

Internationales Filmfestival / International Film Festival
18. für Kinder und junges Publikum / for Children and Young Audience

14. bis 20. 10. 2013 / 14 to 20 - 10 - 2013



ECFA SEMINAR

(October 17th 2013 in Chemnitz, Germany)

CHILDREN'S FILMS & ROLES OF ADULTS



Schlingel director Michael Harbauer described today's event in his opening speech as a continuation of the Kristiansand Seminar, a further attempt for teachers and film professionals to inspire each other. Both parties were represented in Chemnitz.

Successfully involved in numerous movies, producer Uschi Reich realises that adults can't be missed in children's films.

"There are more children's films without children than without grown-ups."

In her career Uschi Reich came across a wide gamma of adult characters, from good to evil, realistic to zany, dramatic to comical... No standard is set; a neutral perspective is rarely found.

"Looking at grown-ups through children's eyes, we're showing a world that a young audience can understand and identify with".

This is what all famous children's authors have done and this is what the children's film industry should strive for.



Uschi Reich

This was illustrated by examples from Uschi Reich's movies. In *WILD CHICKS* roles got reversed when a child acted as a moral authority reproving an adult. When grandma is about to fire a gun, her grandchild warns her for immoral behaviour. And a teacher in *THE FLYING CLASSROOM* enriches the lives of his pupils by offering them a new view on reality. Author Erich Kästner had a strong belief in the pedagogical powers of education.



Wild Chicks

IN THE FISHBOWL

The seminar continued in a fishbowl format: 4 debaters around a table observed (and interrogated) by the audience. In today's fishbowl: Dutch scriptwriter Willemine van der Wiel (MIKE SAYS GOODBYE!), Canadian filmmaker Eric Tessier (THE PEEWEES), French director Julien Abraham (ASPHALT PLAYGROUND, aka LA CITE ROSE) and children's film distributor Felix Vanginderhuysen. The moderator was Eduard Barnsteiner.



“The most important task for adults in films is: taking care of children” says Willemine van der Wiel. In MIKE SAYS GOODBYE! a single mum takes up the fight against her alcohol addiction to support a son in need. “Grown-ups define the arena in which a story takes place, in a grown-up’s world they have all the decisive power. Children have to battle the obstacles and barriers raised by adults. But reality is often more grim than our story”.



The Peewees



Mike says goodbye!

In THE PEEWEES the worlds of adults and children clash into another. “I’m proud that my film raised huge discussions in many families” Tessier says. In THE PEEWEES a grieving father is commanded by his son to get a grip on life again. But teaching the adults can never be a child’s responsibility. Tessier: “Films are all about evolving characters, in children’s films it’s the children provoking these changes. Often labile grown-ups are asked by children to act according to their age, a very recognisable pattern”.

How realistic can youth films be? Julien Abraham's LA CITE ROSE is situated in the rough city suburbs "but we wanted to stay true to both sides of the coin, being realistic in depicting a negative environment, but also showing the warmth you can find there in family life. Often parents in the ghetto are regarded as failures.

But they are not; only the ones who are absent fail. The film has some very strong adult characters: mothers at home, teachers in school...

You might never see them in the news, but they are very real and they make the harsh ghetto atmosphere contrast with happy family scenes".



La Cité Rose

No adult is to be trusted

Moderator Eduard Barnsteiner: "All those years working for Disney, the words 'children's film' were not used once. Family entertainment is what we did". Also PEEWEES is promoted as 'family entertainment'. "The difference between a family and a children's film is defined by the different layers put into the story". According to Willemine van der Wiel the best example is WINKY'S HORSE, in which a whole layer is understood totally different by those who stopped believing in Santa Claus, while still keeping the mystery alive for the young believers. Julien Abraham: "Until the age of twelve children see the world without political notion. But once you're twelve you become more aware of the outside world's opinions and religion, socio-politics and common theories are getting settled in the minds of youngsters".

What are a distributor's expectations? Felix Vanginderhuysen: "We expect children as main characters with a certain degree of realism. And there should be at least one adult in whom children can put their trust. 'No adult is to be trusted' would be an uncomfortable message. There should always be hope". Why is hope so important? Van der Wiel: "Because children simply can't say 'it was just a movie'. They feel too deeply involved in the story".

Happy people

One question often asked regarding children's films: where are the normal families? Why is often one of the parents dead or totally absent? Tessier: "Happy people don't have a story". Van der Wiel has an even more pragmatic answer, making realism subject to narrative technique: "Less work for the scriptwriter. One less character to develop in an even more conflicting setting. But picturing adults as one-dimensional caricatures is too easy. What you need for a persona, whether grown-up or child is different layers to enrich its character".

The TWIGSON films were named as recent examples set in a complete and happy family.

Eduard Barnsteiner wants to know if grown-up characters in a movie often give voice to the director's personal opinions? Abraham: "My opinions are everywhere to be found in my film, shared in many different ways. I've put a lot of different strings there and the audience can choose which ones they might pull".

The Schlingel debate was appropriately followed by a screening of the French movie THE DANDELIONS (aka DU VENT DANS MES MOLLETS) by Carine Tardieu. In this heart-breaking film, watching the decline of a dead end marriage through the eyes of a child, adults paraded in every possible manifestation, from grotesque to poignant. (GH)



Du vent dans mes mollets

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