

Inesa Kurklietytė about A BUTTERFLY'S HEART

“Set free to happily fly to the meadows”

“Can I touch your heart?” That is what Rugile literally asks her new friend Juozapas, who was born with a bizarre condition: the boy carries his heart outside of his chest, protected by a special armour. Always careful and cautious, what Juozapas likes most is spending time in a deserted mansion, where he keeps his collection of bugs, beetles and butterflies, a secret he shares with nobody but Rugile. In return, she will help him to overcome the insensitivity of his tougher classmates. Summer seldom looks as sweet as in the Lithuanian countryside, in a film that breathes a delicate lyricism and carries the smell of wildflowers.

The story is set in a small village, where you can sense some kind of magical atmosphere. Is that the typical Lithuanian charm?

Inesa Kurklietytė: We did create a bit of extra fairy-tale-like atmosphere, with a mysterious mansion containing many secrets and a traditional town centre surrounded by beautiful nature; forests, fast flowing rivers, a

wooden bridge and flowering meadows, which are important elements in the life of our main character. The story is set in current times, however small towns in reality are quite empty these days, as people have all moved to the cities. There are colourful houses and funny old ladies gathering by the church. The local people know each other well and children have installed a social hierarchy among themselves, defining who is the boss, and who is a loser. Breaking free from those social structures is a challenge, but Juozapas succeeds and he can maybe inspire other kids in the audience to do the same. We actually combined three different locations, so even for Lithuanians it could be tricky to guess where the filming was done.

In this village there is the old mansion where Juozapas keeps his insect collection, and that looks unique both on the inside and the outside.

Kurklietytė: I found this abandoned Šumskas Mansion by the Belarus border, even before writing the film



script. It was an obvious choice. The building represents several hundred years of Lithuanian architectural heritage, and throughout two world wars and other historical tribulations, it has kept its extraordinary spirit. The crickets from the film still live there since we left, and in winter I was surprised to see butterflies seeking shelter on the icy walls of the mansion.

In this idyllic landscape, kids are playing: driving a tractor, riding their bicycles, playing pranks with the classic ‘wallet’ trick... How much did they like driving around in

cars and tractors?

Kurklietytė: We have been observing the games children are playing these days, and we consulted our young actors. It is surprising how some games have remained popular since the childhood days of me and my co-author Modesta Jurgaitytė. The young actors indeed learned to drive an old Russian Niva car and were totally excited about it. The rest was left to the magic of cinema and the skills of our stunt team. The professional details will forever remain a secret among our film crew.



As charming and spontaneous as she is, what makes Rugile look somehow 'unconventional'?

Kurklietytė: We needed a peculiar girl to stand up to the main character, to inspire him and "kick his ass". She needed to be brave and smart. Since her early childhood I have recognised my daughter's talent for acting; her father and grandmother are actors too. That is why I assigned Rugilė's role to my 10 year old daughter Vilnė, which I haven't regretted for one second.

In one scene she is wearing the unique "butterfly dress".

Kurklietytė: In our crew were gathered some of the best film professionals. Our costume designer Neringa Keršulytė already astounded many theatre audiences, and she surely did it again!

Juozapas and Rugile have a very natural, unspoiled way of being together, as if they immediately know they can trust each other (which is very rare at that age).

Kurklietytė: I have always admired those honest friendships between girls and boys, that are sometimes spoiled at the eve of adolescence. I am happy to hear that our actors Eli-



jus and Vilnė succeeded in conveying this connection, that had an important place in the script.

Dogs, cats, butterflies, bugs... Your set must have been one big animal farm. Were there any 'divas' among the insects?

Kurklietytė: Working with the animals was truly a challenge. We had a wonderful professional biologist, that we called our 'insect trainer' and to whom we are very grateful. He was in control of the butterflies and their 'stunt doubles', that were finally set free to happily fly to the meadows. Actually the audience can pick up a lot of information about the mysterious world of bugs and insects from this film.

There is this wonderful 'bug hotel'. Was it constructed especially for the film?

Kurklietytė: I saw my first bug hotel ever in Mannheim, Germany and I was carried away by this proof of human respect, taking care for nature. In the film, Juozapas has his own creation, a micro city, built by our designer Anžėlika Šulcaitė.

I'm trying to imagine all those fragrances on the set: the oranges, the boxes full of insects, the festive scene with the flowers...

Kurklietytė: In general, a child's senses (including the smell) will be experienced stronger, brighter, sharper. With our DoP Viktoras Radzevičius we

discussed how to convey the smells and colours of youth. As talented as he is, I think he managed. The scene with the flowers refers to the Lithuanian tradition to offer autumn flowers to the teachers on the 1st of September, celebrating the new school year. At the same time, this is a symbolic farewell to the joys of summer.

The film also traps the parents in the magic act of reading their children a bedtime story.

Kurklietytė: I have three daughters; I know all about the importance of reading together. I remember my parents' voices from my childhood – pure magic! I wish that we all could find the time to read with our children more often.

If you'd be an insect, which one would you be?

Kurklietytė: My mother once asked me this question. I answered her, a butterfly who has just crawled out from its cocoon and has not spread its wings yet. This is exactly how I feel nowadays, on the eve of the world premiere of A BUTTERFLY'S HEART.

–

Gert Hermans

Festival contact: Renate Zylla,
RZylla@arcor.de