



**European Children's  
Film Association**  
Association Européenne du Cinéma  
pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse

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*interviews*

**Sihja, the rebel fairy**

**The fantastic  
journey of Margot &  
Marguerite**

**Ket & Doc 2021**

**La Mif**

**Birta**

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# Journal

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*May*

*Photo: Sihja, the rebel fairy*

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**3 SIHJA, THE REBEL FAIRY**

Interview

**5 TRIPLE TROUBLE**

Interview

**6 THE FANTASTIC JOURNEY OF MARGOT & MARGUERITE**

Interview

**8 Ket & Doc 2021**

Industry Project

**11 LA MIF**

Interview

**13 Giffoni Festival:**Claudio Gubitosi  
Industry interview**15 CABINETS OF WONDER**

DoxSpot

**16 FILMS ON THE HORIZON****18 Dimitris Spyrou**

Meet the Mentors

**21 Give&Take Film Workshop**

Youngsters make films

**22 BIRTA**

Work in progress

**24 GIRLSBOYSMIX**

Interview

**26 Parole Emil**

Industry

**28 SKY RAIDERS**

Interview

## Pull that trigger

ECFA continues to grow in numbers - with Iceland and Chile two new countries are now represented in our membership list. As every organisation does in troublesome times, we sometimes might ask ourselves: do we have enough to offer our loyal members? For ECFA the answer is a wholehearted "yes". Isn't it fantastic to have festivals and events rolling out the red carpet for ECFA members, offering them a free accreditation or a reduced fee? With a heartfelt "thank you" to BUFF (Malmö), KICFF (Kristiansand) and CMC (Sheffield) for facilitating opportunities for "exchange and consultation"...

...Which are vital and crucial aspects of our work, as recently became clear, again, when receiving a question about a young audience documentary (*see page 8*). In BUCK FEVER you'll meet a family of passionate hunters. During one of the family conversations, framed very discreetly, a wild boar's skin is ripped off. A festival considering to programme the film, doubted whether children could handle such explicit horror. They consulted the JEF festival, where the film premiered in February, and where the young audience's reactions were different than expected.

In a Q&A with directors Louise Van Assche and Griet Goelen, the young audience focused on the film's central question: will 8 year old Emily be pulling the trigger to shoot her first deer or not? They would (*although it is difficult to address this theme without*

*giving away spoilers*) find it quite an anti-climax if the girl, after a strong build-up, finally wouldn't dare to shoot at the supreme moment. That is a compliment to the filmmakers (who carefully constructed their story around this dilemma), and an indication that adults still have difficulties assessing what young audiences can handle or not. It's all in the hands of the filmmakers and the choices they make. I remember a screening of THE RABBIT HUNT at the *doxs!* festival, when the images (and sound!) of a rabbit skin being stripped off sent a wave of horror through the theatre. The impact lies with the camera. Children are still susceptible to the power of the image and the effects of certain cinematographic choices. When the filmmaker's choices are balanced, children can handle a lot.

I hope BUCK FEVER will be programmed in many festivals soon, for kids to confirm their status as skilled viewers.

—  
Gert Hermans

Join us on 30 May for a virtual edition of the ECFA AGM (members only) and ECFA Award Ceremony (open online event) hosted by the Zlin Film Festival.

## Marja Pyykkö about SIHJA, THE REBEL FAIRY

### “A hoodie in a box”

Sihja, an outrageous young fairy, is surely one of a kind. When entering the life of Alfred, a shy and sensitive boy, she turns his whole world upside down. She messes up his room, scares off his friends and spits her milk all over the table. But even stranger things are happening. Birds are found dead on the streets, and both plants and people display rather peculiar behaviour. Something weird is going on at the local fertilizer factory! Alfred and Sihja are the only ones capable of preventing an environmental disaster that threatens the nature of mankind.

Keeping control over the uncontrollable, that was a mission for Marja Pyykkö, director of SIHJA, THE REBEL FAIRY, and skillfully mastering the twilight zone between chaos and order, with the support of Finnish producer Tuffi Films.

Marja Pyykkö: Tuffi is known for its ambitious catalogue with high artistic standards. I am honoured to be part of this tradition. Scriptwriters Jenni Toivoniemi and Kirsikka Saari have de-

livered great work; it was a pleasure to create Sihja’s world on such a solid base.

**Can I compliment you with Sihja’s wings? Scientists would probably identify them as “too small to carry a creature of Sihja’s size” but they look so elegant!**

Pyykkö: Me too, I was very pleased. We had a lot of discussion about them. Fortunately the Dutch ‘magician’ Rob Hillenbrink gave them their final shape. The idea was to combine a bat and a maple leaf, with one specific sort of beetle in mind as our reference. Rob and I joined forces with production designer Otso Linnalaakso, DOP Remko Schnorr and the VFX wizards from PlanetX to make it all come to life.

**An iconic object for this film is Sihja’s yellow sweater. What happened to it after the shoot?**

Pyykkö: I wanted Sihja to be like a ray of sunlight, clear and bright. This oversized hoodie lends her a kind



of street credibility. “Sihja from the Bronx” I told my costume designer Emmi Leeve. I have two daughters, who often stood model for several parts of Sihja’s character. The hoodie is now guarded as a treasure in Tuffi’s secret safe deposit box, for possible later use.

**Fairies come with special effects! Was there a lot of “film magic” required to make her walk up the walls? Or were there other more complicated tricks required in the film?**

Pyykkö: I always try to get “the real feel” to all the tricks. It helped a lot that Elina Patrarkka (Sihja) is a talented gymnast; with the help of a stunt team she was really walking on walls, wearing a harness and rigs. She did her own stunts, which wasn’t easy at all. Justus Hentula (Alfred) and Elina were very brave and bold, and after a lot of training, they did as much as possible on the spot, including the flying scenes. Those kids were flying above the rooftops, hanging on cranes, which was truly amazing! I wanted the audience to really feel the



night wind on their faces.

**If there is one thing among the actors that sounds very convincing, it surely is their laughter. As if they had an awful lot of fun on the set.**

Pyykkö: The secret to that is... Justus! He is hilarious. Elina simply loved his stories, and they got along so well. We did some rehearsals without a script, mainly trying out stunts and hanging out together, talking about life. From then on, the work on the set was filled with trust and laughter.

**Maybe it had to do with the many things Sihja was allowed to destroy. Already in her very first scene, she turns Alfred's room into a total mess. Was it fun, wrecking all that stuff?**

Pyykkö: Of course! Especially the mud fight was cool. At first the kids were a little worried about getting dirty, splashing each other with mud – which was actually cleaned thoroughly to avoid all risks. As soon as mud was flying around, we sent our DOP to the middle of the arena, and let the kids loose. Pretty cool!

**Elina Patrakka's 'magic aura' makes her perfectly credible as someone who might perform magic.**

Pyykkö: This little lady has special



powers! She is rather experienced and has been working on various film sets before. But she was simply born to play Sihja, the role allowed her to display her full potential, freely playing around and experimenting. She is pure magic, and a true pro, even if that sounds weird to say about a nine year old.

**How are the other kids treating Alfred? I wouldn't exactly call it bullying, but how would you describe it then?**

Pyykkö: Alfred is drawn towards different things than the other kids, which I also have witnessed with my own daughters. This story is Alfred's farewell to childhood, the last adventure in which he can deny all pre-teen problems already "lurking" around the corner. He is still in his own magical world, and I think he is happy there, not ready yet to take the next step. The gang of other kids isn't bad or mean, they are just in a different universe than him. I love how Justus gives shape to Alfred, wise, and full of righteousness and humour. The value of kindness is priceless.

**I was intrigued by the 'magic potion' that plays a crucial role. We're all dreaming of a better world, but a potion that "destroys all bad elements" sounds horrible. That is an interesting ambiguity!**

Pyykkö: Nature is naturally leaning towards chaos, while humans are desperately looking for order. But when looking into nature, you will always find order, and when looking at humans you will always find chaos. It is all about balance, between temper and serenity, between beauty and ugliness... All emotions have their rightful place in our world, including sorrow and rage. Our flaws and weaknesses are little jewels to treasure.

**Can you tell us something about that intriguing factory location?**

Pyykkö: Those scenes were shot in a water plant, with amazing colours and shapes. All that grey and yellow! Other shots were made in an abandoned factory. All the machinery and empty halls allowed our art department to create a world exactly like they wanted it. I find the result very convincing.

**I'm probably not the first one who saw certain similarities between the scenes with the shipment of "magic potion" and the current vaccination debate...**

Pyykkö: The script was written way before we even heard about Covid-19, so I have to admit this is pure coincidence.

–  
Gert Hermans

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# Marta Karwowska about TRIPLE TROUBLE

“The golden rule of children’s cinema: get rid of the adults”

Creeping footsteps in the museum garden, skilful fingers fumbling on the frame of a painting... Not just any painting, but a masterpiece by Monet. The next day it turns out the painting has been stolen and Julka and Olek travel to Poznań to start their investigation. Since Julka’s aunt is falsely accused of theft, the duo quickly needs to reveal the true identity of the thief. They get unsolicited help from Felka, though with her comes trouble, jealousy and rivalry.

**The film opens with a burglary in a museum. It felt almost like ‘Mission Impossible’ for kids.**

Marta Karwowska: I worked with a great team and the opening scene is the result of several departments joining forces - stage design, cinematography, sound... We meticulously prepared the scene by drawing storyboards. We wanted to create a

strong effect to attract the viewer’s attention from the very first shot.

**Where exactly did you film that scene?**

Karwowska: We had been searching for a suitable location for a long time until finally my dream came true. We shot exactly where the scene is actually taking place, in the hall of the National Museum in Poznań. Polish people will recognise the place that is famous for its beautiful architecture and decoration. The cooperation with the Museum went smoothly, everyone was very helpful and open to our ideas.

**The story’s set up is not coincidental...**

Karwowska: Together with producer Agnieszka Dziedzic, we were looking for something that could serve as a foundation for our plot. Agnieszka



remembered the story of Beach in Pourville, the only painting by Monet on public display in Poland, which was stolen from the National Museum in September 2000. It was cut out of its frame and replaced with a copy, painted on cardboard. The painting was recovered only in January 2010 and one suspect was arrested. This was exactly the kind of story we were looking for.

**In comparison to the first (very successful) DOUBLE TROUBLE film, your characters have grown up a bit and are now facing life’s bigger questions about friendship and trust.**

Karwowska: For me, both films are two different worlds. I approached the actors and the script completely differently. Our characters are older and more mature, so their problems are a bit more complex. I hope our audience is growing up parallel to the films. Even the visual design of the movie is different - I wanted this one to be sunny with more space and oxygen.

**How did you direct Pulpet, the dog, in his wild police chase scene?**

Karwowska: The dog obeyed to only one person, which was our first AD. He was the one in charge, although



the scene was mainly constructed through the editing. Both the dog and the policemen are running all the time through the same corridor. The scene was initially intended as a short gag, but in the editing room it turned out we had enough material to make it longer, if we puzzled it nicely together. I will also reveal the secret that Pulpet actually is a girl and her name is Marlena.

**There were some more technical challenges to the film: cars, boats, planes... You had it all!**

Karwowska: My main challenge is to shoot good emotional scenes, to be honest. That is what I care about. All you need for the action scenes is to be well-prepared and to guarantee the safety of the actors and extras. The chases were shot in the studio and we had stuntmen in the forest and on the boat. It wasn't as hard as it seems.

**Throughout the film it is always the kids who keep control; they can solve every problem without the involvement of grown-ups.**

Karwowska: This is the golden rule of children's cinema; get rid of the adults and let the kids do the job.

**In your case: two girls, who truly**

**cooperate once they've overcome their rivalry.**

Karwowska: As a woman, it is only natural that I have girls playing the leading roles. People often tell me how TRIPLE TROUBLE is a movie with strong, charismatic female characters, like Julia and Fela, but also Kaja, Aunt and the Double Coloured Eye woman. I really believe in friendship among girls - Julka and Felka's friendship is an example of how to overcome problems and build strong relationships.

**Your film has been travelling the festivals.**

Karwowska: Festivals – like Ale Kino! here in Poland – add an extra dimension to children's cinema. They attract an audience that likes to talk about film. In countries like ours, where unfortunately not many films for children are being made – they emphasise the importance and prestige of our work.

–  
Gert Hermans  
© Ale Kino! Festival

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## Pierre Coré about THE FANTASTIC JOURNEY OF MARGOT & MARGUERITE

**“Realism allows me more than fantasy does”**

*Margot and Marguerite are both 12 years old, struggling with family, friends and other issues. But one lives in 1942 during the war, the other one in 2020. They tumble into each other's lives via a magical trunk. One more thing they have in common: an absent father. Despite the 70 years that separate them, they embark together on an adventure on the edge of space and time.*

**Is anger a crucial emotion at the age of 12?**

Pierre Coré: In this film this anger is mainly Margot's privilege; Marguerite simply isn't there yet. At the age of 12 you are no longer a child but not yet adolescent. You have one foot in both worlds. Marguerite tilts more towards childhood, while Margot is revolting like a teenager. I love that passionate side of teenagers, their heightened emotions. They are angry with the es-

tablished order and adult compromises (which we prefer to call wisdom)... At the same time, they are often egocentric, seeing the world only through their own filter and having a hard time adapting to someone else's point of view. Margot's anger serves as fuel, the energy that enables her to accomplish this mission.

**What is so typical about Margot's father? And by the way: is graphic designer not a real job?**

Coré: Oh yes, of course it is! My wife is one, you should see this as a little wink to her, though I'm not sure if she finds it funny. I wanted to make young audiences reflect on the evolution of the fatherly role over the course of 70 years. Coming from 1942, Marguerite is quite distraught facing this “adolescent dad”, who refuses to grow up, wearing jeans and hoodies. This is not the kind of authority she expects.





However, dad will have to find peace with his fatherly status.

**A film about time travelling can never be realistic, but still you made a great effort to make it look like that.**

Coré: To make your audience believe in magic you have to be as realistic as possible. We close a pact with the audience regarding the magic trunk, testing the flexibility of their imagination. If they're willing to accept that, it's okay to have our two heroines swapping time zones. Once this pact is sealed, you have to keep the story as close as possible to the characters, not losing yourself in artificial effects.

The more the context seems realistic, the easier your audience will accept the cheating with the time and space continuum. In short, realism allows me more than fantasy does.

**When filming from a 1942-bound perspective, were there moments you were wondering about our contemporary times, and the kind of lives we're living today?!"**

Coré: It was great fun filming our world through the eyes of a girl from the past. I didn't want to pass a judgment, I don't think everything used to be better in the old days, I don't feel like idealising the past. Each period has its quirks, its brutality and

its moments of happiness. I wanted Marguerite to be astonished when being confronted with our mixed school classes, our cell phones and our means of transport. She discovers people eating fast food and sugary snacks while drinking sparkling soda. The funny thing is that by trying to be neutral, the audience can interpret our projection any way they want. The sequence with the wind turbines, for example, can be experienced either as a magical, poetic moment, or as a nightmarish vision of a disfigured world... Everyone can project their own fantasies.

**The girls have to run, drive, fly...**

Coré: This was indeed a very demanding physical performance. Main actress Lila Gueneau (playing both Margot & Marguerite) loves to run, jump and do stunts. But we shot in winter and weather conditions were tough, sometimes with rain and snow. We had to adapt her costume to keep her from shivering all the time. And there was the concentration she had to keep up for eight weeks. Every day she was on the set, almost in every scene, which for a 12 year old is quite a challenge.

**What about that beautiful 'mansion' location, the villa where Marguerite**

**is living?**

Coré: A beautiful house it is! We did a lot of prospection before we discovered this one. I wanted Margot to be completely overwhelmed by the size of the house. Nowadays most of us live in cities or suburbs in rather tiny spaces, and Margot's first shock is precisely about this immensity. I profoundly had to cut Margot's discovery of the location in the editing process. Initially she made an almost hallucinatory stroll through all the rooms, each one even larger than the other. Unfortunately the audience only sees a small part of the decor. This house is so big that we even created an extra set for another sequence; also the labour camp kitchen scenes were shot here.

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**Gert Hermans**  
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## Ket & Doc: new generation of Flemish young audience documentaries

Ket & Doc means five new Flemish young audience documentaries every year. For 15 minutes, these films consequently look at the world through the eyes of a child. After they premiered at the JEF festival, children talked to the directors via the classroom computer. This is what the young audience wanted to know...

In Ket & Doc, a trajectory for filmmakers that started in 2018, Flemish directors go through a series of workshops working towards their own young audience documentary. The five films that were made within this year's Ket & Doc edition tell captivating stories,

and have all been broadcasted on Ketnet, the Flemish youth channel of the public broadcaster. *"We do not shy away from difficult themes: farewell, gender issues, children's psychiatry... These films offer an open view on the world,"* says Annemie Gulickx, Net Manager of Ketnet.

With Ket & Doc, the three partners - the Flemish Audio-visual Fund (VAF), JEF and Ketnet - have succeeded in putting youth documentaries on the map in Flanders. Meanwhile, a new batch of filmmakers is preparing for the third edition of Ket & Doc: another five lovely films in the making.



Buck Fever



Yaren and the sun

## ANGRY by Frederike Migom "The big explosion"

Some children often get angry. So angry that life at home or at school is no longer bearable. In hospital, in the children's psychiatry department, they explain through conversations, photos and images why they are so angry and how they feel about it.

**Everybody gets angry sometimes. When do things become so problematic that you have to see a psychiatrist?**

Migom: When you are no longer able to go to school or just live at home, when you and the people around you are no longer able to cope, then you need help. But there is always a reason why kids get angry, and that's what we need to look for.

**Is it a disease or can you grow over it?**

Migom: Children are facing so many confusing feelings that are sometimes difficult to understand. All that confusion can come out at once in a rage, like an explosion. If those feelings are very strong, the explosion can be huge.



**"I don't believe you really like me," says one of the children.**

Migom: If your teachers and parents tell you time after time that you're nasty, and nobody wants to play with you anymore, you might tend to believe that nobody likes you, indeed.

**Did you want to make a series of portraits of several children, or did you approach them as a group?**

Migom: I wanted to give a voice to a group of children who have something in common. Through the animations they do get their own colours and textures that suit their individual personality. When they grow more and more angry, their voices grow into one big voice, because they all share the same experience; the anger in this film has but one voice.

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## BUCK FEVER by Griet Goelen & Louise Van Assche

### “Her deer’s head on the wall”

In Texas, Emily, an 8 year old cheerleader, is on the eve of her first hunt. She is the youngest in a hunters family and the only one who does not yet have a deer’s head hanging on the living room wall.

#### Where did you find Emily?

Goelen: In Llano, the ‘Deer Capital’ of Texas, a small town where hunters go for groceries.

Van Assche: One day in a shop we met Chase and his dad. Chase told us he had a younger sister who would soon go hunting for the first time. She was a cheerleader. This family had everything we were looking for. Hunting is a family tradition in Texas, passed down from generation to generation. Boys often learn to hunt at a very young age.

#### Still it is weird to see children carry a weapon.

Van Assche: When I first got to Texas, all those guns shocked me. The combination of ‘weapons’ and ‘children’

will always raise questions, even if children can only handle a gun in the presence of an adult.

#### Emily’s father is kind and patient.

Goelen: We were moved by the bond between Emily and her dad, which was reinforced by spending long hours together in a hunting cabin.

#### *(Spoiler alert!)* We were all waiting for Emily to pull the trigger but then... she didn’t.

Goelen: Emily makes clear that the time isn’t right for her yet, which is a brave thing to do. It is what she felt inside. Sometimes things turn out differently than expected; suddenly you don’t want something that you thought you always wanted. Then as a child - and as a young girl - you have the right to say no.

Producer contact: Bram Versteyshe; [bram@lionheart.be](mailto:bram@lionheart.be)

## JULES & ME by Anne Ballon

### “Going through a transition all together”

Roos has a sister who used to be her brother. At home, a lot of attention goes to Jules. Still, Roos tries to be a good sister.

#### You made this movie within your own family.

Ballon: Roos and Jules are my sisters. Sometimes it was easy to make a movie in my own family, because you know the story through and through. But sometimes it’s harder because you don’t want to hurt anyone. You want it to be a pleasant experience for all. That is why you constantly wonder how far you can go.

#### Why did you make this film?

Ballon: It is important that minorities in our society get more visibility. It’s all about being seen and heard, and it adds to our vocabulary to talk about such topics. I wanted to look at a transgender person through the eyes of a family member. Because such a transition is something you go through all together, as a family.

#### At what age did Jules know she was



#### a girl?

Ballon: I think she always knew. But it wasn’t easy to admit, even though she liked to dress like a girl and play with Barbie’s as a child. As a teenager she kept it hidden for a long time, and around the age of 20 she finally told us.

#### What does Jules think about the film?

Ballon: She is happy with it, but she is also a little vain. Film extrapolates everything, both your appearance and your behaviour. During the editing I showed her different versions that we discussed thoroughly. In the end, I usually got my way.

Producer contact: Frederik Nicolaj; [frederik@offworld.be](mailto:frederik@offworld.be)



## THOM & STOFFEL by Zaïde Bil & Sébastien Segers

### “Overlooking the horse stables”

Thom's best friend is Stoffel, an old Shetland pony. Wherever Thom goes, Stoffel trudges after him. But Thom has grown too big for Stoffel. Soon he will have to choose another horse.

**Segers: We wanted to show how Thom looks at life, how he experiences his world.**

Bil: He lives very much in the “here and now”. Thom doesn't think about yesterday or tomorrow; he is enjoying the moment.

**Thom is a bit different, but we don't get to know much about that.**

Segers: Thom has a form of autism, but we never mentioned it. We thought it was more important for the film to raise questions than to provide answers. This isn't a portrait of a boy with a disability; we just show Thom as he is.

**Why does he need a new horse?**

Segers: Thom has grown enormously. He has the body of a 10-year-old, he



grows big and strong, but inside he is still 3.5 years old. He has now grown too big to ride Stoffel, his feet are almost dangling to the ground. That is why he has to change horses.

Bil: For him this is a turning point. The new horse symbolises Thom's personal development.

**Where does Thom live?**

Segers: On a large farm, with meadows and a pear orchard. He has plenty of freedom and space. His bedroom overlooks the horse stables, from his window he can see Stoffel, Rosanne, Xantos and the 15 other horses... and all the chickens, cats and dogs.

Producer contact: Zaïde Bil;  
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## YAREN AND THE SUN by Renate Raman & Joren Slaets

### “We went along camping”

Yaren goes to a summer camp for children who have lost a dearly beloved person in their life. There she meets Kato, a real twinkletoes. This is the start of a special summer and an equally special friendship.

**Why did you choose to follow Yaren?**

Slaets: Yaren and Kato were both capable of talking easily about their grief. At the camp they ended up in the same group and became best friends. That made them our obvious main characters, although they had never met before.

Raman: Thanks to that strong bond of grief, they became close friends. And they still are. They have both already registered for the camp again next year.

**How was it for you to join the camp?**

Slaets: The three of us (two directors + sound guy) went along, we ate, played and stayed with the children. Those five days were extremely intense. All the sad moments were extra sad, and

all the nice moments were extra fun - all emotions were particularly extreme. Afterwards I felt so tired.

**How difficult was it to constantly keep up your professional approach during those sad moments?**

Slaets: We couldn't. That light parade was such an intense moment that we couldn't keep filming.

Raman: We filmed for about half an hour, then we put the camera aside and went among the kids. In that scene we mainly focus on the connection: the being together, the hugs... We want Yaren and Kato to be proud whenever they see this film, we don't want them to relive all those sad moments every time again.

Producer contact: Maarten Schmidt;  
[maarten@storyhousefilm.com](mailto:maarten@storyhousefilm.com)

## Fred Baillif about LA MIF

“Like a rushed, energetic, pounding heartbeat”

In LA MIF (aka THE FAM), self-taught Swiss filmmaker Fred Baillif tells an impressive story about seven teenage girls with traumatic *family* experiences, living in a residential shelter in Geneva. Mif is a French slang word for family; although most of the girls have parents and siblings, public welfare has put them in a home.

Born in 1977, Baillif, grew up in the countryside near Geneva, where he graduated in 2000 as a social worker and found a job in a youth detention centre. But his dream was to make films. He went to New York where he worked as Production Assistant on a documentary series and at night as a DJ in the legendary bars in Brooklyn. Back in Switzerland, in 2003 he directed his first documentary SIDEMAN, about the New York-based Swiss harmonica player Grégoire Maret. With his background as social worker he then made the documentary GEISENDORF, about kids terrifying citizens in Geneva’s Geisendorf Park. As an established documentary maker, he started working for Swiss TV station



RTS.

His first fiction feature TAPIS ROUGE was a no budget film made with teenagers from a Lausanne suburb. With them he started developing a method for directing non-professional actors. LA MIF, created in collaboration with a shelter home in Geneva, was honoured with the Grand Prix in the 14plus Competition at the Berlinale 2021. The International Jury stated: “*Like a rushed, energetic, pounding heartbeat, this film pushes its char-*

*acters and viewers in brutal honesty through different stories and incidents. Carried by captivating and strong performances it never loses its balance between power and vulnerability.*”

### LA MIF almost looks like a documentary. What is the advantage of making fiction films for you?

Fred Baillif: Freedom! There was a particular moment in my career when I understood the limitations of the documentary genre. At that time I was making a documentary series for

Swiss TV – in prime time – and there was this producer telling me constantly “*we must have this, we must have that*”. It felt like making a reality show. All the time I was so anxious about manipulating reality. That is when I decided: I am not going to do documentaries anymore. I’d rather try fiction and see if that might work. And it did! With this method for non-professional actors, I have the freedom to tell any kind of story, always true to my point of view.

### How was this method applied with LA MIF?

Baillif: All started with Claudia Grob, playing Lora, the director of the shelter home, which was really her profession until she retired. We worked together 20 years ago and stayed in touch. Through my documentaries about ‘the social work field’ she kept up with my career. She told me how frustrated she was about her work in the institution, especially when issues of ‘sexuality’ were involved – and they always were – and in the way politics dealt with it. Her deep anger towards





the entire youth protection system, became my inspiration for LA MIF.

**So when Lora accuses the institution, these were Claudia's own words?**

Baillif: Completely!

**What happened then?**

Baillif: I interviewed the girls and employees of the shelter. Asking them about the real 'drama' in their lives, I made up a story for each of them... but not their own stories. I asked all of them to evaluate their characters... except for Lora; Claudia agreed that she wouldn't know anything about her character and her backstory. That is how the young actresses became the

film's co-authors, without knowing the details of the overall story. Finally on the set, every day they got to know a little more about the characters and plot. Of course none of the dialogues was written.

**There was no script, no screenplay?**

Baillif: You can imagine how difficult it was to get such a project financed! That is why it took so long. Finally, after three years I said: *"Okay, we don't have the money, but the girls are growing up. We need to shoot now, otherwise it will be too late."* So we shot the film within two weeks.

**How did you keep the girls in line over such a long period?**

Baillif: We built up a relationship. I went to the shelter maybe once per month on a Sunday evening to have dinner with the girls, together with my wife and kid (who both had a role in the film). I told them from the start this project would take a lot of time.

**How much footage did you collect?**

Baillif: I haven't calculated, but maybe 5% finally made it into the movie. The story further evolved in the editing phase. It was the first edit that finally made local fundraising possible.

**Your relationship with those young people seems to be very intense. How were you as a teenager?**

Baillif: Super difficult. For me the whole world was black or white. When there was a teacher who understood me, we were best friends; when there was one who punished me or felt superior, all hell broke loose. I wanted to become a teacher, just to do better than them, to try and understand those children. And I became a social worker because I believe these kids need to be listened to and heard. Teaching is listening, but in schools or shelters there is no time for that. The problem is not with the social workers, but with the institutions and with the overregulated system.

People are always anxious; protection is our priority. I have different priorities: how can we make these kids believe in themselves? How can we help them expressing themselves – like they did in the movie? All I can do is plant the seeds – sometimes they grow, sometimes they don't; we can't control everything. This is what I have to accept, as a social worker and as a filmmaker.

**On the soundtrack I would have expected maybe punk songs, but using classical pieces by Mozart, Scarlatti and Bach works very convincingly.**

Baillif: This music takes us back to the time when shelter homes were ran by nuns. Our current juvenile system is regressive, it takes us back in time. Moreover I didn't want the music to manipulate the audience's emotions, as it happens all the time nowadays.

–  
Uta Beth

World Sales: Freshprod;  
[fb@freshprod.com](mailto:fb@freshprod.com)

# Giffoni Film Festival celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

## Claudio Gubitosi: “Changing the idea about the South”

Isn't that what defines the nature of truly famous people? We all know them, we know all the facts published in gossip magazines, but none of us know who they really are. The same goes for famous festivals: everybody knows the Giffoni Film Festival, one of the biggest children's film events, but little do we know about the beating heart of the festival, the founder and director Claudio Gubitosi. What we all know about the festival in Southern Italy is this: it's welcoming young people from around the globe through exchange projects, it's big in numbers, premieres and screenings, it attracts famous Hollywood stars as festival guests and... it's celebrating its 50th anniversary!

**We know the Giffoni Film Festival as a massive event. Were you “born big”?**

Claudio Gubitosi: The original event in 1971 was very small. We just had some films – the ones we read about in magazines or found with local distributors - and a jury: some hundreds of kids full of energy and curiosity. Over the first



10 years the event grew slowly, until everything suddenly changed in 1982: François Truffaut accepted my invitation to come to Giffoni for a meeting with our jurors. It was amazing! From that moment on, finally, cinema professionals became curious about us and started to accept my invitations.

**The festival is impressive in terms of numbers: so many films, so many guests... “Size matters” for Giffoni?**

Gubitosi: For us it is crucial that every

member of the family can find something interesting here. We have many sections in our programme, each one for a very specific audience or age group. Even for such a big event, it is important to really know your audience and their preferences. Over the years, we have closely studied the reactions of our young jurors and how they evolved. A 9 year old in 2021 is very different from a child of that age in 1989. But still we want to offer them all a film that moves and touch-

**Giffoni**  
experience

es them.

**The path of the festival is closely intertwined with your persona as founder and director.**

Gubitosi: I was only an 18 year old boy back in 1971. Now I am probably a wiser man, but my enthusiasm and energy are still the same. In the beginning I worked with a small team, while now there is a staff of professionals, often people who grew up in the festival and first came here as jury members in the eighties or nineties. I see it as my duty to coordinate and direct this staff, showing them the way and together giving shape to the festival of the future.

**One of the festival's trademarks is the presence of big stars, like Hollywood celebrities. What is their role?**

Gubitosi: In my opinion it is getting more and more important for youngsters to meet people in the “real world” – not only star actors, but writers, politicians, scientists, to better understand their human side. They are not idols, they are not untoucha-



ble, they are normal people with passions, desires and fears from who you can learn. A famous actor can tell you how much work and study are needed to master a role, or how many fears he had to overcome. This is important in a world where success seems so easy to reach.

**Which one of these stars has made the strongest impression on the team?**

Gubitosi: Many of them did, but we will never forget Meryl Streep. After a long day of meetings and interviews, at dinner she asked to take some pictures of the staff, because “only thanks to these people such a wonderful event was made possible”.

**You're located in South Italy, famous for its splendid beauty and hospitality, but at the same time poverty, unemployment and organised crime are casting a dark shadow over the region. What role can a festival play in the lives of young people growing up there?**

Gubitosi: The festival has an important impact on multiple levels. Economically all the festival funding returns to the region multiplied in different ways (taxes, impact on tourism etc.). Culturally the festival changed the idea about the South with all the gen-



*Claudio Gubitosi with Meryl Streep*

erations of jurors who have come here from other Italian regions or from abroad. Young people who, thanks to Giffoni, discovered the beauty and safety of Naples, Amalfi, Paestum, might return here as adult tourists. The same happened with those Hollywood stars. After Giffoni many of them returned here and called me to say how happy they were to discover all these wonderful places.

**Italy has an interesting production tradition for young audiences, but the results are seldom seen in the international scene. Can the festival have an impact on the visibility of Italian production?**

Gubitosi: We do our best to promote

Italian films but at the same time we think Italian producers should be more active, specifically for young audiences. European countries like the Netherlands or Germany produce so many good films for children and youth every year, while it is still a struggle to find one Italian title for our children's sections.

**What is the common thread throughout the festival's programming? What makes a film “a true Giffoni film”?**

Gubitosi: Quality and honesty. A Giffoni film should have visual qualities and an authentic story that can open a cultural horizon for our jurors. A film that motivates them to think,

and think further. It should be a film that our jurors can “feel” and - at the same time - a starting point for new thoughts, a new perspective on the world.

**Are there any specific ambitions for the future that you can share with us?**

Gubitosi: In 2020 the festival's 'Winter Edition' was our answer to the pandemic situation. Now I'm trying hard to create a new festival calendar with more appointments throughout the year. I'm sure this should be our future; I just need to convince my sponsors and partners. Different events could be dedicated to specific themes or types of production (like experimental film, video dance, VR). We have to be open to all new aspects of the world of imagination. At the same time I hope Giffoni will become more and more a place where youngsters from all over the world can meet, not just to watch films together but also to discuss their needs, their rights and their ideas for a better future.

*We wish you good luck with these ambitions, and congratulate you on your 50th festival anniversary!*

-  
Gert Hermans

## CABINETS OF WONDER

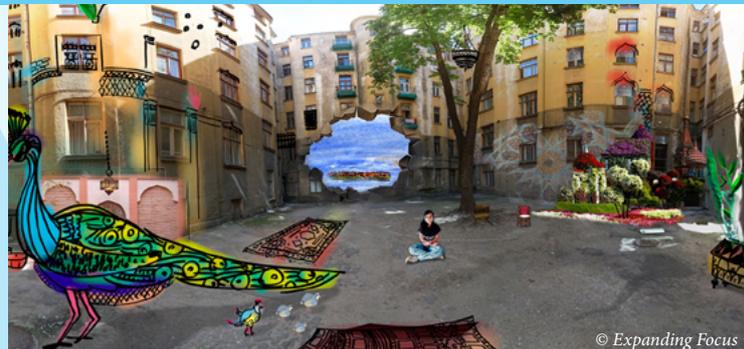
**CABINETS OF WONDER** is an immersive experience of the virtual truth. We embark on a journey to find the answer to the question: If childhood were a place, where would it be?

The multi-platform project CABINETS OF WONDER consists of a documentary film accompanied by a VR experience series and media literacy programme for schools and educators. In the feature length hybrid documentary, four children aged 9 - 12 take us on a journey into their world, and share their hopes, dreams and fears. Each of them has a different story to tell about exclusion and expectations, belonging and friendship. Wisdom speaks of his grandfather, the lion slayer. Having grown up in Germany, his Cameroonian heritage is still an important part of his identity. In Roya's accounts, she becomes a mermaid and overcomes her fear of drowning. Elias prefers to speak with Rose, an intelligent voice system he befriended. In Joline's world, she is not only battling letters doubling and mixing up, but people's expectations she is afraid not to meet. A veil of mystery is

draped over their depictions. In a jungle of cat people and glimmering blue bugs, the children retreat to a secret place, inaccessible for adults.

German director Susanne Kim accompanies her protagonists roaming around and playing with friends. She offers them a safe space to tell their stories. Using a collage of animations, photos and props, she emphasizes certain aspects of their narrations, illustrating the inner conflicts hiding behind the metaphors. While the overall tone is playful, Kim never shies away from more serious topics. *"Do you know that it's really hard when... For example, when you go to another land as a foreigner..."* Roya is interrupted: *"You shouldn't call them foreigners. There is no such thing as foreigners."* When the children share private accounts, it comes across as natural and authentic. The camera lens never feels invasive, but more like a supportive friend.

The VR experience serves as an interactive pairing to the documentary, making you discover lion fights, expe-



© Expanding Focus

riences of displacement, cat people and shiny blue beetles. It is exciting to realise, through VR our practices for depicting the real are no longer contained by the aesthetics of a 2D canvas. The audience can step into and become part of the world previously seen on a screen, creating a feeling of really "being there". We can connect with Wisdom, Elias, Roya and Joline on a more personal level. VR can serve as a strong empathy building tool while teaching media literacy and addressing social issues with audiences of all ages.

Susanne Kim's team, together with the children developed a world for each protagonist – an audio-visual mix consisting of 360 stereoscopic photos, documentary footage, drawings and 3D models, creating an uncanny

immersive experience for, by and with children.

Director: Susanne Kim  
 Producer: Alexander Herrmann for Expanding Focus GmbH;  
 World sales: Expanding Focus GmbH;  
[alex@expanding-focus.de](mailto:alex@expanding-focus.de)  
[www.expanding-focus.de](http://www.expanding-focus.de)  
 Germany 2020, 80'

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



## Dear Future Children

Documentary, Germany, UK, Austria, 2021

Director: Franz Böhm  
 Prod.: Nightrunner Prod., Schubert Film, Lowkey Films, ...  
 World Sales: Magnetfilm  
 Phone: ++49-16-38-01-07-53  
[info@magnetfilm.de](mailto:info@magnetfilm.de)  
[www.magnetfilm.de](http://www.magnetfilm.de)



## The Fam (aka La Mif)

Feature Film, Switzerland, 2020

Director: Frédéric Baillif  
 Prod.: Freshprod, RTS  
 World Sales: Freshprod  
[fb@freshprod.com](mailto:fb@freshprod.com)  
[www.freshprod.com](http://www.freshprod.com)

## Gagarine

Feature Film, France, 2020

Director: Fanny Liatard & Jérémy Trouilh  
 Prod.: Haut et Court  
 World Sales: Totem Films  
[hello@totem-films.com](mailto:hello@totem-films.com)  
[www.totem-films.com](http://www.totem-films.com)



## Kids Cup

Documentary, Norway, 2020

Director: Pavel Mirzoev  
 Prod. & World Sales: Medieoperatørene  
[info@mop.no](mailto:info@mop.no)  
[www.mopfilm.com](http://www.mopfilm.com)



## The Lesson

Documentary, Germany, 2020

Director: Elena Horn  
 Prod. & World Sales: Open Citadel  
[julia@open-citadel.com](mailto:julia@open-citadel.com)  
[www.open-citadel.com](http://www.open-citadel.com)  
[www.thelesson.film](http://www.thelesson.film)

## Little Vampire

Animation, France, Belgium, 2020

Director: Joann Sfar

Prod.: Joann Sfar's Magical Society, Panache Prod., Studiocanal, ...  
 World Sales: Studiocanal  
 Phone: ++33-1-71-35-35-35  
[www.studiocanal.com](http://www.studiocanal.com)



## Martin and the Magical Forest

Feature Film, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, 2021

Director: Petr Oukropec  
 Prod.: BFILM.cz, Leitwolf Filmprod., Negativ Film Prod.  
 World Sales: Attraction Distribution  
 Phone: ++1-51-43-60-02-52  
[info@attractiondistribution.ca](mailto:info@attractiondistribution.ca)  
[www.attractiondistribution.ca](http://www.attractiondistribution.ca)



## Moonbound

Animation, Germany, Austria, 2021

Director: Ali Samadi Ahadi  
 Prod.: Little Dream Entertainment, Brave New Work, Coop99  
 World Sales: Sola Media  
 Phone: ++49-711-96-89-44-40  
[post@sola-media.com](mailto:post@sola-media.com)  
[www.sola-media.com](http://www.sola-media.com)

## My Dad is a Sausage



Feature Film, Belgium, Germany, 2020

Director: Anouk Fortunier  
 Prod.: A Private View, The Film Kitchen, Leitwolf Filmprod., ...  
 World Sales: Studio Hamburg  
 Phone: ++49-40-66-88-53-51  
[info@studio-hamburg-enterprises.de](mailto:info@studio-hamburg-enterprises.de)  
[www.studio-hamburg-enterprises.de](http://www.studio-hamburg-enterprises.de)

## Nelly Rapp – Monster Agent

Feature Film, Sweden, 2020

Director: Amanda Adolfsen  
 Prod.: SF Studios  
 World Sales: Reinvent  
[sales@reinvent.dk](mailto:sales@reinvent.dk)



[www.reinvent.dk](http://www.reinvent.dk)



## Night Forest

Feature Film, Germany, 2021

Director: André Hörmann  
 Production: Kurhaus Prod., NDR, RBB  
 World Sales: Kurhaus Prod.  
 Phone: ++49-7-22-13-02-19-06  
[office@kurhausproduction.de](mailto:office@kurhausproduction.de)  
[www.kurhausproduction.de](http://www.kurhausproduction.de)

## On the Water

Feature Film, Estonia, 2020

Director: Peeter Simm  
 Prod. & World Sales: Filmivabrik  
 Phone: ++37-25-16-36-41  
[filmivabrik@filmivabrik.ee](mailto:filmivabrik@filmivabrik.ee)  
[www.filmivabrik.ee](http://www.filmivabrik.ee)



## Padreostro

Feature Film, Italy, 2020

Director: Claudio Noce  
 Prod.: Lungta Film, Pko Cinema, Tenderscapital Prod., ...  
 World Sales: Vision Distribution  
 Phone: ++39-06-99-58-51  
[catia.rossi@visiondistribution.it](mailto:catia.rossi@visiondistribution.it)  
[www.visiondistribution.it](http://www.visiondistribution.it)

## Remy and Juliyat

Feature Film, the Netherlands, 2020

Director: Tessa Schram  
 Prod.: NL Film  
 World Sales: Dutch Features  
 Phone: ++31-23-88-80-168  
[sales@dutchfeatures.com](mailto:sales@dutchfeatures.com)  
[www.dutchfeatures.com](http://www.dutchfeatures.com)

## The Scary House

Feature Film, Austria, 2020

Director: Daniel Geronimo Prochaska  
 Production: Mona Film Prod.  
 World Sales: Sola Media  
 Phone: ++49-711-96-89-44-40  
[post@sola-media.com](mailto:post@sola-media.com)  
[www.sola-media.com](http://www.sola-media.com)  
[www.dasschaurigehaus.at](http://www.dasschaurigehaus.at)

## School Garden

Documentary, the Netherlands, 2020

Director: Mark Verkerk  
 Prod.: EMS Films  
 World Sales: Attraction Distribution  
 Phone: ++1-51-43-60-02-52

[info@attractiondistribution.ca](mailto:info@attractiondistribution.ca)

[www.attractiondistribution.ca](http://www.attractiondistribution.ca)

## Sihja, the Rebel Fairy

Feature Film, Finland, The Netherlands, 2020

Director: Marja Pyykkö  
 Prod.: Tuffi Films, Windmill Film, Den Siste Skilling  
 World Sales: Dutch Features  
 Phone: ++31-6-42-40-69-22  
[sales@dutchfeatures.com](mailto:sales@dutchfeatures.com)  
[www.dutchfeatures.com](http://www.dutchfeatures.com)

## Spring Blossom

Feature Film, France, 2020

Director: Suzanne Lindon  
 Prod.: Avenue B Prod., Eskwad, Bangumi  
 World Sales: Luxbox  
 Phone: ++ 33 171-37-99-34  
[info@luxboxfilms.com](mailto:info@luxboxfilms.com)  
[www.luxboxfilms.com](http://www.luxboxfilms.com)

## Stambul Garden



Feature Film, Germany, 2020

Director: Ilker Catak

Prod.: Flare Film, SWR, ARTE, ...

World Sales: Totem Films

[hello@totem-films.com](mailto:hello@totem-films.com)

[www.totem-films.com](http://www.totem-films.com)

## The Whaler Boy

Feature Film, Russia, Poland, 2020

Director: Philipp Yuryev  
 Prod.: Rock Films, Man's Film Prod., Orka Film  
 World Sales: Loco Films  
 Phone: ++ 33-7-62-99-49-19  
[info@loco-films.com](mailto:info@loco-films.com)  
[www.loco-films.com](http://www.loco-films.com)



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

[www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films](http://www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films)

## DIMITRIS SPYROU (Greece)



### Personal impression by Xiaojuan Zhou

When something goes above our heads, the English expression could be: It's all Chinese to me. To find someone complicit in such an endeavour, the English language offers an alternative: It's all Greek to me! Now imagine a Chinese interview with a Greek! Dimitris does not speak English nor Chinese and his mother tongue is on the to-learn-list of my next life... With the help of a diligent translator, here we are!

Language barrier aside, Dimitris and I have learnt to use our

body languages to communicate effectively over the years. In his eyes you still see the charming actor he once was and above all his sincere soul that cares about children's cinema. We have grown to be like an old couple, understanding each other with a mere glance. I know what he wishes to say and he always returns with his best efforts.

I have not yet been to Greece, but to me Dimitris represents the best of his ancient country. He's a filmmaker, actor, educator, distributor and founder and

director of the first children's film festival in his country - so many hats that always land on the garden for children! Good days or bad ones (think the 2008 financial crisis), he has been steady and stubborn in his lifelong pursuit of presenting the best films to children in Greece (including the ones in refugee camps). He comes across as a man with a gentle heart, a clear mind and a firm hand. To a man who adores the Chinese film *THE KING OF MASKS*, I call him a King of Children's Cinema, well, at least in Greece.



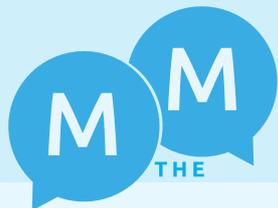
## THE 'MEET THE MENTORS' Q&A

*Dimitris Spyrou, Artistic Director of the Olympia International Film Festival for Children & Young People*

### You have dedicated a big part of your life to quality children's cinema. How did it all start?

Spyrou: My encounter with cinema for children and youth happened kind of... randomly. Until 1990, although I was an active filmmaker - I had directed a number of documentaries and short fiction films, I had written scripts for TV series, I had been an actor in theatre and films - I had no idea about the very existence of "young audience films" as a genre. In Greece, children's cinema equaled Disney films. Then I made a feature called *THE FLEA*, a film for all ages with a 12 year old boy as lead actor. All producers I contacted refused the project and urged me to forget about it. "Who will go to see a film about a boy publishing a handwritten newspaper in a small village?" they would say. I believed in the film and produced it myself, risking everything. I submitted it to the Thessaloniki Film Festival, the only Greek film festival at that time, where the selection committee rejected it for competition. It was screened in a side-section where the audience welcomed it





with enthusiasm. Then THE FLEA was awarded in Berlin, Chicago and other international festivals. Thus, traveling with the film, I met many colleagues, film directors, and representatives of ECFA, which had just been formed. I was charmed by this type of cinema and the atmosphere among people. There was good sportsmanship instead of harsh competition; it was a friendly environment, with mutual love and support. And there was one important parameter that I was really interested in: the educational aspect! This is how I decided to get involved, dedicating all my energy to the development of production and distribution of cinema for children and youth in Greece. For instance, by launching the Olympia Int'l Film Festival for Children & Young People. Without ECFA, I wouldn't have dared to do it.



*Dimitris Spyrou (right) with childhood friend (1969)*

The support of Felix Vanginderhuysen was crucial. I consider him to be not just a supporter but a co-creator of the festival. I will never forget how in September 1997 he came from Brussels to Cologne, on his own expenses, with the exclusive purpose to discuss with me the details of the 1st Festival edition that was planned for December. He is a member of the Olympia Festival family and a beloved friend forever. We also got substantial support and encouragement from ECFA's then President Elke Ried, from Charlotte Giese, Reinhold Schöffel and



many others.

#### **Who, fictional or real, inspired you the most?**

Spyrou: In cinema and literature I am amazed by situations described in an original way, with an interesting plot and a nice dramaturgical development. I like credible characters, protagonists or antagonists. Surprisingly, although my gospel truth is Aristotle's Poetics, I have learned a lot from Bertold Brecht, who tried to deconstruct Aristotelian aesthetics. In my daily life I am inspired by people who take a stand against any form of injustice, who sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of society and who struggle for ecumenical ideals.

#### **What are the objectives of an international festival like Olympia?**

Spyrou: Over the course of 23 years, Olympia Festival has promoted films that contribute to a mutual understanding among people from different cultures, cultivate empathy, develop critical thinking and take down stereotypes. We do not treat children purely as entertainment consumers, but launched several programmes that stimulate them to become cinephiles, understand film language, learn how to cooperate with one another and become creators themselves.

#### **What in your view makes a good film for children?**

Spyrou: I believe that a film focused on childhood can also be interesting for adults. The "objective gaze" on childhood and youth (that is, the adult gaze) rarely leads to good films. On the contrary, when a filmmaker manages to become a child him/herself, seeing the world through the eyes of a child – as if it was for the first time – to discover the truth that a child hides under innocent lies, to be surprised by what seems mundane to an adult, this will make a film more real, more poetic, more interesting for children, and charmingly nostal-



gic for adults. Any theme can be interesting, when addressed properly. I believe that childhood and youth are creative challenges for a filmmaker.

**What's the secret to your success, personal character, study and travel, hard work, good luck or simply good genes?**

Spyrou: I haven't reached the point yet to make my final balance. I don't know what to consider a "success" from what I've done until now. I feel happy to be in a permanent dialogue with young people and by consequence I have extended my own childhood by a few decades. And if there's one important thing I've learned, it is to let childhood mature at its own pace and not to be in a rush to turn children into adults.

**The children and youngsters who may go through difficulties, bullying, family separation, sickness, war, poverty, covid-19 etc., what do you wish to tell them through the films you present at Olympia?**

Spyrou: It is important to know what every child is deprived of, what makes them sad, what scares them, what hurts them, what discourages them. It is crucial to track down in time why a child becomes aggressive, hates the "others", detests the differences. If



THE FLEA

cinema is applied properly, using a Socratic method, we can draw forth the thoughts and sentiments of children and discuss them, in order to edify, sensitise and help young people. Once more: cinema for children and youth should also contain an element of education.

**You were a good filmmaker as well. What can festivals mean to the career of a film and its maker?**

Spyrou: In festivals, films reach their initial purpose: making contact with the audience and the experts. Festivals set a film on a path towards larger audiences, either in cinema venues,

on television or through other distribution channels. Professionals have the opportunity to meet and discuss collaborations. A festival is not only a cultural, but also an economic and social event.

**Some say that what's national is also international. Do you agree?**

Spyrou: If we define properly what is considered national, then yes, it is also international. But "national" is not defined only by external, superficial characteristics; it is a deeper and more complex matter. It is difficult to grasp and express it in an authentic way. The Greek philosopher Heracli-

tus said that "Nature loves to hide". The same goes for societies; they are not easy to unveil. They like to play hide and seek to keep their secrets.

**Can you name a few things on your bucket list and how you plan to accomplish them?**

Spyrou: I have so many loose ends. I'd rather let you know when I get to settle some of them.

**How do you wish to be remembered?**

Spyrou: Socially, among children and youth, with good friends from around the world. Professionally, like setting up a complex and demanding film sequence, when after I've said "cut", actors, crew and extras applaud with satisfaction.



# A Give&Take Film Workshop

## 5 countries, 5 days, 58 students, 10 films

Nine years ago, at the first Youth Cinema Network Conference in Tromsø, the idea for a Give&Take film workshop was brought up. The concept is like this: there's three groups of young filmmakers in three different countries, let's call them Team A, Team B and Team C. They are all working on three short films. After Team A developed its idea and shot the scenes, they send the material to Team B for editing. Meanwhile they receive the footage from Team C. Like a perfect triangle.

The idea looked great on paper, for many reasons...

- There is a didactical catch about teaching film authors to give away 'their baby': handing over your idea in someone else's hands is a matter of trust.
- Now that the entire film industry is about co-production, it is good for young filmmakers to have this experience as early as possible.

How did it work out in reality? Unfortunately, not good. Over those

nine years many teams and festivals have tried, but the concept never ran smoothly. Until now! In a Give&Take workshop that included 58 students from five different countries, working in three time zones, with nine groups, making ten films!

This Give&Take was organised at the end of April in the framework of 'Film Days at VBU', a workshop taking place in Sweden, bringing together young filmmakers from different European countries. The main organiser was VBU, a Swedish highschool in Ludvika, collaborating with other members of the Youth Cinema Network: FiSH (Festival im Stadthafen, Germany), Fresh Film Festival and Emerging Limerick Filmmakers (Ireland), Camera Zizanio (Greece) and XIII. Gimnazija (Croatia). Nine groups in total collaborated in this year's (online) edition. Even if the topic was the same for all teams (Corona generation), each group was assigned a specific genre (documentary, fiction, animation, experimental, music video). One extra barrier: the nine groups were operating from three dif-



ferent time zones!

The schedule looked like this:

- Day 1: Brainstorming, script writing and pre-production
- Day 2: Pre-production + shooting
- Day 3: Shooting + sending the material
- Day 4: Editing material
- Day 5: Premiere of the films + live streaming in FiSH framework.

Finally, without any technical bugs (unbelievable!), the workshop resulted in 10 films that can be watched on a [YouTube channel](#).

What was the difference with previous Give&Take attempts? There was none, actually. Except for the fact that after living under pandemic circumstances for more than a year, everybody nowadays is used to op-

erating digitally, from a distance. Technology has evolved rapidly – nine years ago teams were sending hard drives through 'snail mail'; today we're flawlessly exchanging 20 GB in less than an hour. What will be next?

–

Marija Ratkovic Vidakovic

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](http://www.youthcinemanetwork.org).

## BIRTA

### “Single parents might easily be forgotten”

The Kristiansand ‘Films on the Horizon’ presentation is a classic! Soon you might find out more about some of those works in progress. But one title carried within an urge to be shared with you straight away. We found director and producer Bragi Thor Hinriksson (THE FALCONS) and script writer/journalist Helga Arnardottir willing to tell you all about BIRTA, a light-hearted social drama with an estimated release in November 2021.

One day Birta, a strong and responsible girl with a passion for handball and playing guitar, overhears her mother on the phone, telling that she is so totally broke that there might be no Christmas this year. She simply can’t afford it in times of financial crisis. Birta, shocked by the news, wants to start raising money through various adventurous methods. But that’s not easy when you’re only eleven.

The film, shot in October, November & December 2020, is currently in a late post-production stage. This is the perfect moment to ask the film team

to tell us all we need to know about BIRTA and its adorable protagonist.

Helga Arnardottir: Birta is an 11 year old sensitive girl with a big heart and strong sense of justice. Even though it can be tiring sometimes, she takes care of her little sister and wants to help her mother, especially during the busy weeks before Christmas. She is independent and has a strong personality.

#### To what extent is the script based on true facts?

Arnardottir: It is partly based on my three years of experience as a former single mother. I myself was brought up by a single mother, raising me and my brother while struggling hard as a freelance actress. The idea for the story is based on a misunderstanding that I remember from when I was only 11. My mother had been working on a theatre project, and I never realised this was the only income she relied upon, not even having a contract that guaranteed her a salary. Shortly before Christmas she didn’t get paid



Helga Arnardottir & Bragi Thor Hinriksson

and was totally left out for dry by the theatre producers and director. When asking her why she looked so worried, she told me the facts, presuming I was mature enough to deal with the news. In her encouraging words she added that I shouldn’t be worried at all – “Christmas will always be there”. The idea that maybe someday there wouldn’t be Christmas stuck with me. From that day on, every Christmas period I suffered from a little ‘anxiety knot’ that maybe there wouldn’t

be enough money for food and gifts. Instead of calming me down, in her kindness she planted this little seed of anxiety in me.

Bragi Thor Hinriksson: When I read the script I immediately recognised its quality, not only in the structure but also in its portrayal of an innocent mind. I guess we share similar experiences regarding being exposed to our parents being broke when we were young.



**This is not about a “ghetto family”, but about an ordinary, young single mum.**

Arnardottir: This is exactly what I wanted for the story. This isn't about straight-forward poverty but about the financial struggle of an educated single mum with two children. She has a job that goes with her education, she might work as much as she can, but being alone with a fragile family network makes things so much harder. Moreover, nurses don't get a very high salary, and they have to work difficult hours, which is never easy for a single parent. Raising a child by yourself is financially challenging, and the child support system in Iceland should take the financial situation of single parents more into account. They might easily be forgotten, in Iceland or elsewhere.

**Poverty can be humiliating (Birta has to play handball barefooted). Does she have to pay a heavy toll in her social life?**

Arnardottir: Being broke is not the same as being poor, but unfortunately both affect children. This is something I felt when I was young. But I was never hungry, my wardrobe was full and I had a happy childhood apart from that. My mother recently told me that as a child I was very serious,

so I suppose Birta is a bit like me. We've seen a lot of films about pure poverty but we seldom see how single parents thrive and struggle financially and how that affects children socially. That is the story I wanted to tell.

Hinriksson: A financial status has the potential to raise feelings of shame among children, especially in the world we are living in today, that of-



ten seems like a kind of contest for beauty, singing, art and overall “Happiness”.

**Birta also takes care of her little sister. How many responsibilities can a young girl bear on her shoulders?**

Arnardottir: Single parents often

don't have a strong social network, they might easily rely on the older siblings to take care of the younger ones. I suppose that's a common thing, not only in Iceland. I was 11 years older than my brother and I often had to babysit when my mother was at work and had no one else to help her.

Hinriksson: It depends on the relationship children have with their parents.

**Birta's quest for money serves to save the Christmas party. Does that – in a way – make BIRTA a Christmas movie?**

Arnardottir: It was initially written as a Christmas movie. But it is more than that: it also shows how children have a strong sense of justice and can do everything for their parents.

Hinriksson: I love the idea to have a Christmas theme in a film without having it labelled as a Christmas movie. Christmas is this time of the year when families come together, no matter their disagreements, and everything is forgiven. We designed the film in a way that you can enjoy it year round, but especially in the holiday season.

– **Gert Hermans**

**BIRTA**  
 Director: Bragi Thor Hinriksson  
 Production company: H.M.S. Productions  
 Producers: Bragi Thor Hinriksson, Helga Arnardottir and Valdimar Kuld.  
 Iceland,  
 estimated release: November 2021

# GIRLSBOYSMIX

“Boys room or ladies room, it doesn’t matter for me”

With GIRLSBOYSMIX, the first new nomination for the ECFA Doc Award 2021 was handed out at the JEF festival. Wen Long is neither a boy nor a girl... she is intersex; at her birth it was unclear whether she was a boy or girl. Her parents leave the choice up to her. As an intersex person, it is difficult to know where you’re standing in a world distinguished between men and women. During the festival, the Dutch embassy facilitated a Q&A with director Lara Aerts, Wen Long and her parents.

Wen Long: We met at the Pride Walk through Amsterdam.

Lara Aerts: Wen Long was the only child in the parade. She was seven years old, she wore a dress in the purple and yellow colours of intersex, and she carried a large flag. At first she walked in the middle of the group, but after a while she moved all the way up to the front. For miles and miles she walked across town, waving her flag. That was such an activist image: look, here’s a child who has nothing to hide! We kept in touch, and now



the time was right to make a short film about her.

## Can you explain what intersex exactly means?

Aerts: The common idea is that the world consists of men and women. For a man we expect XY chromosomes, testosterone, a penis and testes; for a

woman XX chromosomes, oestrogen, an uterus, fallopian tubes and a vagina. But 1 in 90 people is born with a body that doesn’t meet the expectations of what a male or female body should look like, or what it should be capable of. What about a woman with XY chromosomes or a man with a little remnant of the uterus? We see men and women as the only possible options, defined by mankind. In reality, there is much more diversity, the biological sex is a spectrum with countless equivalent variations.

Wen Long’s parents: It has been said that intersex is just as common as red-haired people. Everybody knows someone with red hair, so it is not even exceptional.

## Do you feel like a boy or girl?

Wen Long: Neutral. I have long hair and I wear dresses, so people usually see me as a girl. I feel like both a boy and a girl, but I like girls’ clothes better. Like the dress I’m wearing today: I designed it myself in yellow and purple, and there is a sign saying “Princess Intersex” across my heart.

## Do you sometimes meet other children who are intersex?

Wen Long: Not really.

Wen Long’s parents: Oh yes, you do. We meet other families, but the children hardly realise what binds them; for them it is not such a big thing. We have decided to be very open about it, we don’t want to burden Wen Long with a lifelong secret. Wen Long is fantastic, and she can be just the way she is.

## Are you sometimes confronted with people’s lack of understanding?

Wen Long’s parents: At Wen Long’s new school, the ladies rooms were broken. So she shouted loudly through the classroom: boys or girls rooms, it doesn’t matter for me, I can use both. The teacher contacted us, she thought Wen Long was saying weird things. When we explained to her, there was a certain rigidity; things like this were not a part of her world view. After all these years, it is no longer such an important issue for us and so we sometimes forget to inform people thoroughly.



Aerts: There were hardly any negative reactions to the film, except for some messages on social media from people who do not understand, and do not want to understand.

**Why did this film absolutely have to be made?**

Wen Long: As soon as everyone knows what intersex means, I can stop explaining it all the time. I was already in the papers, I met the audience at Cinekid and I was on the Youth News, but sometimes I explain it and people still can't believe it.

**As a filmmaker, what was your main focus?**

Aerts: For GIRLSBOYSMIX – my very first film! – I mainly wondered how to raise awareness. I followed Wen Long without a camera for a long time to get to know her better. That's how I discovered that she doesn't have many problems with being intersex, except for the ignorance of people and their reactions. Here is a child who does not see the need for making a choice, but then she enters the society where she is constantly confronted with the classic dichotomy: in the toy store, in the shopping street... everywhere.

Wen Long: You filmed me just the way I am.



**The result is remarkably light-hearted.**

Aerts: Many intersex people carry huge trauma with them, due to secrecy or forced medical interventions. So when talking about intersex, it is often about the pain, the suffering; the first impression rarely sounds positive. In this movie you meet a happy, carefree child. That is why I made it light-hearted: I want to keep the first association with intersex a positive one.

Wen Long's parents: It's not nature's mistake, it is just a part of it all.

**Those medical interventions are briefly mentioned in the film.**

Wen Long: That is when baby's get an operation right away to make them a boy or girl. But isn't that something a child should decide for itself?

Aerts: As a baby you cannot choose yourself; the choice is made for you. Can't we let intersex children grow up until they are old enough to know what they want to be? You cannot leave such a decision to the parents or doctors.

Wen Long's parents: This usually involves a medically unnecessary procedure, comparable to (irreversible) genital mutilation. In the past, this often happened on the advice of a doctor, but now that awareness is growing, the urge to operate will hopefully

disappear. Isn't it bizarre to operate on people out of precaution?

**People nowadays are evolving towards a new openness. Where do you think we will be standing in about 20 years?**

Wen Long's parents: Empowerment is super important. Make sure your child is confident, and knows that she can be exactly who she is. If you are happy with who you are, then so will others be.

Wen Long: There was a child who said to me: "Thanks to you I dared to tell it." After seeing the Youth News, she had told her best friend that she is intersex. She hadn't told the whole class, but at least it was no longer her secret.

– **Gert Hermans**





of the most prominent knowledge shows for children on German television. In their talk, André reports on a new show: an experiment in cooperation with TV broadcaster WDR. DER ETWAS ANDRÉ UNTERRICHT (*A somewhat different lesson*) is a format born out of the current Covid crisis. During a daily live broadcast, Gatzke explores various topics such as home-schooling and lockdown, and makes them understandable for a young audience. What is particularly interesting, is the possibility for the audience to send

live questions, which André tries to answer directly with the help of a team of experts.

The first episode of "Parole Emil" (50') is a nice mixture of casual conversation and informative sections, not limited to just one medium, but covering various facets (series, films, online offerings, games, audio plays, books). In addition to a review of the first episode, you can also find a list of all series and films discussed as well as a link to the "Parole Emil Spotify playlist" on the

## The Moderators

### Anne...

...prefers her tea in a thermos mug, as displayed during the expert discussions at the KIDS Regio lobby initiative, which she organises as her main occupation. Anne is an avid board gamer, a member of the Slytherin house, a bread lover and no less passionate about gardening. From her roof terrace she can see her home, the Baltic Sea, when the weather is good...

### Hanna...

...knows the Goethe Park like the back of her hand. After all, she has lived in Weimar since 2004. She has been involved in children's media for at least as long - first with her own projects and since 2013 with the "Besondere Kinderfilm" initiative. Hanna always has good advice on films and series, DIY and gardening. It's also worth dropping in on her weekly private family cinema session - the popcorn machine is waiting!

website of Förderverein Deutscher Kinderfilm e.V.

If you would like to send your comments, questions, recommendations or topic suggestions for the next episode, then record a voice message (max. 30") and/or write an email to [podcast@foerderverein-kinderfilm.de](mailto:podcast@foerderverein-kinderfilm.de).

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[Paulina Jacob & Anne Schultka](#)

## Lior Chefetz about SKY RAIDERS

“We found a small airfield that had a few old planes scattered around”

Anyone who gets a kick out of airplanes and aerobatics will certainly get their money's worth in Lior Chefetz' debut film. But SKY RAIDERS is not just about the roaring of engines. It is also the story of a boy learning to cope with his father's death, an old man who sees the past revived, and a beautiful bond between a boy and a girl.

When Yotam and his classmate Noa find a rare antique plane, they try to bring it back to life. This means they have to team up with Morris, an 80 year old grumpy loner.

**Films have been made about children dreaming of getting their own dog, their own bicycle or their own horse... but dreaming about their own airplane?!**

Lior Chefetz: The idea came from an old children's book that my mother gave me for my 6th birthday. ADVENTURE IN THE SQUADRON by Oded Marom tells about two boys restoring an old fighter plane with the help



of their old pediatrician. As a child I loved that book, but I forgot all about it. 25 years later, coming home from film school for a summer vacation, I found it in my old library.

**The film opens with an air battle and ends with a spectacular air show.**

Chefetz: I love airplanes, especially Warbirds. Those World War II classic fighters are beautiful machines with a lot of history and human drama connected to them. SKY RAIDERS opens

with a dogfight between British Spitfires and German Messerschmitts over the English Channel, part of the famous Battle of Britain. In the end of the film again there is a Spitfire and a Messerschmitt, this time in a contemporary setting.

**How did you capture those scenes?**

Chefetz: The actors were filmed inside a fake cockpit, in front of a green screen. The cockpit was static – we didn't have the resources to put it on

a moving platform – with a moving light imitating the sun. The shadows moving across the actors' face create an illusion of the plane turning and rolling. For the exterior shots, in which you see the planes flying in the air, we had to create two elements: the backgrounds, which were filmed with the use of a drone, and the planes, which are mostly 3D models. Working with the actors was the least complicated part of the production. Amir Tessler and Hila Nathanzon were 13 and 15 and I didn't notice any difference from working with adult actors, except maybe a sugar rush after eating chocolate...

**Some of your locations are tickling my imagination: a warehouse full of planes, an airplane cemetery...**

Chefetz: I was hoping to film in a huge airplane cemetery like those in Arizona. But in Israel those places are in restricted military bases. However we found a small municipal airfield that had a few old planes scattered around. At first the managers didn't



want us there: a film crew with kids and an active airfield is not a good mix. But when he heard that we are doing a movie based on that children's book, he couldn't believe his ears – it had always been his favourite! From that point on we could do whatever we liked - shoot around the old planes, inside hangars, borrow an old engine and even film a crazy chase on the runway. We also had a couple of days in the Israeli Air Force Museum to film the two historic planes: the Black Spitfire and the only relic of an Israeli Messerschmitt. Then we scouted tons of hangars, until we found a very old oranges storehouse. It is rusty, has lots of echo and pigeons living in the rafters. We ended up using a lot of the pigeons' sound in the sound design.

**This is also the story of a mother and son dealing with a great loss.**

Chefetz: Writing about a child who lost his father is a classic cliché. However it's a strong tool to create emotional connection and motivate our hero, so I decided to keep it but make the character as specific as possible. If we gave the hero an emotional truth to motivate his actions, it could work. Yotam rather doesn't talk about his father, or only in a nonchalant way, as if it's not a big deal. The truth is



that he hasn't completely processed the loss, and buries it under layers of emotional protection.

**In the film I feel a great respect for what people create, craft or repair with their hands. As Morris says: "There's something special about old machines."**

Chefetz: I like antiques and hand-crafted things. But the idea that an old machine has a spirit came from the Japanese term "Kami" which are the spirits or "holy powers" that are venerated in the Shinto religion. I feel that old planes have some spirit in them as well, as each part was hand-crafted, and the cockpit is soaked with the

sweat of the many pilots that sat inside and took this machine into many daring adventures.

**I suppose there are female pilots in the national air force?**

Chefetz: For many years women could not serve as pilots in the Israel Air Force, and opening the course to women was not an easy change. The military opposed at first and only after a supreme court ruling 20 years ago, the course opened for women. Since then a handful of women managed to complete the course. Few other combat roles are still closed to women and currently debates are being held in the courts regarding this

issue. I support the right of any person to choose what they would like to do, regardless of their gender, so it was important for me to make a point about it and show how Noa can be as good of a pilot as anyone else.

**Have you made a film with a gigantic ecological footprint?**

Chefetz: That is a very important point. The struggle for our environment is crucial, and I support the young generation who fight to save the planet. I'm proud that we managed to make a movie about planes without a single airplane flying especially for our production. Every plane that takes off on the screen is a computer-generated 3D image. On a broader thought, one may ask if air shows are necessary in our time, as the planes burn so much fuel. Maintaining old planes in flying condition, preserving the technical knowledge of their operation, has its own cultural value. It is important to discuss how to protect the cultural heritage of aviation, while protecting our environment.

–  
Gert Hermans  
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## ECFA Journal

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ECFA's goal is to support cinema for children and youth in its cultural, economic, aesthetic, social, political and educational aspects. Since 1988 ECFA brings together a wide range of European film professionals and associations, producers, directors, distributors. ECFA aims to set up a working structure in every European country for films for children and young people, a structure adapted to Europe's multicultural interests.

For more information and memberships (€ 250 per year):

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Databases on children's film festivals, sales agents, distributors and TV-programmers interested in European films for children.

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