, Holbek Trier depicts her own daughter – a true 'dummy-holic' – who describes how she got a grip on her 'abuse'. A very different magic realism pervades the short film *Susanne Sillemann* (2000) in which we meet a lonely girl who longs for a friend and for her parents to stop arguing. She turns to magic – but magic is powerful and unpredictable and not always easy to control. (LM)



Photo: Lars Høgsted



Wanna See My Beautiful Navel / Photo: Peter Roos

THE HUMANIST *Søren Kragh-Jacobsen (1947)*

"Children will always be part of my films" (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen)

Up to now, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen has kept his word, even if the child in his latest film for adults about surrogate mothers, *Skagerrak* (2003), with Iben Hjejle, stays in his mother's womb till almost the end of the film.

Kragh-Jacobsen is the grand, but far from old, man of Danish children's films, and the creator of the classic *Rubber Tarzan / Gummi Tarzan* (1981) about a boy who is bullied by his classmates and a tyrannical father. An unrivalled blend of styles comprising everyday realism and fable-like make-believe, *Rubber Tarzan* is a witty, lyrical story on the theme that "everyone is good at doing something, they just have to discover what it is," to quote a line from the film. *Rubber Tarzan* has repeatedly demonstrated its enduring popularity and influence. In 1998 when 150 professional children's film connoisseurs compiled a list of the world's ten best children's films over the years, *Rubber Tarzan* finished first among 276 titles from 32 countries.

A refreshing joy of storytelling, psychological sensitivity, humanistic commitment and cinematic musicality distinguish all of Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's films about children, starting with his debut film about school camp infatuation, *Wanna See My Beautiful Navel? / Vil du se min smukke navle?* (1978) and the children's thriller *Shower of Rain / Guldregn*, to the story of the first Danish resistance group during the German occupation, 1940-45, *The Boys from St. Petri / Drengene fra Sankt Petri* (1991).

But the director, who has also achieved international fame for the Dogme film *Mifune / Mifunes sidste sang* (1999), is critical of the children's film concept. Not only because he thinks the concept limits a film's potential audience, but also because his films about children also appeal to adults. "The moment you say, 'Here comes a new Danish children's film,' your audience is peopled solely with divorced fathers and their daughters who are visiting them for the weekend," he says. (MP)



Photo: Anne Prytz Steensager

FILMMAKER BY ACCIDENT Tomas Villum Jensen (1971)

"I want to make films for an audience." (Tomas Villum Jensen)

Tomas Villum Jensen entered the film world by accident, so to speak. He auditioned for a part in Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *The Boys from St. Petri / Drengene fra Sankt Petri* (1991) – just for the fun of it – and landed one of the leads, which led to a number of minor and supporting roles such as Sven Methling's family film *The Crumbs 2 - Crumb at a Gallop / Krummerne 2 - Stakkels Krumme* (1992) and Lasse Spang Olsen's rogue comedies *In China They Eat Dogs / I Kina spiser de hunde* (1999), *Jolly Roger* (2001) and *Old Men in New Cars / Gamle mænd i nye biler* (2001). Tomas Villum Jensen eagerly assimilated the skills of filmmaking by the learning-by-doing method, which also involved making commercials on both sides of the camera. In 1996, he and Anders Thomas Jensen directed the efficient, dramaturgically compact short film *Ernst and the Light / Ernst og lyset*, that wittingly answers the nagging question of what Jesus would do if he returned. The film achieved a nomination for an Oscar, so it was no surprise when Tomas Villum Jensen debuted with a feature film in 1999: *Love at First Hiccough / Kærlighed ved første hik* – a box-office hit. It is a youth film that farcically depicts the first shag, but it also delighted audiences younger than the target group. *Love at First Hiccough* is a lightweight, popular comedy, Villum Jensen's genre of preference for the time being.

My Sister's Children / Min søsters børn (2001) and *My Sister's Children / Min søsters børn i sneen* (2002) had funny premises: It's a good starting point to have a professor in child psychology – who has authored several books on how to raise children, but doesn't have any – to have to deal with reality in the form of five kids who don't really conform to the 'highfalutin' theories.

Villum Jensen masters the filmmaking craft and the popular art of keeping a comedy pleasantly in the middle of the road and unwaveringly pull it through to the end. (UB)



My Sister's Children / Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen



Photo: Jan Buus

UNSENTIMENTAL SENSITIVITY Linda Krogsøe Holmberg (1969)

"I'm fully aware that it's more prestigious to make features than shorts. But why spend ninety minutes telling a story that can be told in ten?" (Linda Krogsøe Holmberg)

Linda Krogsøe Holmberg knows what it means to tell her stories briefly and to the point. Yet this took time for her to learn, and she didn't follow the beaten track to get there. She applied five times – in vain – to the National Film School of Denmark, until '99 when she accepted the consequences and took part in starting Super 16, an alternative film school in Copenhagen. This became her diving point to the established industry.

The opening film of the Odense Film Festival in 2000 was her short film entitled *The Jutland Connection / Den jyske forbindelse*, a warm comedy for grown-ups. At the same festival, Linda Krogsøe premiered her short film *Faith, Hope and Batman / Tro, håb og Batman*, which is just as appealing to children as it is to adults, and has won several international awards since. The film is a gripping, unsentimental story about a 7-year-old boy who sees his life change when his father falls ill and dies. Linda Krogsøe tells the story with great sensitivity, but at the same time, she accurately captures the boy's pragmatic realism and determination in the face of adversity.

These two short films made 2000 a turning point in her career, and the next step was the ingenious short for children entitled *Kiss, Kiss / Kys kys* (2001). Under its mildly humorous surface, *Kiss, Kiss* deals with a serious subject: the tribulations of love.

This autumn, Linda Krogsøe Holmberg will be debuting with her first feature film *Count to a Hundred / Tæl til 100* about a boy named Thomas and his mother Anne who are constantly on the run from Thomas's psychopathic father. But a stopover in a village – where Thomas and his mother make new, memorable acquaintances – conclusively changes their situation. (LM)



Faith, Hope and Batman / Photo: Jan Pallesen



Photo: Helle Roos



Little Big Girl / Photo: Nille Leander

DRAMA AND PROFOUND EMOTIONS *Morten Køhlert (1961)*

"I believe in powerful dramas that not only make the audience run the gamut of feelings but also bring them safely home at the end." (Morten Køhlert)

Morten Køhlert graduated in directing from the National Film School of Denmark in 1995. His graduation film was *Masquerade / Fastelavnsfesten*, and he and the rest of the class received an Honorary Bodil Award the following year for their exceptionally promising talent. In 1999 he debuted with his first feature film *Fast Lane / Under Overfladen* – a psychological thriller about a group of wild young people from the affluent suburbs north of Copenhagen.

Morten Køhlert's second feature film, the powerful, moving *Little Big Girl / Ulvepiggen Tinke*, based on a novel by Cecil Bødker, followed in 2002. The film takes place in 1850 when the shepherd boy Larus meets a girl named Tinke who has been living alone in the woods since her parents died. A friendship develops between Larus and Tinke, who follows Larus to the farm where he works. But the rude, hot-tempered farmer doesn't like Tinke who, despite her small size, is strong and defiant and refuses to be cowed. The farmer threatens her with the poorhouse, till it turns out that Tinke may be the grandchild of a wealthy family.

The film is told with dynamic imagery and far more close-ups and medium range shots than conventional historical films. When combined with the dialogue's modern tone, the overall effect is a familiar, contemporary atmosphere that strengthens the film's sense of intimacy. Although the story is dramatic, Køhlert firmly believes that this should not give parents cause for alarm: "The children cried when it was sad and jumped out of their seats and applauded when things went well, and afterwards they were enthusiastic," reports Køhlert with regard to audience reactions to *Little Big Girl*. "Even so, some parents apparently think it's better to giggle their way through an entertainment film. I think it's a pity that they deprive their children of powerful cinematic experiences." (LM)



Photo: Henrik C. Ploug



Benny's Bathtub / Photo: DFI Film Archive

MUSICAL PLAYFULNESS *Flemming Quist Møller (1942)*

"Adults frequently discuss whether children's stories should be taken from the world of imagination or reality. I've talked to many children about this, and they all think that the best stories always include both real and imaginary elements. I think so, too. But the 'reality' bit is a little difficult, because it always gets clouded by the adults' views of what life is all about." (Flemming Quist Møller)

Flemming Quist Møller is one of the biggest names in Danish animation over the years. Together with Jannik Hastrup, he made one of the genre's genuine classics, *Benny's Bathtub / Bennys Badekar* (1971) – a story about a boy named Benny who discovers he can dive into his bathtub and find a fantastic underwater world populated with wacky, funny sea creatures. Møller's magnificent musicality and his tribute to imagination and the joy of playing make the film as relevant and wonderfully entertaining today as it was thirty years ago. Quist Møller – who is also a musician, composer and author – has been directing animated films since the mid '60s. His many titles include *Concerto Erotica* (1964) *Slambert* (1966), *Scatclat* (1967), *Prins Piwi* (1974) and *Kedsomhedens gåde* (1986). During the course of his career he has created several figures familiar to the childhoods of all younger Danes – including Snook, a peculiar pink snout creature wearing gangster glasses who was the rage in several short films in the early '80s. But the most popular figure was the little, brazen Amazon Jack who starred in two charming feature films (*Amazon Jack 1 / Jungledyret* (1993) and *Amazon Jack 2 - The Movie Star / Jungledyret Hugo - den store filmhelt* (1996), both made in collaboration with Søren Fjeldmark). Amazon Jack seems more Disney-inspired than the Snook films, but they share thematic characteristics. A stranger comes to the big city, and through his wondering eye we get a different view of the familiar daily life. The stories take place in the no man's land between reality and imagination – and although dangers and loneliness lurk in the asphalt jungle, excitement, friendships and love affairs do, too. (LM)



Photo: Jan Buus



Kick'n Rush / Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen

NATURAL LEVEL-HEADED TALENT Aage Rais-Nordentoft (1969)

"I've had the privilege to delve into the reality of children and have described their lives on their own terms."
(Aage Rais-Nordentoft)

Aage Rais made his directing debut at the age of 27 with the children's film *Anton* (1996) that was critically acclaimed. The film tells the story of 10-year-old Anton who must deal with the emotion of grief when he loses his father, a pilot. He builds his own aeroplane and intends to fly up to heaven to meet his father. The film's story fuses fantasy with reality to tell how a bright, sensitive boy reacts to the death of his father. Fantasy is a natural part of Anton's everyday life and therefore of the film as well. The absent father dominates Anton's world, and he has to struggle with grief, being bullied and bed-wetting before he moves on from his crisis, prouder and stronger, with the help of his imagination and an audacious girl. The film has its own pure tone of innocent wonder, discreet humour and subdued, but deeply felt pain. By making *Teens / Tøser og drengerøve* (1998), Rais-Nordentoft took the big plunge into the world of the dramatic documentary. He let his camera become a fly on the wall when children in budding adolescence hold a school party, and where puppy sexuality gets crossed with mixed feelings in an attempt to explore the great erotic mystery. As they talk about girls, the boys paint a portrait of their technical, sexual options in harsh physiological details; but one of them still holds onto his belief that girls "like to kiss best of all". So romance still sprouts in the hardboiled soil of pornography and silicone-inflated babes – the boys' preferred objects of reference. Using a handheld video camera, grainy pictures and spontaneous, improvised "games" Rais establishes an instantaneous cinematic depiction of an open-mouthed, groping age group who grow through trial and error and are constantly unsure of each other, because everything is happening for the very first time.

In autumn 2003 Rais-Nordentoft's youth film *Kick'n Rush / To ryk og en aflevering* will be released. (MP)



Photo: Jan Buus



Miracle in Valby / Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

THE DANISH SWEDE Åke Sandgren (1955)

"Like any other creative task, the making of a children's film should be a personal expression of a personal viewpoint. You simply have to film the stories that you yourself would see, that you like and are fond of."
(Åke Sandgren)

Åke Sandgren is Swedish, but graduated from the National Film School of Denmark and has worked in Denmark, with a few exceptions, such as *The Boy in the Oak Tree / Pojken i eken* (1988) and the masterpiece *The Slingshot / Kådisbellan* (1993), about a boy's childhood in an odd working-class environment in Stockholm of the 1920s. He has meticulously learned his craft from the ground up as a director's assistant for Jørgen Leth, Lars von Trier and Søren Kragh-Jacobsen. He debuted with the prize-winning short film *Bicycle Symphony / Cykelsymfonien* (1983) before trying his strength with the 53 min. *The Secret of Johannes / Johannes hemmelighed* (1985). It was an astonishing, unusual children's film – something as rare as a religious-philosophical story in virtuous, cinematic packaging. Johannes meets Jesus in the guise of a very Jewish-looking young woman who leads Johannes through a slice of modern Denmark where the terms good and evil are discussed. He immediately made a name for himself with his first feature film, *Miracle in Valby / Miraklet i Valby* (1989), a thriller at child's eye level that brilliantly creates its own logical universe, where some children travel to the Middle Ages in a time machine. Their experiences in the past are linked to the present and help them to gain an important realisation and understanding of life. In the youth thriller *Beyond / Dykkerne* (2000), he splendidly tells an out-and-out sailor's yarn of the secret contents in a sunken German submarine, where two brothers make some frightening discoveries. As in his other films, Sandgren unites unerring narrative skill with infectious narrative exuberance, and the thrills and violence are in such measured doses that the film is adequately thrilling without scaring the daylight out of anyone. (UB)



Photo: JV Film & TV



Snook Takes the Plunge / Photo: DFI Film Archive

THE ESSENCE OF ADVENTUROUSNESS Jørgen Vestergaard (1935)

“Film language is immersed in so much credibility and realism that a good fairy tale is suffocated by common sense” (Jørgen Vestergaard)

Jørgen Vestergaard believes that if you’re looking for the essence of adventurousness, then look at animation. This very passion for adventurous storytelling has made him one of the most enduring makers of puppet films.

In his youth, he was deeply moved by how Karel Zeman (a Czech animation director) transformed ‘real film’ into a fantastic language by placing the actors and actresses in front of animated backdrops and in unreal interiors. Zeman could depart from the narrowness of film naturalism better than anyone else and give free reign to boundless imagination. His works are a key to understanding Vestergaard’s own universe.

Vestergaard is a widely read man who demonstrates his great passion for cultural history and mythology in titles such as *Sigurd Fafnirsbane / Sigurd Fafnersbane* (1981), *The Shadow / Skyggen* (1975), and *The Story of a Mother / Historien om en moder* (1977), the latter two based on Hans Christian Andersen’s fairytales, or *Morten the Painter / Morten Maler* (1986) inspired by medieval murals. His films appeal to the inquisitiveness in persons of all ages and present cultural heritage in a classic, but startling light.

In 1992, Vestergaard took the plunge into feature films with the magically realistic *The Snooks / Snøvsen*. The film was made using computer animation and its success was partly due to its consistent focus on the needs of the youngest cinemagoers who also have many features in common with Snook. Snook is an irritating know-it-all, yet refreshingly egocentric and charming at the same time – a wonderful role model through and through. The sequel *Snook Takes the Plunge / Snøvsen ta’r springet* was released in 1994. (UHN)



Photo: Birger Vilén-Petersen



The Flying Granny / Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

KITSCH AND POKER-FACE Wikke (1959) & Rasmussen (1949)

“We always have to test whether the ice can support us two metres further out. And if it can, we just have to test whether it can take a couple more.” (Wikke & Rasmussen)

With the comedies made by Michael Wikke and Steen Rasmussen, you’re in good company. The couple’s characters are often unsuspecting and charming eccentrics, and the plots – that rarely should be taken too seriously – are seasoned with song and music. The director team, who often perform in their own films, established something of a cult following via a total of eight surrealistic television series up through the 1980s. And the two biggest successes of their production of four feature films were made for children and the rest of the family.

Hannibal and Jerry came in 1998 and is about the talking dog Jerry, who was stolen by people who were not quite as evil as they looked – including toy manufacturer Uncle Grandpa. The main character is the dog’s owner, a wet-combed boy named Hannibal and his strange suburban family who live in a synthetically coloured bungalow paradise. The ironic, naïve title song by the Souvenirs, a pop band, became a hit and was also effective in capturing the peculiar, self-conscious, simple-minded tone of this stylised film.

The Flying Granny / Flyvende farmor (2001), Wikke & Rasmussen’s biggest box office hit, is teeming with even more lovable characters. Popular Jytte Abildstrøm plays a tinderbox of a grandmother with a twinkle in her girlish eye. Radiating cheerful energy she pursues the boyfriend of her youth, Aage, who left in a mail plane back then, never to return.

They personally take their success sitting down and are reluctant to overexploit their talent: “We have allowed ourselves the luxury of enjoying our work. If we don’t feel that we have anything to offer for two years, then we’ll stay away for two years. That’s the difference between us and everyone else.” (MP)



Photo: Erik Aavatsmark



Catch That Girl / Photo: Jens Junker-Jensen

CHILD-LEVEL ACTION *Hans Fabian Wullenweber (1967)*

“Adult” was our keyword. To the film crew, it meant we should be just as ambitious and make our film just as brilliant, thrilling and real as if we were making an action film for adults. (Hans Fabian Wullenweber)

Hans Fabian Wullenweber made a tremendous breakthrough when his debut feature film became a hit. His *Catch That Girl / Klatretøsen* (2002) is a child-level action film, and was enthusiastically received by young audiences. Perhaps because they could clearly tell they had been respected.

The film is about 12-year-old Ida whose father is seriously ill. The complicated operation that could save his life costs 1.5 million kroner, and the family can't afford it. As a result, Ida and her two friends decide to plan a Mission-Impossible style bank robbery – in which they have to overcome obstacles such as sophisticated alarm systems, specially trained Rottweilers and the feat of climbing up the middle of a 30-metre shaft.

According to Wullenweber, he wanted to combine an American-style action film with Danish realism and Danish sensitivity. Credibility was decisive and the human element of having something at stake was important.

“We sustained a high pace throughout the film because we know that nowadays kids quickly pick up on what's happening and have a well trained eye,” says Wullenweber. “We do cross-cutting and have different stories running simultaneously. We wanted to visualise life and death, high and low and tried to shoot from above and below as much as possible. We use monochrome colours. When things get hot, they're very hot.”

Wullenweber graduated from the National Film School of Denmark in '97, after which he travelled to the UK to continue his studies. In 2000, he wrote and directed the short film entitled *Still Around / Udenfor*. His second feature film, *Gemini / Tvilling* will be released in the autumn, 2003. (LM)

Contributors: Film critic: Liselotte Michelsen (LM) / Film critic: Morten Pül (PM) / Screenwriter: Ulrich Breuning (UB) / Ulla Hjorth Nielsen (UHN).

The above portraits include only a selection of the many Danish directors whose feature films for children have been released during recent years, or directors who have made a significant contribution to contemporary Danish children's cinema by authoring works that have blazed new cinematic trails.

Outside this selection are numerous Danish directors who have provided us with children's classics, or films that have made an impact on the national and international arena:

**MORTEN ARNFRED / BILLE AUGUST /
GABRIEL AXEL / ERIK CLAUSEN / GERT FREDHOLM /
NILS GRÅBØL / RUMLE HAMMERICH /
LARS HESSELHOLDT / ASTRID HENNING-JENSEN /
KLAUS KJELDSSEN / BIRGER LARSEN / PETER MADSEN /
NILS MALMROS / SVEN METHLING / LONE SCHERFIG /
THOMAS VINTERBERG / LINDA WENDEL /
BRITA WIELOPOLSKA ...**