

Ivan Pokorný about THE SCENT OF ORANGES

Rules are to be broken

Darek has to look after his eight year old, mentally handicapped sister Ema, ever since his father has difficulty coping with life. And then there's the harassment by one of his classmates, but the summer season looks promising. A herd of sick horses that have become useless to their owners arrives on the farm, and Darek takes a liking to these fast trotting "angels". Then there is Hanna, a charming girl that beguilingly smells of oranges. In the Film'on festivals in Brussels, I speak with Ivan Pokorný, director of a vibrant teenager story with an opening scene that drags you into the film with its fast paced editing.

Ivan Pokorný: Addressing a specific target group with this film, adolescents in their most turbulent years, I needed the opening scene to set the tone. It could be a little tough, probably not very pedagogic, but it should grab them by the throat. I secured enough time – I calculated two days – to make that scene as strong as

possible, and we had stunt doubles on the bicycles. Apparently that paid off well.

The rhythm of that scene is built up very punctually.

Pokorný: I've been searching a long time to find this village, located on a hillside. Through the streets you could see the mountains in the distance. But we shot the scene in autumn and exactly on this day there was a fog. Such a shame! Visually it could have been more stunning with this panoramic effect.

From that scene on there is an in-



tensity that you had to balance throughout the entire film.

Pokorný: That credit goes to the author of the script, my wife Iva Procházková. She wrote several books for youngsters, always targeting the same age group as our own children, so she had an insight into the world of her readers.

The story is set in an intriguing location.

Pokorný: The region is called Lusatia, the border area between Czech Republic, Germany and Poland. Both on the Polish and the German side the situation is problematic with unemployment, social uproar, Nazi extremists etc. But on the Czech side things are going well. People from Prague came here to buy houses for a cheap price and renovate them. We also had to renovate the house that is our main location, surrounded by grassland for the horses. When we found it, it was a total ruin, much worse than in the film.

Some locations, like the graveyard, the windmill and the garage are like landmarks with a strong impact on the overall imagery.

Pokorný: With a touch of irony I sometimes make this statement: when you have the right actors and the right lo-



cations, the movie is practically done. In other words: finding the right locations to me is crucial. The important spots I search for myself. I get in my car and drive around, alone, instead of throwing in my lot with a location scout. Google maps is a big help if you know exactly what you need. This is actually how I found our location. Thinking visually is an essential part of the cinematic language that unfortunately is sometimes neglected when it comes to children's film.

You don't seem to be very satisfied with today's youth film production in general.

Pokorný: There is a lack of quality films

for adolescents, diplomatically speaking. Good films are made for kids up to the age of 12, and then there is a vacuum until they are 18. Often festival juries get enchanted by films with young protagonists, while the young audience was bored to death. I'm very careful not to generalise too much, as I find it very important for movies to tell an engaged story, but finding the right social or political theme doesn't automatically guarantee that you've made a good film. Last year in the Schlingel festival my greatest recognition was the teachers coming to tell me they never saw their pupils so attentive before in the cinema.

THE SCENT OF ORANGES had a very

physical appeal, with close ups of bodies and skin and...

Pokorný: ...Let me tell you this. It was my first time working with German DoP Jürgen Rehberg. In our first meeting he asked me: what is our visual concept? I had problems giving him the correct expert's description, and he had problems understanding my emotional and fragmented answer, and that discussion continued over several meetings. Until one day I told him: "Jürgen, I found out what our concept is. We don't have one! We'll rely on our instinct in every specific situation." In that sense I'm very un-German, non-conceptual. I tend to shoot my scenes the way it is need-

ed according to the emotional curve. Rules are there to be broken, which is more interesting than holding on to a dogmatic approach. This being said, collaborating with Jürgen was a great pleasure for me.

On screen there is a sweet tenderness between Darek and his sister Ema.

Pokorný: For Tomáš Dalecký (Darek) this is his film debut. He is a clever boy with a sweet appeal. I had to emphasize the few moments when he was making a more manly impression, because his natural aura is very soft. And the actress Hana Bartonova (Ema) was a true miracle. The script mentioned a "mentally disabled person" without further specification. At first I was reluctant to really cast a disabled person, I couldn't imagine it would work. We looked for girls with some specific personality traits, but couldn't find the right one. Then suddenly this girl with down syndrome came walking in. This was a different case than all the other candidates we'd been seeing. In one minute she had us all enchanted. I am very grateful for the help we got from Hana's mother. She was all the time with me behind the monitor to intervene whenever obstacles appeared. Every scene they rehearsed together, preparing signals

that would guide her through the dialogues. Hana was well aware of her role as an actress and she could improvise if needed.

On the set you had teenagers and horses. Which ones were more difficult to keep in control?

Pokorný: Definitely the horses. To make them look starving, we followed a long procedure, controlled by a veterinarian. The process turned out to be rather complicated, so we used make-up to emphasize the horses' ribs and make them look skinny. It worked, somebody from the village even reported us to the police for animal abuse.

Do you see THE SCENT OF ORANGES somehow fitting into the great Czech children's film tradition?

Pokorný: Our tradition was part of a policy, financed and controlled by the government. Nowadays we're still producing Czech fairytale movies, but the tradition of realistic cinema unfortunately has been interrupted. I don't see myself fitting into any tradition. I prefer to piss against the wind.

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Gert Hermans



Two main actors at the Zlín festival