

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.

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Gert Hermans

Contact: Weydemann Bros.
info@weydemannbros.com,
www.weydemannbros.com