

Josep Arbiol about MiCe

Buccaneer with a mission

From a one-man project in Valencia to a worldwide network of festivals in which the work of professional directors is appreciated, yet remains in the shadow of films made by children. Josep Arbiol, founder of the MiCe festival in Valencia, is a buccaneer who sees opportunities that others ignore. With lights twinkling in his eyes, he is trying to put the funk back in media education. A clown with a mission, about which he tells with great passion.

The MiCe festival is well known for their presentation of films made by children. Do you remember one particular moment when you realised: this is what I want to do?

Josep Arbiol: About 20 years ago, as a teacher working in media education, I travelled to Camera Zizanio in Pyrgos, Greece. A festival only screening films made by children was an eye-opener for me. Then a few years ago, coming back from the BIKY festival in Busan, South Korea where I had been invited to talk about my work, on the long flight back to Valencia I had all the

time to reflect. That is when I decided to start a small film festival: for 4 days we showed films made by children and a few ones made by professionals, I invited some like minded friends from around the world (who paid for their tickets) and it worked. We had an audience, we had our name in the papers, and it felt like this formula could become successful.

And did it work?

Arbiol: For us it was crucial that children should find their way to the festival. With our small budget we succeeded in attracting around 9,000 visitors. Then a request came from several communities in the region: it is impossible for us to bring children from the villages to Valencia to attend the festival, but can you bring the festival to the villages? We did! We showed films in isolated mountain villages where there is no cinema theatre. One focus point in the policy of the Valencian government is to stop the exodus from the inland villages towards the city, and our event fitted perfectly into that policy. In the 8th



MiCe festival (in the middle Josep Arbiol)

edition we will have 70 villages cooperating with us. Last year we reached out to 48,000 children and this year we will double the amount of participating villages.

All in the region of Valencia?

Arbiol: We curated a few editions of MiCe in Madrid, but the situation is different there. Making a festival in Madrid is more expensive, but our main problem is in politics. We will always depend upon the balance of power in the local government. MiCe is a festival for children, it is not about

left or right, but politicians will always have difficulties to see it that way.

You named BIKY and Camera Zizanio as two festivals that have inspired you.

Arbiol: My first time in Camera Zizanio was like a dream. In Valencia we usually screened the results of our filmmaking workshops only to the parents of participating children, and that was it. But this festival was entirely dedicated to the work of children, and the atmosphere was unbelievable. And in BIKY I found out about the importance of mixing professional films and



films made by children in one festival. The difference is that in BIKY and Camera Zizanio, the main part of the festival is the professional competition. In MiCe the films made by children are the most important festival section. We have the same spectrum but the focus is different. Our focus is entirely with the young filmmakers.

What is MiCe's biggest achievement in Spain? Is it about the amount of children participating?

Arbiol: I think it is about the teachers, who feel that MiCe really is their festi-

val. In other festivals teachers will often feel treated 'second class', it is the filmmakers who are the stars. Maybe we are not experts in the art of cinema, but we are experts in children. As a teacher making films with children, the most important thing is not the result but the process. The Valencia city council once offered me the help of a professional filmmaker. When he saw the results of our work, he thought it looked horrible, and not at all professional. So we gave a workshop together and as an excellent professional he did 5 or 6 takes of every scene. The children went mad. The result looked better indeed, but the process with the children had been so different. It is not about making the best film, it is about making their film. After 8 MiCe editions I'm more confident in my contacts with professionals. I have my own experience now, with MiCe as my signboard.

This brand you're now ready to export to Latin-America?

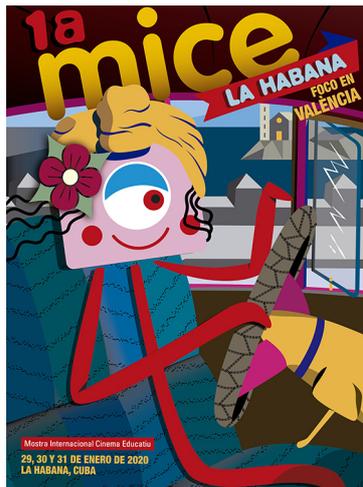
Arbiol: Last year the Cuban government opened the door for MiCe. We have launched MiCe affiliates for instance in Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico, but MiCe Cuba should be the beating heart behind our work in Latin-America. In Cuba, the cradle of Lat-



in-American culture, I want to establish an educational festival, screening films made by professionals and made by children. We had a screening in a huge theatre in Havana with 1,200 children watching SUPA MODO. Cuba gives great importance to schools and education in general, but there is a lack of good media education. There are some individual initiatives outside the schools, but in my opinion media education belongs inside the school, in the curriculum. We should now find a convenient festival formula. We have a long way to go, but I'm sure together we can develop something worthwhile.

In every country a different approach is needed?

Arbiol: We can't copy MiCe Valencia into MiCe Havana or MiCe México. It all depends on the culture, the economy, the education, the traditions, the politicians and the money. Maybe the goal can be the same, but the approach should be different. MiCe Mexico takes place in Guanajuato, a middle class city, while in Havana a middle class doesn't even exist. And working with Argentinian people I often stay behind the scenes. Buenos Aires is like Paris, so that asks for a different sort of cooperation.





What about your plans for MiCe Sahara?

Arbiol: Sahara was once the last remaining Spanish colony. When Spain left, the Sahara territory was no longer a nation, it mainly became part of Morocco. There is still a population of 300,000 Spanish-Arabic people and their situation is generally neglected in Europe. We simply don't know about their problems. Organising MiCe Sahara feels like something I have to do, going there to work with the people, to serve. With MiCe Sahara we will make films in refugee camps and screen films for the local community. Therefore we first need

to educate the teachers. MiCe Sahara will have the same director as FiSahara, the well-known Sahara International Film Festival.

You might not have the budget, but you have the energy. That is how we all know Josep Arbiol.

Arbiol: In Europe the first question usually is: what is it that you're selling, and how can we make it profitable. Not in Latin-America. Cultural education is an important weapon for the people's development. Our Latin-American partners are thinking about the bigger social context, not about viability. Many of our local part-

ners are investing their own money in this initiative. You can ask them to do that once or twice, but we can't keep on asking them forever. That is why we are talking with the Cuban authorities about how to implement MiCe on a large scale.

Where do you see MiCe standing in 10 years?

Arbiol: After establishing MiCe in Latin-America, I might like to go to Africa, or India, or the Philippines... I am dreaming big. I never thought MiCe would grow like this. It is often easy to do a first or second festival edition, but the difficult part is to continue.

That is why you left MiCe Valencia in the hands of a new director?

Arbiol: Voro (Salvatore) Huertas has a background as a teacher and filmmaker. It will be his challenge to make MiCe a more stable and coordinated event. A festival needs a strong personality to prepare the way. He will do that in his own style, which might be different from mine.

On the other hand, you're not the clown you're pretending to be, are you?

Arbiol: Oh yes, I am a clown and I'm happy to be one. I respect people working with an intellectual approach,

but in Cuba I was happy to arrive at the first festival screening in a pink convertible. Maybe some colleagues can do a better intellectual speech, but then maybe my dancing is better.



MiCe Film Festival

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