



European Children's
Film Association

Association Européenne du Cinéma
pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse

interviews

Phantom Owl Forest

Too Far Away

Running to the Sky

Ella Bella Bingo

The Arctic Camels

Journal

No. 1 | 2020

February

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www.ecfaweb.org

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SERIOUS IN THE FUN SEGMENT

Even though children's film remains – who dares to contradict? – the most fun and sympathetic segment of the film industry, this branch can no longer exist without statistics and business models. As Milena Klemke (producer TOO FAR AWAY) states in her interview: *"There is a business to make in children's film."* In the article about ELLA BELLA BINGO, you'll read about integrating commercial considerations into your artistic ambitions. If there is one person who brought participants on the edge of their seats during the ECFA Seminar in Schlingel, it was Canadian producer Adrien Bodson: *"This industry should rethink the way we are branding ourselves. Branding affects the entire production chain."* Everyone feels an urge to professionalise. Children's film is no longer a hobby for well-meaning philanthropists. It is a market based on well-overthought models. People working in this industry know what they are doing and combine good intentions with professional ambitions.

Part of this professionalism is the need to complete our gut feeling with numbers and statistics. Many festivals last year – like the Zlin Film Festival, Buster, Schlingel, Film'on, Cinemagic, etc. – picked the card of knowledge enhancement in an industry environment. And this tendency continues in the new year: in a

forum Fifem (Montreal) wants to convince the local industry of the potential of children's films. In a seminar, supported by ECFA, the BUFF festival (Malmö) will bring the industry closer to its young target audience. More initiatives will follow, as many ECFA members are willing to create platforms where we can continue to meet. In a formal way, and in an informal way, because remember ... the children's film is and will remain the most fun segment of the film industry!

Dates to remember:

*** The KIDS Regio Berlinale Meeting Point (22 February, 12:00 - 13:30)** (focuses on reconnecting young audiences with film. "Cinema as Discovery Space" invites expert speakers such as Raphaëlle Gondry (Europa Cinemas) and Sanam Gharagozlou (Marketing Manager at MUBI).

*** The BUFF Seminar 'Reaching the young audience' on 25 & 26 March during the BUFF Film Festival and in collaboration with ECFA, will focus on young people's media consumption. What do they want and how do we reach them?**

Anu Aun about PHANTOM OWL FOREST

"An outrageous but not so comfortable dress code"

Since Eia's parents have little time for her, the 10 year old girl is forced to spend the Christmas holiday with her grandfather on a remote farm, in the middle of the snow covered Estonian forest. There she discovers the beauty of nature and wildlife, threatened by a businessman who has a plan to destroy the primeval forest, inhabited by mysterious owls. While fighting for the protection of Phantom Owl Forest, Eia unwraps a well-kept family secret.

One year ago at the Berlinale, PHANTOM OWL FOREST was one of the flagships of the 'Estonian 100 years anniversary', a cultural support programme celebrating the anniversary of the Baltic states and meanwhile boosting the national film industries. Afterwards the film travelled the festivals intensively with a story about intergenerational friendship and ecology. We met director Anu Aun at the Film'on Festival in Brussels.

PHANTOM OWL FOREST embraces

a particular style: sweet, beautiful, a bit old-fashioned, and that recipe seems to work perfectly.

Anu Aun: We were walking on thin ice, trying to make the film look more beautiful than reality. A Christmas story should feel warm and cosy, something you'd want to watch over and over again, like children do. We added little elements of magic that enchant both grown-ups and children.

That magic is to be found in nature, not in any sort of hocus pocus.

Anu: The magical return of the owl at the moment when it is most needed, is based on a true story. I read an article about people spotting for the first time in 100 years a particular type of owl in Estonia. Our story was in need of a rare endangered species to save the forest, so we added a bit of truth to this magic fairy tale.

I have to make a confession. When meeting you and producer Maie Rosmann-Lill years ago in the Cinekid Co-production Market, I thought:

such a nice project, what a shame it will never see the light of day.

Aun: I appreciate your honesty, but we were more confident than you expected! We had applied for the 'Estonian 100 years anniversary', in which a lot of money was involved. The moment we got that grant, things went very fast. After five years of preparation, we had every detail worked out. For the first time in my life I could work with a normal budget, without thinking all the time where to cut and squeeze. This budget enabled us to work fast, as we didn't have to hire one person for nine different jobs, we simply hired each person to do his own job.



How Baltic is this film? Could it have been made anywhere else than in Estonia?

Aun: It could have been made in many places, like for instance in Scandinavia. There is definitely something Nordic about this film. I don't know much about the Baltic culture and industry, I feel closer connected to Scandinavian countries.

How difficult was it to shoot in winter?

Aun: Very difficult! It was extremely cold. I was dressed for the occasion with two pairs of short underwear, three pairs of long underwear, and a warm ski costume. All exterior scenes



were shot outside, in real snow. Only one interior was built in the studio. When spending the whole day out in nature, the fresh air gives me plenty of energy. In a studio I tend to feel sleepy at some point, but in the forest we were running around energetic in our outrageous, but not very comfortable dress code.

Everyone in the film looks nice, healthy and blushing, like a promotion spot for living outdoors. Weren't you facing any practical problems?

Aun: Many. In the woods roads were covered with snow so we had to hire tractors. Sometimes we had to make a long walk before arriving on the set, where we had only a small caravan and a heated tent waiting for us. Electricity sometimes was problematic. But considering we were there with at least 30 people, mostly in the snow, almost none of us fell sick. The whole shooting was like a winter wonderland in another universe.

Did you already return to planet earth?

Aun: Hardly! We had such a positive vibe on the set. We picked our team very carefully, and that paid off well. The entire crew is looking back upon



this period with great nostalgia.

Was there a lot of wildlife on the set?

Aun: We had a specialised crew working on the wildlife footage. Our DoP for nature photography assembled his own team of experts. Most animals were filmed in different forests all over Estonia, and we found a lynx and deer in a wildlife park. A trained owl was brought into the studio from a Lithuanian owl park, that was the only animal not being shot in its natural habitat.

Your film deals with high moral values, like family togetherness, living honestly, ecology...

Aun: When we started writing the story, ecology wasn't as trending in Esto-

nia as it is nowadays, but it was always in the core of our film. In terms of family values, I was probably reflecting on my own situation. Every summer and Christmas holidays I was sent to my grandparents and I totally loved it. I felt a strong bond with them, for which I'm still grateful. But I see so many families around me where children are kept separated from one of their parents or grandparents. They can't meet them because their quarrelling parents are having a bad relationship. Looking through the eyes of a child, this is such a tragic situation to happen, and it is seldom brought to the attention.

How did the Estonian release go?

Aun: We premiered as the opening film of the Just Film Festival in Tallinn

in 2018 and then released PHANTOM OWL FOREST in December. For the promotion we worked close together with the 'Estonia 100' team. It was a huge success. With almost 150.000 admissions, no film in Estonia did better, not even BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY which ended second place.

I presume this is going to be the type of film that from now on will be screened on Estonian TV every year during the Christmas holidays, like a new SOUND OF MUSIC, a national treasure.

Aun: I would love that – the idea makes me really happy. On an international scale we were proud to be picked up by Attraction Distribution. We had several agents interested in PHANTOM OWL FOREST but we really liked Attraction's catalogue. Some of those titles made an international career – some even made it to Estonian cinemas – so now they might do the same for PHANTOM OWL FOREST.

–
Gert Hermans

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Mirlan Abdykalykov about **RUNNING TO THE SKY**

“The birds were not chosen randomly”

12 year old Jekshen is the fastest runner in the Kyrgyzstani mountain village, where he lives together with his alcoholic father. Jekshen grows up pretty much by himself, finding the last bit of freedom and relief by participating in a traditional running competition. Until one day he is pledged to take part in a big race, one that might change his life for the better.

The environment in which the story takes place seems to have a big influence on the character, the nature of the people living there.

Mirlan Abdykalykov: The landscape and especially the atmosphere in the village had a very positive influence on the entire filmmaking process, and on the crew and actors. Off set, we all felt at ease in that place. The wonderful atmosphere fitted so well to the story. Through observing the scenery, the landscape and nature I'm building up a tension that lasts throughout the entire film.

People in those villages don't speak much.

Abdykalykov: We shot the film in a big village where during the Soviet days a uranium mine was located, making it a rather dangerous and unhealthy place to live. After the Soviet period, the mine was closed and most of the people moved out. The ones staying behind must have had a strong connection with the place. Maybe this explains why those people in general are rather introverted.

Is what you show us really “life as it is nowadays” in that village?

Abdykalykov: It's a truthful example of typical village life in Kyrgyzstan. We didn't have to rebuild or decorate anything – the scenery was all there, ready to use. A traditional village scenery in its purest form. There is a strong connection between story and location. The film refers to how life was during and after the Soviet days, which clearly shows in the environmental details.



What sort of details?

Abdykalykov: All the big buildings, like the school, were built during Soviet times. It is like time has stood still ever since, and every form of development has stopped. And even what we got from the Soviet days, we don't seem able to save and keep it. It is my very personal opinion that our society is not moving forward. We're having a status quo. About this, I want to raise some questions in the minds of the audience.

Your protagonist Jekshen is extremely loyal. How loyal can you be to a father who refuses to take up his parental role?

Abdykalykov: Respect and loyalty towards the elderly, and especially towards the father, are deeply rooted in Kyrgyzstani traditions. The film doesn't tell you how far this loyalty can go. Just like you will not find out why exactly the mother has left her husband. Such things you can only presume. Boys like Jekshen sooner or later will make a decision and meet their fate. The closing scene, in which

Jekshen runs away with his rooster, leaves room for interpretation. In the original script, Jekshen wasn't able to deal with life's hardships, and died. But I couldn't agree. When you can overcome so many difficulties, and still you die in the end, then you're weak. I didn't want my character to be weak. After many discussions with producers and scriptwriters, I proposed a different ending and measured the pro's and con's. That's how I convinced my team, and we rewrote the script with this open ending.

In the film I spotted lots of images of birds flying through the sky. Not just because you're such a passionate birdwatcher?

Abdykalykov: In this world there is less and less space for animals to obtain, so I wanted to guarantee them a place in my film. Their presence is no coincidence. In many cultures – surely where I come from – animals often represent special symbolic notions. The birds you spotted in *RUNNING TO THE SKY* were not chosen randomly. A pigeon symbolises love, like between the teacher and her colleague. For Jekshen that gym teacher impersonates motherhood, beauty, first love. The rooster is connected to the running game that is in the centre of the story. And the cuckoo comes with



Director Mirlan Abdykalykov meeting the audience at the Schlingel festival

the scene in which Jekshen visits his mother – remember how cuckoos don't raise their own chicks. One main intention with this story was not to put a blame on one specific person. The guilt is on all of us to carry. The presence of birds and other animals is there to explain this idea of a blame that needs to be shared.

A lot of drinking is going on in the village.

Abdykalykov: I believe there is always a reason behind all that drunkenness. Look at Jekshen's father and you will understand. In the nineties the alcohol problem in Kyrgyzstan was even bigger, but it still exists nowadays.

How difficult was it to make the film?

Abdykalykov: Both on the level of financing and technique, making a film is never easy. I constantly felt the threat of not having enough money to finish the film, which complicated everything. Luckily since 2005 a system of state funding was installed, the film landscape in Kyrgyzstan has developed. But for this type of cinema, telling personal stories based upon my individual ideas, there's still many challenges. Working with the best technical equipment, using the best facilities, is something we can't afford. To make a good film, having a 'good idea' is the crucial element. I am always hoping to meet someone who has plenty of money and no ideas. I have plenty of good ideas but no money to make them happen.

Is it true what they say about you?

Abdykalykov: What?

You were the child actor who played the title role in BESHKEMPIR?

Abdykalykov: I was. I have the best possible memories of that project. My father Aktan Abdykalykov was the director, and I'm now following in his footsteps.

BESHKEMPIR was made 20 years

ago.

Abdykalykov: *HEAVENLY NOMADIC*, my debut as a director, was a children's film too. It got a small scale release in 30 German arthouse cinema's. Now *RUNNING TO THE SKY* is having its European premiere in the renowned Schlingel Festival. In the city of Chemnitz, I can feel the presence of a long children's film history, but on this 24th festival edition, *RUNNING TO THE SKY* is the first Kyrgyzstani film on the programme. I'm proud about that.

–

Gert Hermans

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Sales: Margot Haiböck,
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Producer Milena Klemke about TOO FAR AWAY

“Boys in general love to be on the pitch”

Two kids arrive at the same time in a new school, Ben whose family had to move after their house was sold to a mining company, and Syrian refugee Tariq. They meet not only in class, but also on the football pitch, both aspiring to the same position as the goal scoring striker. When both rivals find out they have a deep emotion in common, this marks the start of an unexpected friendship. TOO FAR AWAY won the ECFA Award at the Smile Int. Film Festival in Delhi. We met Milena Klemke, producer for Weydemann Bros., at the Film'on festival in Brussels. We both agree: it is always a good idea to start a film with a beautiful scored goal!

Milena Klemke: Isn't it? It gives you the right energy. Those football scenes help the film a lot. We wanted to make a children's film with strong content and a good story. We tried to balance it, not putting too much weight on the football, but it is a narrative line we consequently follow.

Author Susanne Finken embedded Ben's emotional evolution cleverly in that storyline. Scene by scene, he evolves as a team player, learning to cope with his new situation. This is something every kid can relate to.

It made you spend a lot of time on football pitches.

Klemke: We went about the football scenes with great respect. In Germany shooting slots for children are strictly limited, we could only work with them three hours per day. For those football scenes we needed detailed choreography. We had 4 or 5 actors joining an existing football team. In preparation for the shooting, they rehearsed together and practiced every move in detail. It all went quite easy. Boys in general love to be on the pitch, so they would have loved to work extra hours.

Ben has to move to a new place when his village is taken over by the mining industry.



Klemke: Brown coal mining is still being intensively exploited in two German regions, North Rhine Westphalia and Saxony. Making way for the industry to grow, sometimes people are chased out of their homes and have to start somewhere new. Which makes them sort of refugees too. Entire villages disappear and are rebuilt on a new spot, kilometres away. This still

happens today. In 2018 we filmed in a kind of ghost town, only two families still lived there. Even a protected forest was endangered and often there were protest demonstrations, until the works then stopped temporarily. Today the village has entirely disappeared. People have grown up there, but the church where they got married, the graveyard where their fami-



Too Far Away - Producer Milena Klemke (left) @ the Filem'On Festival

lies are buried are all gone.

This new village is filmed like a cold geometrical construction.

Klemke: To emphasise the contrast with the house where they used to live before, that contained natural materials like stone and wood. Now they move into something clean and clinical. We found an area near Cologne that looked exactly like we imagined it. The pictures are framed so geometrically because this small and narrow place restricted us to certain angles, but it exactly captured the right feeling.

What convinced you as a producer about this project?

Klemke: The story, definitely. It is a universal story about moving on to something new in life, embodied by two strong individuals. We were amazed by Susanne Finken's treatment and thought it would be a perfect project for debuting director Sarah Winkinstette, who had been successful with her young audience short films. It all went pretty fast, it took us three years to complete the story and the budget.

Focusing on places and activities

familiar to every child, like school, sports, family... The story stays close to the world of children.

Klemke: You are all the time with Ben, which was a challenge, as we needed the actor Yoran Leicher to be in every single scene. Every day he was on the set. Yoran, who already played in two other children's films, could do it, he is full of energy. Sobhi Awad, playing Tariq, is a refugee who had been living in Germany for only one year and never acted before. He hardly understood the language, his role stood very close to his real life. The dynamics between them were great, Yoran was like a big brother to Sobhi.

What was your role as a producer?

Klemke: This was our first children's film at Weydemann Bros. and we found it an interesting market that brings you directly in contact with an extremely engaged audience. There is a business to make in children's films. As a debuting director you have to compete with so many others for funding and to acquire a place on the market, while children's films have a clear mission and a well-defined target audience from the very beginning. Nevertheless, with an original screenplay and a debuting director, this was not an easy film to finance. Our role as producers was to bring the



budget to a level that actually made it possible to shoot this film, and we are very happy that we found the right partners in the end. *TOO FAR AWAY* will be released in German cinemas in March 2020.

—
Gert Hermans

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CHAMP

"Keep moving, don't stand still" Esma's trainer reminds her, *"show her who's boss"*. The 14 year old girl from a disadvantaged neighbourhood in the Hague dreams of becoming the world's greatest fighter. As a promising kickboxing talent she dreams of fame and wealth, her name will go down in history. Kickboxing is not only her ticket to all of that, but helps her cope with her anger as a healthy outlet in stressful times.

Since Esma's childhood her mother has been ill, making constant visits to the hospital a necessity. As Esma prepares for which will be her toughest fight yet, her mother needs to go to the hospital once again. Worrying about her, the kickboxing teen struggles to keep her head in the game. The numbing fear of losing her mother is weighing on her. Will she be able to put her fears to the side and stay focussed in the ring? Will all the hard work finally pay off?

CHAMP's strong female protagonist is trying to remain resilient, determined to give her best at all times. She is



convinced, if her mother can keep on fighting, so can she! At its core, this is a documentary about winning and losing with the moral evergreen being 'Don't give up!'. However, director Cassandra Offenberg's powerful production transcends beyond this cliché. Rapid cuts creating tension, suspense interrupted by poetic pictures, the sweeping dreaminess of the gloomy light of a chandelier in the family home... Offenberg creates a hybrid form where reality and the sensory world meet. By using three different cameras – one digital, a 16 mm and a smartphone – she creates a unique atmospheric density. The imagery captures Esma's life, enhanced

by the emotional quality of advice given by her trainer and mother. While the narrative style is quite artistic, the camera always engages at eye level with its protagonist. Finally, one of the keys to the film's success surely constitutes Offenberg's choice of music. Right from the opening scene, the music sets the pace, carefully coordinated to glimpse into Esma's boxing career. The director knows exactly when, where and how to utilise it, to underline Esma's challenges, successes and failures.

CHAMP was honoured with the ECFA Doc Award at the 18th *doxs!* film festival in 2019. It was chosen by students

themselves to be screened at the festival as part of the "Kulturrucksack" workshop. Within the scope of this project, the students selected films for an entire programme block prior to the festival.

Director: Cassandra Offenberg; cinematographer: Sam du Pon; editor: Eline Bakker. Hazazah Pictures in co-production with NTR, the Netherlands, 2019, 16'.

The Doxspot column is published with the help of the [doxs! festival](https://www.doxs-festival.de/) for children & youth documentaries in Duisburg and other cities in the Ruh Area. www.do-xs.de.



You'll find an interview with director Cassandra Offenberg in the next ECFA Journal (May 2020).

Karl Emil Rikardsen about THE ARCTIC CAMELS

"Up North we have a different perception of time"

Did you know the two happiest camels in the world live on an island in Norway above the arctic circle, and they prefer an entire wholemeal bread loaf for breakfast? When Thorarin and his sister Svalin asked for a horse, they got two camels. But will they ever be able to ride them? The family embarks on an expedition to Mongolia to seek help. But little did they know about Mongolian training methods.

Two ECFA Doc Awards have already been taken home by Norwegian films (THE SHELTER and DANCING FOR YOU). Few children's documentaries raised more discussion than the Norwegian feature TONGUE CUTTERS. With THE ARCTIC CAMELS another Norwegian documentary shines a light on the relationship between humans and animals. *"Contradictions make you see things more clearly"* states director Karl Emil Rikardsen in the Film'on Festival.

Was this film from the beginning

conceived as a feature?

Karl Emil Rikardsen: In the earliest stage we considered making a series for television. But the interest was much bigger in a feature that broadcasters eventually could cut into three pieces, like a mini-series. We have three versions: a feature, a 3 x 25' version, and a 52' version. Too many things are going on to capture in one short film. I wanted to capture the culture and lifestyle on this specific island, as far North as you can go in Norway. This story takes time, you can't train a camel overnight. We knew we had to follow them for three years, which is a long period for a short film.

The film's profile is a story about camels. What initial concept did you have in mind?

Rikardsen: I considered something as weird as camels as a good vehicle to tell about life up North. When this family brought a Mongolian camel trainer to Norway, I was expecting a



culture clash. There were more than enough small conflicts that could mirror big scale cultural frictions in our society. Both the conflict between the kids and the animals, and the gap between the Mongolian trainer and the Norwegian expectations, say something about society nowadays.

Life in Northern Norway seems to be defined by ice and snow. People all the time have to adapt to the weather conditions.

Rikardsen: The climate is tough and windy. Inland, in the mountains, temperatures may fall to -40°. But living by the sea, the Gulfstream mitigates the temperature. In Mongolia winter is much colder. Mongolian camels are

not like dromedaries in the Sahara, with their 30 centimetres thick fur coat they are perfectly equipped to survive the Northern winters.

Did the weather conditions have logistical consequences for you as a filmmaker?

Rikardsen: Distances and weather conditions are two elements we always had to be prepared for. I live 300 kilometres above the arctic circle, but still it took me days to get to their place, which is more than going to Mongolia. When going by car, you depend upon the snow and the avalanches. I usually went by boat and then stayed for a couple of days at their place. Up North we have a differ-

ent perception of time, the nearest neighbour city for me is four hours by car.

Who are the people living there?

Rikardsen: In that small community, you will find few people who grew up there. The family in the film comes from Oslo, they moved North because they fell in love with the place. After 10 years of working in the advertisement industry, they left their jobs and moved to this island to build up something new.

The boy Thorarin calls it “the best place in the world”.

Rikardsen: He is free to do whatever he wants, and many things parents and children do together. There are five children in that family and all of them have artistic talents. One is even in film school – we brought him in as an assistant. The girl Svalin is currently preparing her art studies. In their teenage years, they all move out to other towns. Except maybe Thorarin. He is a talented musician, but his roots are anchored deep in the island.

He is your narrator.

Rikardsen: With him being 8 years old and Svalin being 12 when the project started, initially we planned to have two protagonists. But as the project



evolved, she became a teenager and lost her interest, she had other things on her mind. When I told her about Thorarin becoming the main character, that was a relief for her. Now that there was no more pressure on her shoulders it all became much easier. Her big dream was to have a baby camel, Thorarin's dream was to ride a camel. Very role confirming!

Those camels are such weird looking

creatures.

Rikardsen: They are huge! 1,000 kilos are not easy to control for a kid. The male one has a nasty bite. Once when I was filming the female, my back turned towards him, he wanted to protect her. Luckily I was wearing a hood, as suddenly he sneaked up on me and my entire head was inside his mouth. I had to punch him on the nose to free myself. But they are beautiful animals with a strong personality.

Still seeing a camel standing next to a Christmas tree is a weird anachronism.

Rikardsen: Camels in the arctic are a contradiction in itself. Contradictions are interesting to work with – they make you see things more clearly. Nowadays, people growing up far away from agriculture or nomadic societies might have romantic ideas about animals. Like this family in the film. As if you only may instruct a camel after asking for his permission. Mongolians have a deep respect for their animals, but their tradition is over 1,000 years old.

You went to Mongolia.

Rikardsen: Meeting Mongolian people was overwhelming. They were 100% friendly and polite. I've been around the world, but never experienced

something like this before. We had an excellent team of Mongolian fixers arranging everything. But filming in a desert, sometimes at -20° with the wind blowing up the dust, is disastrous. Afterwards we had the cameras immediately sent to the factory to have them cleaned.

How did you keep the tension throughout the narrative?

Rikardsen: I like to tell my stories slow, but there is a limit to how slow you can go. The story in itself is exciting, while the Mongolian sequences are beautiful, with a mesmerising atmosphere, but there isn't much drama to it. That is why they were shortened in the editing.

How are the camels doing now?

Rikardsen: They had a baby last year in February. The first camel born above the arctic circle.

–
Gert Hermans

World Sales: Outlook Filmsales, Austria

Production: [Relation04 Media](#), Norway, media@relation04.com

Maxis Kinoabenteuer - Big cinema adventures for small children

Film exhibitors do recognise the importance of the youngest audience. German cinemas are now addressing this specific niche for the first time with a joint concept. *Maxis Kinoabenteuer* is a project offering 4 year old children, even outside the festivals, a high quality selection of short films and embedding them with custom made moderations. We asked Petra Rockefeller, one of the initiators, about the origins and the evolution of the project.

Petra Rockefeller: The idea for *Maxis Kinoabenteuer* actually came from a grouping called PROARTHAUS, uniting 12 independent exhibitors. These cinema enthusiasts meet regularly to exchange stats and figures on one hand and on the other to develop new creative concepts, often based on committed efforts on the spot. The core of the group wanted to develop, based on their experience with Kitakino, a year round overall concept in which the youngest audience is introduced to the world of cinema through beautiful short films

from renowned film festivals.

Who is involved in the project?

Rockefeller: Out of these 12 cinema theatres, 8 were convinced to join the start-up phase. They have jointly submitted applications for short film funding to the German Federal Film Board (Filmförderungsanstalt FFA). A promotional concept with a mascot (a squirrel named Maxi) and live moderations, advertising material - printed as well as social media and a cinema trailer – was developed and implemented. Mo & Frieze, Kuki and the International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen were immediately open to the idea of having these short film series curated externally. The final goal is to carefully wake children's interest in cinema language through a variety of short films, while meanwhile introducing them to the cultural space called 'the cinema'.

How was the first response?

Rockefeller: We implemented the first event in the Kurzfilmtag (short film day), so that we could simultane-



CAT LAKE CITY in Maxis Kinoabenteuer selection

ously introduce *Maxis Kinoabenteuer* to the respective short film portals. We presented a 'winter compilation', a series of short films touching various aspects of the winter season, selected for us by the Mo & Frieze festival team. We were able to inspire almost 600 guests. It is really exciting for us that already for the first screening the word was out and now it is the kindergartens themselves who are applying. And we are of course very happy to offer them this opportunity.

Participating cinemas are Broadway (Trier), Casino (Aschaffenburg), Cinenova (Cologne), Cinexx (Hachenburg), Lichtwerk (Bielefeld), Lichtburg Filmpalast (Oberhausen), Scala (Lüneburg) and Thalia (Pots-

dam). We wish Petra Rockefeller and the *Maxis Kinoabenteuer* initiative best of luck with the project.

MO & FRIESE

The Short Cut column is published with the help of the Mo&Frieze KinderKurzFilmFestival dedicated to short films. As a part of the Hamburg Short Film Agency the festival aims to present documentaries and experimental films in addition to animation and short films as well as to arouse the curiosity of children and to stimulate their imagination.

Kato De Boeck about PROVENCE

"That summer I turned silent"

Every summer vacation Camille's family sets off on a camping trip to the French Provence. This year her brother Tuur is paying extra attention to a couple of girls at the campsite. Camille's admiration turns into jealousy: what if Tuur meets a girl that he will love more than he loves her? Over the last year, PROVENCE has collected festival awards as if they were autumn leaves. When meeting director Kato De Boeck in Amsterdam, in a moment she will, once again, have to be on stage to collect another film award.

Kato De Boeck: It is a part of the game, but it is not what excites me most. This afternoon, I was working on a new script in my hotel room and found a scene that might connect my two main story lines. These are things that make me deliriously happy.

What is it that you will remember most from one year of intensive festival exposure?

De Boeck: That young children look for concrete storylines, that you can't al-

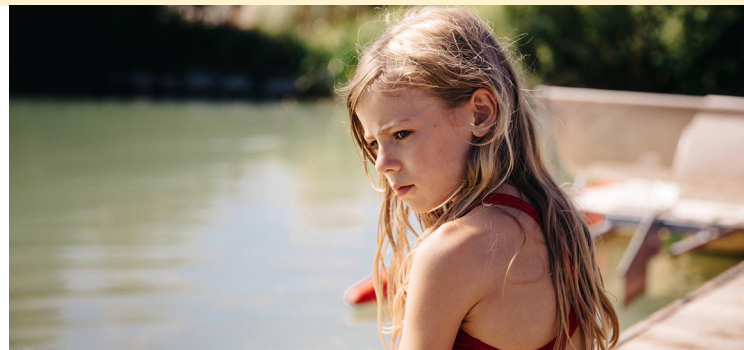
ways find in PROVENCE. In one scene, when Camille tries to find out who her brother is in love with, he doesn't respond to a certain (boy's) name. That is an answer in itself. But children expect something more explicit. That is why I consider PROVENCE primarily as an adult film, but it is great that children get something out of it in their own way.

PROVENCE is a farewell to things that will never come back.

De Boeck: Has not everyone experienced that summer when you felt dejected? When for the first time you realised there was a world out there that you didn't know about? In the opening scene, the film makes you slide into a child's world, but that's where the farewell starts. I usually summarise the film as "a fall from a childlike paradise."

Which for you is connected to the summer season?

De Boeck: Because of one lively memory. During a camping trip in France something was wrong with my broth-



er and I was so upset that I couldn't sleep nor eat. I was a babbler, but that summer I was silent because I couldn't find the right words. Sometime later we had the conversation on which this film is based. That was my personal fall from paradise. I cannot express my brother's pain, so I held on to my own point of view: the little sister's. I'm glad I dared to tell this story.

Saying goodbye is hard for you?

De Boeck: I'm extremely sensitive to that, I have a problem dealing with changes. Which often made me the laughing stock at home. My parents have a furniture store, so now and then the interior changes. They had to tell me one month in advance so that I could properly say a last goodbye to a cupboard or table.

Do you have specific camping memories of the Provence?

De Boeck: I'll tell you a secret. My parents told me recently that we actually spent our holidays in the Dordogne, not in the Provence... But everywhere in the world people know what the Provence stands for. The word has strong connotations. I remember carefree holidays when parents didn't ask where we were going, the campsite was the whole world and it was ours. That's why adults in this film don't come into the picture. It is about children dealing with things their parents know nothing about. With a summery setting that adds extra poetry to the story – a childhood melting away under the sun.

–
Gert Hermans

ALLAH IS NOT OBLIGED



ALLAH IS NOT OBLIGED was the winner of the 2019 CEE Animation Forum Pitching Award (Trebou, Czech Republic). What has happened ever since to this French animation project about Birahima, a 10 year old Guinean orphaned boy, becoming a child soldier? His mental journey, backed up by a strong adventurous story, is both dark and funny. We spoke with director Zaven Najjar and head of development Marion Boffelli (Special Touch Studios).

When his mother dies, Birahima leaves his native village and goes searching for his aunt. Crossing the

border into Liberia, he is seized by rebels. Despondent and abandoned, the boy is easy prey for their intimidation and Birahima becomes a child soldier in a chaotic civil war. Surrounded by death, torture and madness, he somehow manages to retain his sanity.

Director Zaven Najjar: "In some cases becoming a child soldier is a way to survive. But what at first sight might seem like an appealing escape from poverty, turns out to be a curse. Field research reveals different mechanisms, but in many cases it is the promise of a better life, food, and the example of the elderly that convinces

the children. Child soldiers are often depicted as bloodthirsty killing machines, while they are simply adapting to a situation, hoping to survive."

The story is based upon a book by Ivorian novelist Ahmadou Kourouma, who died in 2003. His wife and family are enthusiastic about the project. Najjar: "The story in the book is a pacifist manifesto, that touched me deeply. My family's roots are in Lebanon and Syria, and in my teenage years I heard many tragicomic stories about everyday life during the Lebanese civil war. Those stories expressed how the war had wounded their hearts, but they were often funny and ironic. That same tone I recognize in Birahima's story."

From 1989 to 2003, two civil wars brought Liberia to its knees. Now the country is dealing with a generation of children traumatised by their crimes committed as child soldiers. Najjar: "The film starts in a small village in Guinea. Parts of the story are set in Nimba County, a region in North-East Liberia. Here, workers gathered in forest settlements make a living in diamond mining. Both diamonds and gold were militarized. Just like in Sierra Leone, these are

the resources financing the civil war." Head of development Marion Boffelli: "The region is not easily accessible but Zaven travelled there recently, encouraging us to add more realistic elements from the local culture to the story. We insist on authenticity. That's why we want to involve African artists, including local actors and actresses and former child soldiers as narrative voices. In Europe their stories are not commonly known."

The colour palette will change throughout the film according to the different locations. Boffelli: "Every place has its own colour scheme, like the Liberia-Guinea border, where the colour red is omnipresent." Special Touch Studios (France) worked on several African inspired projects before. **ALLAH IS NOT OBLIGED** will be made with five co-producers, including Lunanime (Belgium) and Paul Thiltges Distributions (Luxembourg), with an estimated budget of approx. €4,5 million. Production starts in January 2020, with an estimated release in 2022.

More info: Marion Boffelli, mboffelli@specialtouchstudios.com

In the ECFA Journal KIDS Regio curates the *Information Celebration* section, answering the call of the Weimar Declaration to extend and improve research, especially when it comes to spreading available data. A close cooperation with ECFA has been standing for quite some years and will be standing for quite some more. Together with ECFA Board member Becky Parry, KIDS Regio initiated a mailing list between researchers from all over Europe to have a standing connection for knowledge exchange.

For this edition we chose a research report that is not completely new but that in our opinion hasn't been talked about enough yet:

Films for Kids in South East Europe: The State of Play

Based on the impression that the production of children's films in South Eastern European countries is extremely low and that movies from Northern European countries do not circulate in the region, the Thessaloniki Film Festival, supported by the Greek Film Centre, launched a research initiative. They identified the need to have reliable data as a basis for reflection and, where appropriate,

for proposals to encourage children's film in Southern Europe.

The report was first presented at the Thessaloniki Film Festival and again at the Cinekid Industry Forum in October 2019. It identifies the following reasons for the current situation:

- Absence or weakness of incentive policies for children's films on a national, regional and European level.
- European support schemes for dubbing are unfavourable to small markets.
- Lack of training for professionals in writing, directing and producing children's films.
- Absence of a regional market and professional meetings.

In consequence filmmakers in the region focus all their creative efforts on the same target group leading to a market saturated by arthouse films aiming at an adult audience. The young audience does not have any (or only little) access to films reflecting their culture. The films they do have access to are mainly of non-European origin, leading to a generation that builds their cultural and civic identity on values often far removed from European ones.



This is a call to all of you, commissioning or working on research, to share your findings through our network. Your facts and figures might mean more to your international colleagues than you think. Let us know about your big or small research projects and get in touch with journal@ecfaweb.org or with project manager Anne Schultka (KIDS Regio), schultka@kids-regio.org

Photo: At the Cinekid Industry Forum, © Corinne de Korver

For more information and a full report we invite you to take a look at the [research section on KIDS Regio's homepage](#).

kids  **regio**

The 'Information Celebration' section is curated by KIDS Regio, a lobby initiative for high quality and multi-faceted European Children's Films. It functions as an agent between policy and society, the film industry and the scientific world in order to form a network and discuss new synergies.

The Abstainer



Feature Film, Czech Republic 2019

Director: David Vigner

Prod.: David Vigner Film, Film House Prod.

World Sales: David Vigner Film

Phone: ++42-07-03-61-57-80

www.davidvigner.com,

www.filmabstinent.cz

All For My Mother



Feature Film, Poland, 2019

Director: Małgorzata Imielska

Prod.: Naima Film, TVP

World Sales: IKH Pictures Promotion

Phone: ++48-501-240-424

iza@ikh.com.pl

<http://ikh.com.pl>

The Battle

Feature Film, Russia, 2019

Director: Anar Abbasov

Prod.: Rock Films Studio

World Sales: Mint Films Int.

info@mintfilmsintl.com

<https://mintfilmsintl.com>

Cleo

Feature Film, Belgium 2019

Directors: Eva Cools

Prod.: Lunanime

World Sales: Be For Films

Phone: ++32-27-93-38-93

pamela@beforfilms.com

www.beforfilms.com

Cuties

Feature Film, France, 2019

Director: Maimouna Doucouré

Prod.: Bien ou Bien Prod.

World Sales: Bac Films

Phone: ++33-1-53-53-52-52

sales@bacfilms.fr

www.bacfilms.com/international

Fahim, the Little Chess Prince

Feature Film, France, 2019

Director: Pierre François Martin-Laval

Prod.: Waiting for Cinéma, Wild

Bunch, Alicéleo, ...

World Sales: Elle Driver

Phone: ++33-156-43-48-70

sales@elledriver.eu

www.elledriver.fr

FoMo – Fear of Missing Out



Feature Film, Hungary, 2019

Director: Attila Hartung

Prod.: Filmteam Kft., Vertigo Media

World Sales: National Film Institute

Phone: ++36-14-61-13-53

klaudia.androsovits@nfi.hu

<http://hnffworldsales.hu/films/current-films/item/240-fomo>

Good Morning Mr. Fotis

Documentary, Greece, 2020

Director: Dimitra Kouzi

Prod. & World Sales: Kouzi Prod.

Phone: ++30-21-07-21-99-09

dimitrakouzi@gmail.com

www.kouziproductions.com

I Am Free

Feature Film, Russia, 2019

Director: Iliya Severov

Prod. & World Sales: Gorky Filmstudio

Phone: ++7-49-91-81-04-04

secretary@gorkyfilm.ru

www.gorkyfilm.ru

I Segreti del Mestiere

Feature Film, Switzerland, 2019

Director: Andreas Mariocci

Prod.: Rough Cat, Radiotelevisione

Svizzera, Amka Films

World Sales: Rough Cat

Phone: ++41-12-24-57-64

info@roughcat.ch

www.roughcat.ch

Jackie & Oppje

Feature Film, The Netherlands, 2020

Director: Annemarie van de Mond

Prod.: Column Film

World Sales: Beta Cinema

Phone: ++49-89-67-34-69-80

beta@betafilm.com

www.betafilm.com

Festivals: Renate Zylla, RZylla@arcor.de

Life without Sara Amat

Feature Film, Spain, 2019

Director: Laura Jou

Prod.: Massa d'Or Prod.

World Sales: Xarxa Audiovisual Local

Phone: ++34-93-50-80-600

laxarxa@laxarxa.cat

www.xal.cat

Lil' Buck: Real Swan

Documentary, France, 2019

Director: Louis Wallecan

Prod.: Lechinski, Tanit Films, Machine

Molle
World Sales: Versatile
Phone: ++33-1-76-21-61-66
vpichon@versatile-films.com
www.versatile-films.com

Little Crumb



Feature Film, The Netherlands, 2020
Director: Diede in 't Veld
Prod.: REP Film, Nuts & Bolts Film Co.
World Sales: Incredible Film
Phone: ++31-6-53-94-89-86
danielle@incrediblefilm.nl
www.incrediblefilm.nl

Muhammed Ali

Docufiction, Turkey, Germany, 2019
Director: Nursen Çetin Köreken & Umit Köreken
Prod. & World Sales: Drama Yapım Film Medya
Phone: ++90-54-34-76-45-66
info@dramayapim.com
www.dramayapim.com

My Brother Chases Dinosaurs



Feature Film, Italy, 2019
Director: Stefano Cipani
Prod.: Paco Cinematografica, Neo Art Producciones, Rai Cinema
World Sales: Paco Cinematografica
Phone: ++39-06-68-75-073
produzione@pacocinematografica.it
www.pacocinematografica.it

Only a Miracle



Feature Film, Ukraine, 2019
Director: Olena Karetnyk
Prod. & World Sales: Kazka Prod.
Phone: ++38-06-72-16-44-46
kazkaproduction@gmail.com
<https://kazkaproduction.wixsite.com>
<https://onlymiracle.com.ua>

Perro

Documentary, Germany, 2019
Director: Lin Sternal
Prod. & World Sales: Zum Goldenen Lamm
Phone: ++49-71-41-9-56-51-55
info@zum-goldenen-lamm.com
www.zum-goldenen-lamm.com

Pompei



Feature Film, Belgium, France, Canada, 2019
Directors: Anna Falguères & John Shank
Prod.: Good Fortune Films, Tarantula, Micro_scope
World Sales: Jour2Fête
Phone: ++33-1-40-22-92-15
www.jour2fete.com

Veins of the World

Feature Film, Germany, Mongolia, 2020
Director: Davaa Byambasuren
Prod.: Basis Berlin Filmprod., Mongol TV, ARTE
World Sales: Global Screen

Phone: ++49-89-55-87-60
info@globalscreen.de
www.globalscreen.de

When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit



Feature Film, Germany, 2019
Director: Caroline Link
Prod.: Sommerhaus Filmprod., Warner Bros., Nextfilm,...
World Sales: Beta Cinema
Phone: ++49-89-67-34-69-80
beta@betacinema.com
www.betacinema.com

More information on all these films you will find on our website:

www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films

Director Frank Mosvold about ELLA BELLA BINGO

Many children's film professionals already have crossed paths with ELLA BELLA BINGO. The project has been talked about for years and stood in the spotlight at various Works in Progress. Expectations were high for this animated feature about the little girl with her sporty bike and her loyal friend Henry, who already played the lead in their own TV series. Director Frank Mosvold is a familiar face among visitors to the Kristiansand Festival, where he held a board position for many years. For ECFA Journal he exclusively writes about the genesis of his film, which is now ready to enter the children's film market for the youngest audience.

When I was at film school in the mid-90s, my student film was awarded the Sam Z. Arkoff award. Arkoff was, together with business partner Roger Corman, the king of Hollywood B-movies. In the award ceremony, I sat next to him, smoking his big cigar in the non-smoking area. I had mixed feelings. I wanted to make important films while he basically made

schlock. Self-pompous I asked him, *"So, who are your favourite directors?"* He told me he liked Antonioni, Fellini and Bergman. What a shock! I didn't even expect him to know about these names. I couldn't help asking: then why do you make B-movies? He looked me in the eyes and said: *"I make films people want to see"*. His answer has stayed with me ever since.

The theatrical market has changed a lot since I graduated from film school in 1996. The nineties were the era of independent cinema. My heroes were Robert Rodriguez, Gus Van Sant, Kevin Smith and Jim Jarmusch. After my graduation the cinema market got overcrowded with blockbusters and movie franchises. It was obvious if I was ever going to make a movie, I wouldn't be able to fight the evolution in the global audience's viewing habits. As is often said: if you can't beat them, join them.

Ella Bella universe

In 1999 my friend Tom Petter Hansen



showed me a rather naive drawing he made of his daughter. It looked super cute and I told him we should make a film about the little girl. Excited, we called our screenwriting buddy Trond Morten Venaasen, and told him we had an idea for a feature film.

We realised that if we ever wanted to catch people's interest, we needed to make Ella Bella Bingo a brand. We pitched the idea to a local broadcaster, who was as excited as we were. Together with national broadcaster NRK we produced 104 episodes. In Norway toys and books were produced. In many ways you can say this

TV series was an expensive marketing campaign for our film. We expected the movie to go into production right after we had completed the TV-series, but the financing took longer than expected. This extended period was a perfect opportunity to further develop the Ella Bella universe.

People better than you

When we were finally ready to go into production, we realised that to compete on the international market, we needed to improve the screenplay. We hired two expert screenwriters. My dad always advised me to "work



Richard Kind in the studio

with people better than you are". Rob Sprackling & Johnny Smith (GNOMEO & JULIET, THE QUEEN'S CORGI) are definitely smarter than me. We simply searched the IMDb website to find people who had worked on films that we admired, and Aardman has always been a great inspiration, in the way they combined artistic integrity with a commercial understanding of the market.

While our ELLA BELLA BINGO TV series was made in charming flash animation, all sales agents told us frankly that 2D feature animation didn't sell. It seemed we had to make the film in CGI. Gimpville Studio in Norway did the job, and it is amazing what they achieved on our limited budget.

What sells?

Sales agents also told us pre-school movies didn't sell internationally. Up-aging the character could be a slippery road, but we decided to give it a try.

As a filmmaker you can always ignore what sales agents say, but nobody knows the market better than them. They are your best friends. A good relationship with your agent is essential. After all, they are the ones selling your movie. It is all a matter of trust. I found our sales agent Thorsten Wegener (Studio 100) by accident on a London street corner. He was talking to a friend of mine when I ran into them.

I pitched ELLA BELLA BINGO and he was immediately convinced. His guidance has been essential, advising me on screenplay, trailers, posters and promotion. Together with Red Central (U.K.) we made a splendid style guide to help distributors promote the film.

Smaller markets

Even if Studio 100 attends all the big film markets, it feels important for me to be present there as well. You get to see how your film is doing in market screenings, you get to meet potential buyers and you can see what your colleagues are working on. That is valuable information you can put into practice to make an even better movie next time. I find smaller markets like Cinekid and Annecy very useful, since buyers are more relaxed and take time to sit and talk with you.

ELLA BELLA BINGO is made in Norwegian, but as we want the film to have a global appeal, we also made an English version with Vox Studio in Los Angeles. And we are very proud of it. Richard Kind (INSIDE OUT) did a fantastic job, and young actors Summer Fontana, Jack Fisher and Benjamin Plessala are simply amazing.

Passion

Despite all the commercial consideration, the passion from my younger days is still in my heart. I wanted ELLA BELLA BINGO to be about something that mattered, something I care about. I wanted to make a film about friendship. We are all afraid of being alone, we want to belong to something bigger. That is why everyone can identify with our young heroes.

It has taken me more than 20 years since I graduated from film school. Finally ELLA BELLA BINGO is ready for the big screen. I hope we have found the right balance between emotion and comedy. I have tried to follow Sam Z. Arkoff's advice about making something people want to see, hopefully without losing my passion for independent cinema.

—
Frank Mosvold

Find more about [ELLA BELLA BINGO](#).

World Sales: Studio 100 Films, Thorsten Wegener, Thorsten.Wegener@studio100.tv

Festivals: The Norwegian Film Institute, Stine Oppegaard, stine.oppegaard@nfi.no

Winners of the YCN Awards

One of the Youth Cinema Network's objectives is to support potential future filmmakers, from their very early age throughout their later growth. The diversity in their work can be noticed in the Youth Cinema Network Awards. We present to you... the YCN Award winners!

The annual YCN Award recognises excellence in films made by young people up to 27 years old. Initially established in 2016 as one single award, it now has developed into awards in 3 different age groups: 0-14, 15-19 and 20-27-year-olds.

The process goes like this: according to their profile, each YCN festival nominates one film for each age group. Then all YCN members get to watch the nominated films and vote per age group, one member, one vote (and festivals can't vote for their own nomination), to end up with a winner in each age category.

Every year the YCN Awards are announced at different festivals, travelling among the members of our network, like Wicked Wales Film Festival

(UK, 2016), REC-Filmfestival (Germany, 2017) and Nextfilmfestival (Denmark, 2018). In 2019 the YCN Award was hosted at two festivals, according to the different age categories. The filmmakers were invited to pick up their awards in the International Children & Youth Film Festival Enimation (Slovenia) and Up&Coming (Germany). More than just a certificate, we are hoping to offer these talented filmmakers something that might help and support them in their future career

Winners in 2019 were:

Age group 0-14: DRAGONS OF MARITTEN (nominated by VAFI & RAFI, Croatia)

Taiwan, 2018, by Hok Key Dragon-Hsu



Cambo is a brave hunter, setting out on a quest in search for the Dragons of Maritten to cure his brother's illness. When Cambo gets badly injured, it is the legendary dragon coming to the rescue. Cambo is now facing a dilemma: how to cure his brother without harming his saviour?

Age group 15-19: THE BOY WITH THE TEDDY BEAR (nominated by FiSH - Filmfestival im StadtHafen, Germany)

Germany, 2018, by Alessandro Schuster



A little boy is running through the city, his teddy bear in his arms. Until he meets a young man who takes him

into his apartment.

Age group 20-27: DEPARTURES (nominated by BFI Future Film Festival, UK)

Uruguay, 2019, by Nicolas Morganti Patrignani

Ludovico accepted the tough choice of his sick wife to be left to die. It takes time before he finds the courage to reveal the truth to their daughter.

Congratulations to the winners! We are looking forward to hearing from/about you again soon!

The Youngsters Making Film column is curated by YCN (Youth Cinema Network), a worldwide network of youth film festivals, organisations and film & media educators. YCN focusses on films made by young people, using their right to express themselves through moving images. For more info about Youth Cinema Network, check www.youthcinemanetwork.org.

Claire Shaw about 30 years of Cinemagic

"A flagship arts event in the city of Belfast"

Several festivals that are nowadays among the leading events in the European children's film circuit were founded 30 years ago. Cinemagic is one of them. There must have been something in the wind back then, as most of these festivals have since developed in a similar way: ever-growing, with a more professional profile and extra attention for the industry

Claire Shaw: Cinemagic derived from the film commission in Northern Ireland at the time along with key figures in the arts and film world locally. The festival was conceived as a cultural antidote and a creative arena for self-expression for young people during the Troubles. For 30 years the organisation has led the way in using film exhibition and production as a vehicle to inspire young people and it has provided a vital outlet for independent cinema, showcasing a film programme that offers a unique window to the world. With the industry growing in Northern Ireland and indeed film being offered as an academic subject in a lot of schools, we have

been able to increase the profile and the reach of our work but our ethos has always remained the same. The nature of the festival's cultural programming and the calibre of industry events, guests and film showcases marks Cinemagic out as the premier youth arts organisation in Northern Ireland which also fervently supports and nurtures young filmmaking talent and talent from these isles. We firmly believe that we should build a cinema-going audience that contributes to the industry through buying cinema tickets.

Cinemagic seems to have found a balance between brand new titles and extraordinary archive cinema. You bridge the gap between titles with an art-house appeal (THE RUNAWAYS, METAL HEART) and more commercial success films like SHAUN THE SHEEP and THE GREATEST SHOWMAN.

Shaw: We want to offer the best in new world cinema, cinema that broadens the imagination and tackles issues that affect youth and alongside that



offer participants the chance to view classic cinema and key content that promotes film culture. It is about that balance in terms of knowing what the audience demand is as well as offering an opportunity to try something new. We are giving audiences a chance to be the first in our territory to see new releases. Filmmakers and distributors see the value in previewing content to captive audiences and target audiences for the releases. The added value around titles, like talks from the filmmakers, is a distinctive draw.

This year you screened again the very first film ever screened at Cinemagic, 30 years ago: VINCENT AND ME.

Shaw: We were thrilled to be able to locate and screen that film and host its actor Tchéký Karyo at it for a really special Q&A. He is known to audiences for a host of other film and TV roles (like the hit series THE MISSING) but holds this film very dear to his heart. The film itself stood the test of time and the story is heart-warming. To have it 30 years after we first screened it, in the exact same venue,



Saoirse Ronan

was a really special occasion.

There was also a screening of THE WIZARD OF OZ in the Belfast Cathedral.

Shaw: For the first time we screened a film in the iconic surroundings of Belfast Cathedral, to create a gala feel to the closing of the 30th Anniversary Festival. The film was screened as part of a national initiative from the British Film Institute as part of the #BFIMusicals season and it's a film that we have screened frequently over the years at Cinemagic.

It seems like the festival pays specific attention to what you could



Hayley Mills

call "stars and celebrities".

Shaw: Cinemagic is proud to include so many high profile patrons as part of our organisation but we ensure they are the right fit for the ethos of the organisation. We are supported by Liam Neeson, Pierce Brosnan, Saoirse Ronan, Julian Fellowes, Colin Farrell for example. As well as providing a welcoming space for local cinema lovers and the arts community in general, the role the festival has played in uniting communities and its dedication to promoting inclusivity contributes to Northern Ireland's strengths as a creative and dynamic destination. Through programmes of masterclasses, workshops, screenings, film edu-

cation and filmmaking, the Cinemagic Festival strives to motivate a new generation of young creatives.

This year you had more than 30 workshops and masterclasses addressing industry people. Because the industry is booming in Northern Ireland?

Shaw: There is a huge demand for the content in our workshops and masterclasses and film students strive to get involved in as many ways as possible. The industry is booming in Northern Ireland and we are able to contribute to the skills development of the next generation by enhancing opportunities to learn about the industry, to see diverse film content and nurturing raw talent.

Did the festival have an impact on the production of young audience content in Northern Ireland?

Shaw: There are more opportunities now in the production of young audience content and we hope that the achievements of the festival has contributed to this, even in the sense that we can inspire those that may want to work in the industry. We have always supported the exhibition of young audience content.

That is why Cinemagic is offering a

platform for the work of young filmmakers?

Shaw: Annually we run a competition for young filmmakers aged 25 and under to submit their short films to Cinemagic. These films are screened as part of the festival to celebrate emerging talents. We wish to signpost as many opportunities as possible to help further their careers. The festival has many alumni who have gone on to work both behind the camera and on screen. Among the alumni credits include crew on hit shows such as GAME OF THRONES, DERRY GIRLS, LINE OF DUTY, TORVILL AND DEAN; movies such as SOLO: A STAR WARS STORY and one of Ireland's leading post-production facilities, Yellowmoon. On screen alumni include Bronagh Waugh and Seana Kerslake. Behind the camera alumni include Oscar-nominated director Michael Lennox, most famously known for the worldwide success that is DERRY GIRLS.

How is the festival embedded in the cultural life of a city like Belfast?

Shaw: It has been a flagship arts event in the city for years and so many creatives across Northern Ireland have experienced being part of the festival over the years. In our 30th Anniversary year, we were awarded Best Creative Business at the Belfast Business



Vincent & me

Awards and this is testament to our positive impact.

You have a network of young volunteers working with the festival.

Shaw: Cinemagic was a front runner in engaging with young people to have input to the festival content. A panel of young consultants offer their feedback on a selection of the proposed in-competition films and we value their thoughts as they are our target audience, and as well as that they input to the marketing and promotion of events so we are engaging in the best ways possible with our audiences. Dedicated volunteers help with everything from programmes distribution to front of house duties, tick-

eting and festival evaluations.

Can you share with us one particular event that you are particularly proud about?

Shaw: We were especially proud of all of our 30th Anniversary activities welcoming guests such as Saoirse Ronan and legendary actress Hayley Mills. The festival always has the audience at heart.

*** Coming up in March in Belfast is the Short Film Festival 'On the Pulse' (www.cinemagic.org.uk).**

*** The Belfast Festival is now open for submissions – submit your films [here](#)**

Richard Heap about THE RUNAWAYS

Turning donkeys into prima donna's

Angie and her younger siblings Polly and Ben live in a cabin by the sea. Their father hardly makes a living vending donkey-rides at the beach. For this family there is nothing like an evening of dark ale and folk singing in the pub to forget about life's hardships. But that night Uncle Blythe returns from prison, harbouring a grudge over a long-standing family debt. Not much later the kids find themselves riding two donkeys over the moors under the drizzling rain, trying to escape from Blythe. At the Film'on Festival we asked director Richard Heap about the exact locations of the film.

Richard Heap: THE RUNAWAYS is set in the North-East of England, on the farmland and in the small villages of the North York Moors National Park. There is a beautiful coastline with old towns like Whitby, where the story starts. When Dracula travelled to Britain, he landed in Whitby. Macy (*Shackleton*, playing Polly) is from Bradford, where they have the thickest Yorkshire accents, while Rhys (*Connah*, playing Ben) is from Lancashire. But

people outside the North will classify both as Northern accents.

In this Northern landscape is a certain desolation. These godforsaken places fit perfectly to the story.

Heap: When the kids run off into the moors, things are getting dark and moody. The moors are often seen as a grim place, with villages that get snowed in in winter. That is where *Wuthering Heights* is set. But when we filmed in autumn – a season of change – the heather was in bloom and it looked more beautiful than desolate. At least to me.

Who are these people? This family doesn't fit into the social safety nets but still found a way to survive.

Heap: Even though the film touches on many social issues, I didn't want it to feel like a grim Mike-Leigh-alike social realist drama. I wanted the film to have a sort of timeless gentleness. So their existence living isolated up on the cliff tops is slightly otherworldly. Initially we went looking for trailer parks along that coast, where people

are living full time in static caravans. But we couldn't find that one unique location. So the production designers decided to build a shack on a cliff top that looked amazing, like a timeless fantasy, not distinctly rooted in a time and a place.

There is also something timeless about people coming together to sing in the pub.

Heap: While on recce we went to a pub in Whitby and they had a sing-song folk night. There was one song about goldmining, written by a guy from New-Zealand, and it was so moving to see the whole pub singing it in unison, it not only cemented my thoughts on having a sing-a-long in the film but also to use that song. It was like a brilliant gift and the folk night musicians joined in with the filming too. Molly (*Windsor, playing Angie*) had her ups and downs with the production. It was low budget and lots of people were under-resourced and stressed, which gave her a difficult time. But that day in the pub was thrilling. In the scene when she reconnects with her dad and puts her arms around him, she tears up. The atmosphere was so amazing that it just swept her along. As a filmmaker, you know it can't be like that on set every day, but every now and then you get lucky.

There is a sort of togetherness that drags these siblings through their quest. This tough journey they can only make as a family.

Heap: Some people find the film open-ended, but for me the story was coming back together as a unit. All that Angie, the eldest daughter, could see in her siblings was the burden of it. She is exhausted of being their mother. But pushing them into a more difficult situation finally makes them bond stronger. When Angie says "*I think we are going to be alright*", what she actually says is: I am going to be alright.

You found a way to visualise those group dynamics in the framing.

Heap: I was thinking in terms of pairs and singles. When they are falling out, like by the pond, everyone appears on their own in single shots. When teaming up again, the three of them are in one frame, sometimes singing together. I have two children myself, a boy and a girl, often very antagonistic towards each other, but every now and then I find them lying on the sofa, all wrapped up in one another. The scene that moves me most is them hugging after getting out of their mums house, a moment of togetherness and comfort. Rhys was a 13-year-old boy



hanging out with two girls he barely knew, so he would always be resistant to hugging. There is in fact a jump cut in that scene, cutting straight into the hug, because Molly actually had to pull Rhys into it. The scene in which Ben and Polly build a camp, make a fire and start to mother their older sister, wasn't in the script. I only came up with the idea one day before, as I always knew we needed a scene in which all the role reversal would crystallize in one little moment.

Working with the actors was a delicate task?

Heap: Even though I always seemed to be under time pressure, I never put any pressure upon the children. We were shooting during school time

and the young actors couldn't neglect their education, so sometimes they arrived on set not knowing any of their lines. It was frustrating but I tried to keep all the angst and stress inside, so that they could feel free, which kept their performance fresh and easy.

Those kids need to behave too responsible for their age.

Heap: Yes, and deep inside you can feel how Angie is longing for a normal family life, in which she can act her age and have fun. Molly Windsor conveyed it all very subtly, she is a great actress. Some people say there is not one good adult character in the film and it is all about responsibility, how adults refuse to take it on but Angie



does. The film has been described as Dickensian – with Blythe as a kind of contemporary Bill Sykes.

The backstory is a bit complex and I had problems understanding the details. What happened in the past that made Blythe a bad guy?

Heap: The two brothers used to run on a fishing boat. The day the boat sank, Blythe was drunk. As a consequence they obviously lost the family business and the testimony of the elder brother sent Blythe to prison. The other item of wealth in the family (other than the boat) was a necklace, which is really a MacGuffin (*an element that sets the plot in motion but*

that is not precisely defined). The story is not about wealth or necklaces or fishing, it is about sibling bonds.

And about donkeys!

Heap: They were fantastic! Animals are a big comforter and a good therapy on the set – whenever you're feeling down, you drift off and give the donkeys a cuddle. The only problem is they eat all the time. You shout 'action' and one of them starts eating so nothing happened. And you can't reverse a donkey, so for every new take, you had to walk them round in a big circle. Having them on the train was a turning point. The first weeks they were really well-behaved but after



Richard Heap

the train-ride they turned into prima donna's. They were like: we're not having any of this.

The film starts at the seaside, and from then on you can always feel the nearness of the sea.

Heap: I came to the story after I did a coast-to-coast bike ride, and seeing the sea again after this 4-day journey was striking. That whole Northern coastline has a faded glory. The fishing industry has been decimated, the steel and all other manufacturing industries are in decline. It is subtly mentioned throughout the story, without ramming it down people's necks.

Were there many people mistaking the film for a rockumentary about a bunch of metal chicks?

Heap: Google has. The title has not been particularly useful for Google exposure. There is indeed this film about Joan Jett and there is a Marvel Television crime series by the same title.

–
Gert Hermans

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Floor van der Meulen about THE LAST MALE ON EARTH

Rhino and mankind

Sudan is the last of its kind. A northern white rhinoceros, of which there are only three left - two females and this 40 year old bull. The animal is a star, the Kenyan conservancy where he spends his last days, is like a pilgrimage site where thousands come to take selfies and pet the colossus. Extinction as an attraction. *"It was surreal to touch something that will soon disappear,"* says Dutch director Floor van der Meulen.

The striking documentary THE LAST MALE ON EARTH was presented as DoxSpot in ECFA Journal's September issue. We met Floor van der Meulen at the *doxs!* festival in Duisburg.

Floor van der Meulen: After I shot several films about the Syrian civil war in Aleppo, it felt like it was time for a change. That is when I saw this provoking picture in a newspaper: a rhino surrounded by armed guys in camouflage suits. I was curious: what kind of a rhino would need a team of per-

sonal bodyguards? I found out about Sudan, the last male Northern white rhinoceros alive. I traveled to Kenya, presuming I would make a film about those rangers protecting him. But on the spot I found Sudan surrounded by scientists, journalists, tourists, reporters and other filmmakers. As if he had the eyes of the whole world focused upon him. Although I don't have a background in biology, I started considering a new angle for my film: the strange attraction of this last male specimen, the power struggle between nature and mankind.

The film starts with a story about God and the beginning of mankind. Humans had to choose between eternal life or procreation – giving birth to children.

van der Meulen: That story's origin could as well be African. A correspondent who has been living in Africa for 30 years told me about the multiple fables about gods and animals. It fitted perfectly to the film, as a way



to introduce the audience to a documentary that is not about a rhino, but about the nature of mankind, who wants to be the ultimate masters of the universe.

The film was screened in several children's film festivals, like in Zlin, in the JEF festival... Here in Duisburg it ended up in the *doxs!* section, not in the adult audience programme.

van der Meulen: When the film was picked up by the children's film circuit, I was surprised, as I expected the philosophic tone to be too complex for children. But when watching it to-

gether with them, everything fell into place. Children are very sensitive to this film, and they are the next generation, they can make a change. All of a sudden, film felt like a powerful tool.

When you started your film four years ago, did you expect Sudan to make it till the end of the shooting? van der Meulen: Sudan was very old. When he got sick, we knew his final moment could be just around the corner. It was like a voice whispering in my ear: "You just wait long enough." Waiting is expensive, as you have to deliver at some moment, according to agreements with producers and

broadcasters. But the images of his dying days are so powerful. It is like looking straight into the eyes of extinction, and recording how mankind deals with it. When making a film about how we deal with 'the end', I thought we had to continue till... the end.

In the editing, you're using mainly non-verbal elements to comment on the situation.

van der Meulen: It was my intention to observe the human species as much as the rhino. There was a whole 'theatre' going on around Sudan, with a marketing strategy behind it. Simply showing this theatre and the many people involved in it, could be considered a critical observation of mankind. We choose for a distant, static camera to observe those people, using wide shots that make them look small within their own natural habitat. I hope this visual style will invite the audience to reflect on what they see. It all adds to the tragicomic tone of the film... the human tragedy.

Many of your interview partners had difficulties to properly answer your questions.

van der Meulen: Like, why is it crucial to save this rhino? We tend to see everything from a human perspec-



tive, we see all those questions in relation to ourselves. Not being able to answer them, says something about the human ego. And then there's the scientists, for whom saving Sudan is a project with great prestige. Conservation always confronts you with a dilemma: why saving one species (or subspecies, like the Northern white rhino) seems more important than saving another?

Finally Sudan turns out to be less important for the survival of the species than his female companions.

van der Meulen: The whole marketing plan was focused on the last male, because that sounds dramatic and sexy. Also two female rhinos are living in that conservancy but nobody mentions them, they can't be petted like Sudan, they're simply less interesting for the general audience. My dilemma

was: what would be the best moment to introduce them in the film? Staying true to reality – them being super important but never recognised as such – I only introduce them after two thirds of the film. For me as a female filmmaker, that says something about the times we are living in.

What will be the next step? The extinction of the human race?

van der Meulen: If we continue like this, probably yes. And it is too easy to put all responsibility on the shoulders of young people. Now a generation has stood up that wants to make a difference. But if we want that to happen, then it is time for the older generation to step aside and make room for a new way of thinking. If we want them to save the world, all of us should take our responsibilities and think about what kind of future

we want together. Not only in Europe. In this evolving world, African people as well claim their rights to a modern, democratic society. In their quest for growth, they will need land, until there is no space for nature left.

Then what use is there in reviving species?

van der Meulen: The Northern white rhino eventually could revive, but bringing a species back to life with only three living specimens left is a gigantic task. We might better focus on other species then. Moreover, if we prove to be able to revive an entire species, this might give us yet another excuse for acting even more destructive from now on, "because we can always bring them back in the end". Humans are always willing to "play God". We probably would be able to bring mammoths back to the Siberian tundra. But the only reasons I can think of for doing that, are tourism, money and prestige – simply to prove that we can.

–
Holger Twele

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Alena Rubinstein & Evgenia Jatskina about IT IS NOT FOREVER

"Families have become matriarchates"

The most mysterious title in the list of last year's ECFA Award nominations was a film awarded at the Spirit Of Fire Festival in Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia. *IT IS NOT FOREVER* combines several stories of children living in a Russian orphanage, all of them trying in their own way to achieve what they dream of most: finding a family. And all are waiting to prove they have love to share. But for some of them, the waiting has been too long.

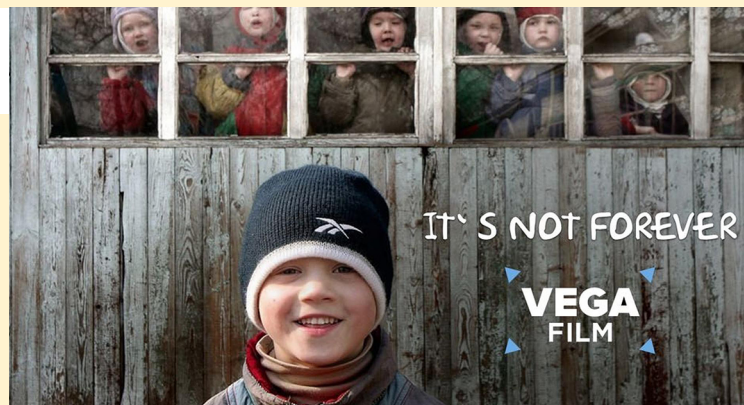
It was a rare opportunity, offered by the Film'on Festival, to meet with both directors Alena Rubinstein and Evgenia Jatskina. But how was it for them?

Alena Rubinstein & Evgenia Jatskina: We were both so nervous. It is the first time for us to attend an international festival screening and we had no idea how the audience would react. Already while filming, we often asked each other: who on earth would like to see this film? We didn't

even dare to expect it would actually be released. So when it was screened in several Russian festivals and then picked up by 270 Russian government cinemas, we were surprised. The Russian audience had mixed feelings. We have such a long tradition of social-realistic drama, with winter landscapes and darker themes, that nowadays there is a strong desire with the audience for cinema entertainment. That is why we felt so insecure, seeing the film abroad with an international audience.

Now even children are watching it.

Rubinstein & Jatskina: We understood both adults and children can see the film. Children are much stronger and more resilient. Adults might easily start complaining, while children keep on seeing the whole world as a game. On the other hand, if we would have known that we were also working for a young audience, there are a few things in the film we might have done differently.



What was the moment you decided: this is what we want to make a film about?

Rubinstein & Jatskina: A key moment was when attending a yearly national celebration with games and food and events, organised for orphans. Once the party is over, busses take those kids back to the orphanages, and nothing has really changed. We wanted to offer them something more profound, like representing their lives in a movie.

For that you needed a story.

Rubinstein & Jatskina: During the celebration, a clip was screened, telling the story of one boy in an institute who had found a picture of a lady and told everyone she was his moth-

er. Which was a lie. What he didn't know was that the woman in the picture was indeed travelling from one orphanage to another, looking for a boy to adopt, but she couldn't find one. Finally she returned to the first orphanage, where she met the boy and actually adopted him. This magical story inspired us to write about Vanya. Later we came up with more stories, putting them together step by step.

This is not the first film we get to see about Russian orphanages. What is so special about them?

Rubinstein & Jatskina: Actually they're comfortable and clean, they have toys and computers and brand new furniture... It looks like children playing

together at a summer camp, more glamorous than the circumstances that I grew up in. This is only an idealistic picture, a superficial impression. The real situation is different. Those kids are still facing the same mental problems, they still have the same demons and social perspectives to fight. All this luxury covers up how nothing has changed on the inside.

Which you prove by the horrifying statistics you show at the end of the movie.

Rubinstein & Jatskina: I don't believe much in statistics, and surely not in the official ones. But it definitely is a shock to the audience. Some people burst out in tears when seeing the numbers of children not being able to build up a normal life.

Combining several stories about differently aged children makes it hard to define your true target audience.

Rubinstein & Jatskina: Our characters grew up within the story. It took us three years to make the film, and sometimes an actor walking into a scene as a little boy, walks out again almost a teenager. Also we were growing up. When we started filming, in our souls we were like children believing that miracles could happen. After indulging deeper into that world,



we came out with a much thicker skin. We had become different people.

The camera is often with the children, almost surrounded by them.

Rubinstein & Jatskina: The camera should breathe together with the children. Them being so much at ease with the camera is a credit to our DoP. Even during casting and rehearsals, the camera was with us. While filming, they didn't see our eyes, all they saw was the camera objective. We felt close to them, but the camera was really a part of their group. We were observers, the camera was their friend and companion.

Sometimes that camera was almost cruel in capturing a face... and then capturing it just a bit longer. The

camera shows no mercy, never turning away.

Rubinstein & Jatskina: It was very important to us for the audience to immerse with the characters and dive deeply into their minds and feelings, even if that sometimes can be confronting. Often we show the action, but we find it more interesting to show what comes afterwards. We are showing more reaction than action.

What is so special about the word 'mama'?

Rubinstein & Jatskina: It is in our culture to give the highest status to 'the mother'. In Russia the word 'mum' is the first and most important one for a child to learn. We even say motherland instead of fatherland. For the or-

phans that word sounds like a miracle, they don't know how it feels to call somebody 'mum'. Many of those kids will face similar problems if once they grow up and might become parents themselves. They don't know how to process such sentiments. And just as much as it is a tradition to have the highest regards about motherhood, it has become as much a tradition for fathers to leave their family behind. The end of the Soviet times caused a total decline of the family as an institute. Families have become matriarchates.

That is why I am facing two female directors, filming together?

Rubinstein & Jatskina: We were classmates in film school when we started working together and the dream team has never stopped. It would sound more interesting if we told you that we were quarrelling and fighting all the time, as most people expect, but none of this happened. Hey... we did it... we made this film together and we're still best friends.

–
Gert Hermans

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Julio Bárcenas S. about EMMA

Funny, not dogmatic

Ever since Emma was hit in the face by a ball on the day of her communion, she has been convinced she is to become a 'saint'. Or maybe a football player. The nuns at school are surprised about Emma's ambition, and at home she is facing even more misunderstanding. Maybe she needs indeed to adjust her dream, just a tiny little bit.

The Schlingel Festival was the first occasion for Mexican director Julio Bárcenas S. to screen his film on the European continent. The original title was EMMA, DIOS Y EL FÚTBOL, and it would be impossible to summarise the story in an even better way.

Football is a popular theme for children's films, unlike religion. You found a way to combine both.

Julio Bárcenas S.: For Mexican people, football and religion are very similar. We are very passionate about both of them, and they are often entwined with each other. Studying in a catholic school, all the way through my childhood a healthy spirit and a healthy

body were intrinsically linked. You'll find traces of religion in every aspect of the Mexican society. The way we included them in the film opens a door for different interpretations.

How would you describe your interpretation?

Bárcenas S.: Religion and faith are not the same. Faith is a mystic thing, like a blind belief in miracles. But how can I put my trust in God when I don't understand him? I grew up in two opposite worlds. My mother came from a traditional Catholic family, my father was a freemason. In the run up to my First Communion, a very important day in Mexico, my dad kept on asking: why do you want to do this? Making this film, all the time I heard him talking through one ear and my mother's family through the other.

That was the context for developing this story?

Bárcenas S.: I waited for years to find investors willing to support my project. That things finally did work out adds to the message of this movie: If



you work from the heart, everything is possible. Even if you have faith, you need to work hard to make your dreams come true.

Many religious symbols appear in the film.

Bárcenas S.: Playing around with these symbols was a tricky thing to do. In the vision that Emma has after being hit by a ball, she doesn't see God or Jesus, but it's a lamb that speaks to her. An animal that represents God, but also resembles a goat, which is the animal of the devil. Such symbols are easily understood by Latin-American people, but I wondered how they would be digested by a European audience. My story is funny,

not dogmatic.

Football can be even more dogmatic than religion!

Bárcenas S.: Monarcas is not even my favourite team. The university is my 'alma mater' so my heart is with Los Pumas (Club Universidad Nacional). But in Morelia, where I come from, it's all about Monarcas.

Emma is a nice sweet girl, living in a nice sweet family.

Bárcenas S.: This movie was constructed step by step, and with every new step I asked myself how to surprise the audience. Emma is causing small changes in the lives of everyone she meets. And all those changes make

them happier people, living happier lives.

How are the dynamics within Emma's family?

Bárceñas S.: Emma's mother is facing a typical Mexican situation: she has to stay home to raise the children. Family is a priority for which she had to put aside her dreams and ambitions. That's why she tells her daughter not to give up on her dreams. Emma is portrayed at the moment when two babies will join the family. She is feeling lost. *"Mummy, daddy, look at me!"* When my own daughter once struggled with similar feelings, I understood that all she needed was lots

of attention. That is only one of the many aspects I copied from my personal life. Jorge Lan, playing the father, said: *"It feels like I am your alter ego."* Maybe he was right.

Those babies look very sweet!

Bárceñas S.: Working with babies, you need to understand their behaviour. The crew has to adapt to the babies, not the other way around. But they add some sensation to the film, seeing little babies is always somehow sensational.

You chose your main actress Cassandra Iturralde because of her eyes?

Bárceñas S.: Seeing Cassandra's pic-

ture, I instantly liked it. I can't explain why – it was an almost instinctive decision. What finally convinced me was how she got along with the rest of the team, and how she could solve a situation just by using her eyes. Even if you have a great story to tell, it doesn't work if the character doesn't have the right eyes. My friend Maria Novara, who was my teacher in film school, told me: it is the heart that speaks through the eyes.

How did you shoot the football scenes in the big stadium?

Bárceñas S.: We tried to create little situations with the public and filmed their reactions. You can feel the sensation when we entered the stadium with the camera. It's an overwhelming force and I love it! The most complicated thing was to insert those earthly, realistic pictures in a fictional fairy-tale story.

There is a lot of football scenes in which girls and boys are playing together.

Bárceñas S.: The girls in the cast didn't play football, but they needed to learn. For five months, they practiced together with the boys. We hired a former football professional to train them. In Mexico, girls playing football is something new, the result of

a mind-shift over the last few years. Only recently women's football started to become big business, right at the moment when we were making a film about it. Gathering seven kids also includes seven fathers and mothers to deal with. That was our biggest challenge. All the time we treated the kids with maximum respect.

Being a producer, you decided to direct a film for children.

Bárceñas S.: Maria Novara, my partner in the Axolote Cine production company, presented a children's film at the Berlinale 2017. Afterwards TESOROS successfully travelled to festivals around the globe. She motivated me to make my directorial debut with EMMA, my "opera prima".

That brought you all the way to Chemnitz for the Schlingel festival.

Bárceñas S.: Today this festival plants a seed and tomorrow we'll be facing a unique audience with a clear idea about the concept of cinema and the many topics that films are dealing with. Educating an audience is extremely important, for the city, for the region and the country, for Europe and the world.

–
Gert Hermans





ECFA Journal

Published by ECFA

European Children's Film Association

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ECFA Journal No. 1-2020

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