

# Meelis Arulepp about PETER THE BEETLE

## “A humanoid with antennas”

Peter the Beetle dreams of performing his art of playing violin in front of a big crowd in the zoo. He leaves home to make his dream come true. Unfortunately, Peter is too small to be seen. It should come as no surprise that Estonian animator Meelis Arulepp shows up wearing a FANTASIA 2000 sweater. In his modest short film, the simplicity of the first Disney clips is never far away.

Meelis Arulepp: Growing up in Estonia, which back then was considered a part of the Soviet Union, Walt Disney has fascinated me since a very early age. I was still in kindergarten when my mother took me to see SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS and it blew my mind. I was mesmerised. The next few days I couldn't sleep and I was daydreaming about those funny dwarves singing and dancing and about Snow White getting romantically involved with a prince. That event has marked my destiny. I've been crazy about animation ever since.

This might explain why your film

makes an impression of being a classic from another era. It looks... timeless. Arulepp: You could have said old-fashioned and I would have felt honoured. That's just my nature. I have a taste for all things classic - in music, poetry, literature, paintings... Everything for which time has proven that it was worth it to stay on the scene.

**When asking animators about the most difficult animal to animate, they usually answer me: the more legs, the more difficult.**

Arulepp: Peter doesn't exactly look like a beetle. It's more or less a humanoid character with antennas. Like the cricket in Disney's PINOCCHIO doesn't look at all like a cricket. For me horses are the most difficult to animate. They have four legs and run on all four of them.

**What is striking about your animation is the way you work with backgrounds: always one clear colour, with the characters acting more up front.**

Arulepp: With a budget as small as

ours, we needed to find ways to have this film made. I'm a big fan of simplicity. It was like a kind of game for me to see how much I could take out from the background. That was the fun part. There was a constant temptation to add more, but then I asked myself: is it needed for this scene? And then I took it out again.

**Knowing about your love for all things classic, the soundtrack contains some beautiful violin music, played with great virtuosity.**

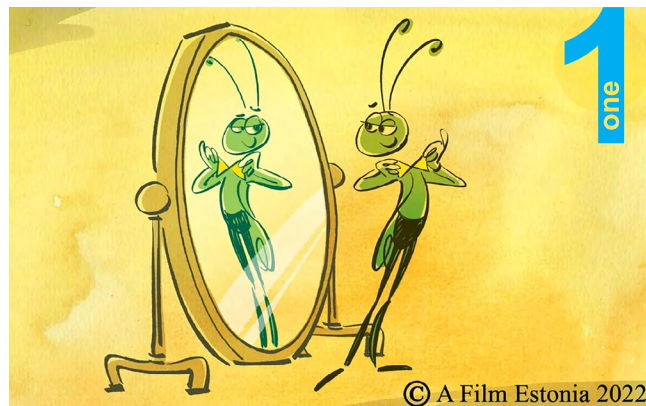
Arulepp: In the original story, written by the famous Estonian author Anders Kivirak, Peter is reciting poems. But reading poetry wouldn't work in a film so I choose music instead. For the

animatic I used Mozart's violin concerto, and I asked my friend and musician Torne Radic to perform the music for the film, but he insisted on writing the score himself. I was sceptical, but he did it, giving us the impression this is a classic piece that has been around for ages. The rhythm of the music corresponds to the rhythm of the images and the colouring.

**This old story comes with an old message...**

Arulepp: Dream big. And if you don't succeed, then don't give up but search for other ways to make your dream come true. As corny as it sounds.

**Does PETER THE BEETLE fit into the**



**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-