

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

Contact: Katerina Mikhaylova,
katerina@vegafilm.ru,
<https://vegafilm.ru/en/>