

Estonian animation tradition?

Arulepp: Not very well. A Film Estonia is a part of A Film Denmark, which is where I studied and gained all the traditional animation know-how. We, Estonians, often somehow walk our own path with a more commercial audience orientation. In a good sense! Which corresponds with my nature, being this big Disney fan.

This short film is part of a bigger animation project.

Arulepp: PETER THE BEETLE is part of a programme combining five short stories. The only thing they have in common is the author - they're all based on stories by Anders Kivirak, whom you can see in an overarching story in which he expresses his desire as a writer to see his characters coming to live. He is a living legend, strolling through the entire film. It is a tricky concept, as all five films were deliberately made with different animation styles and techniques, like 2D, 3D, puppet animation... But his persona brings it all together nicely.

—
Gert Hermans

The full interview you can find as a part of the [Zlin Film Festival podcast on Spotify](#).

Piotr Chmielewski about CRAB

“It’s not a vegan propaganda film”

I remember how Piotr Chmielewski came to pitch an idea at the CEE Animation Forum years ago. With his big disarming eyes he captivated the audience: “I don’t know anything about animation, I don’t know how to make a film, but I have this idea...” Everyone believed him unconditionally (which explains his pitching award!), and rightly so... Because now there is CRAB, a story in which we look through the eyes of a mollusk that finds itself in a very special place: in the galley of a ship, ready to be cooked.

One of the myths in animation is that two of the hardest things to animate are: water and animals with many legs. You decided to make an underwater film with a multi-legged main character.

Piotr Chmielewski: For Paulina Szezwczyk, our head of animation, not even eight legs were a challenge - she can do much more than that! And we found several solutions to minimise the amount of computer effects in the animation of the water. Recreat-



ing the elements is something that I really like about stop-motion; it was great fun.

Tomasz Sobczak (DoP): We also did ‘fire’, which is even more difficult to animate than water.

The animation looks a bit gritty, back to the basics of stop-motion.

Chmielewski: That is the main charm and magic of this technique. I want the audience to see that all this is hand-made, with the use of real, unpolished materials.

I imagine you, sitting in front of an aquarium for days.

Chmielewski: I did my research, watching crab clips on YouTube. I went to the Berlin Zoo to observe the kind of movements they make. And I tried to put myself inside a crab’s head - we can only imagine how that will be, but this is my interpretation of how crabs will see and hear the world.

All film long, we stay close to the main character and watch through his eyes, which are not more than two little balls on antennas.

Sobczak: The crab’s perspective was defined by the use of wide lenses. A camera lens strongly resembles the human eye. In the animal world, pred-

actors in general have a long focal lens, while prey usually have a wide focal lens.

Chmielewski: The mouth can move a little bit, and that's all. Even with a minimum of facial expression, you can still read the emotions from the crab's body language.

It's not only about the eyes but also about the ears.

Piotr Kubiak (Sound): Piotr found it important to use original sounds that we created ourselves, instead of finding them in a sound library. And he forbade the use of dead animals, not even for Foley purposes. For a fish slapping its tail in the frying pan, we couldn't use a dead fish, so we used a banana instead. Bananas were allowed!

What did you use for the sound of bubbling water?

Kubiak: Bubbles! The problem was with the synchronisation. After we recorded the bubbles, I uploaded those sounds in my sampler and then onto a keyboard. Whenever we needed bubbles, I recreated them through the keys of the piano. At first we thought that was funny, but we needed so many of them that after a while I got totally grumpy with Piotr.

There is one particular sound that sent shivers down my spine. The film starts vaguely with a crab crawling around, and then suddenly... the striking of a match. That's when you know we're in a horror movie.

Chmielewski: We create tension, but there isn't much brutality to be seen in CRAB. It's not a vegan propaganda film. It's all about taking the perspective of the crab, not about making people feel guilty about eating it. Being inside the crab's head for eight minutes creates a certain empathy - you imagine how it would feel to be a different kind of being.

We met on an earlier occasion when the project in an early stage was pitched at the Visegrad animation forum, nowadays called CEE animation forum.

Kubiak: Piotr's pitch made a deep impression; the crowd seemed to totally believe in his project and everyone wanted to get him on board. As an award I offered him five work days in my Polish sound studio and my producer Wojciech Leszczynski offered him to produce the animation. CEE has been a crucial element in the creation of this film.

—
Gert Hermans

Elvira Dulaskaia about ICE BREAK

"It's impossible to find properly fitting hockey wear"

Alex is the only girl in a boys ice-hockey team, coached by her dad. He treats Alex like one of the boys, both on the ice and at home. With her short haircut and a body shaped through years of hockey training, Alex is a tough player, and that is how the world is treating her. But now that she falls in love with one of her teammates, this perception starts to bother her.

With the ice hockey arena as a battleground, I was surprised to find tenderness in a place where I mainly expected machismo.

Elvira Dulaskaia: Alex pretends to be tough, but she is actually a tender girl. Even when acting like one of the boys, cracking jokes, she feels different inside. That creates an inner conflict. What if you're doing everything to fit in, but still feel like an outsider? That is what ICE BREAK is all about.

Is an ice hockey locker room just

the same as any other sports locker rooms?

Dulaskaia: Ice hockey is all about teamwork; relationships within the team are of an utter importance. These relations are deepened after the game, inside the locker room. As strict as the discipline is on the ice, there players can unleash their stress. At the same time it is a very competitive, conflictual environment.

Especially when you have your father as a coach. Fathers and children in the same sports arena is seldom a good idea.

Dulaskaia: The main reason why Alex can be in the boys' team is because of her father; she is not treated like all the others, but neither is she treated like his daughter on the ice. For Alex this is very confusing. We had a stunt double on set who was in the same situation; I learned a lot from her.

