

Linda Hambäck about THE APE STAR

Cheaper for the poor, expensive for the rich

Jonna, a well-behaving orphan girl, dreams of finding a mother. That wish might come true when one day a gorilla comes knocking, asking to adopt her. It's not an typical situation, but ultimately they are having great times together. The odd couple naturally arouses suspicion among the decent citizens in town, but Jonna and Gorilla will gracefully disprove all prejudice, in a moving Swedish animated film by Linda Hambäck (GORDON & PADDY). Although Jonna is brave enough to drive a car, the story begins... with a bicycle!

Do you remember what it was like to learn to ride a bicycle?

Linda Hambäck: Yes, I had a red bike and my dad kept on running after me. I didn't know how to turn or how to stop; I just had to yell for him once the road ended. Finally I learned how to do it, to my parents' happiness and relief.

Throughout the film quiet and modest Jonna turns into a girl who

knows what she's fighting for.

Hambäck: For me Jonna always was an observer, with remarkable integrity. Due to her good upbringing at the orphanage, she has her feet firmly on the ground. Now she is getting curious how it would be like to have a real mom or dad. This fuels her curiosity for the world outside the orphanage.

There is quite a bit of speculation with real estate going on in the film! Do you have a personal feud with real estate agents?

Hambäck: No, but I do have a strong political interest and it is crucial for our society not to be determined by capitalism. Like the interesting vision on "fair trade" introduced at Gorilla's flea market: cheaper for the poor, expensive for the rich!

Having a monkey as a mother... In your story it is not an obvious option, but it's plausible anyway. Did you set a limit for yourself as to the absurdity of the story?

Hambäck: For Frida Nilsson, the au-



thor of the original book, Gorilla was the impersonation of her father. He is a special person; her 'personal Gorilla'. As for me, I have always liked working with animals, and through animation it becomes fairly easy to blend and integrate them into my world. For me, not everything needs an explanation; that is the magic of animation.

How did you give shape to a character as plump as a gorilla? How did you compose her facial expression,

despite the confusing positioning of her eyes and nostrils?

Hambäck: Our character designer Maria Nilsson Thore is the author and illustrator of several superb children's books; I just love her way of portraying bodies in her early works. Then Elinor Bergman further elaborated all characters in a way so that they could be animated. We paid a lot of attention to facial expressions; for instance when taking a closer look at Gorilla, you'll notice her eyes are not





the same size, just to make her more characteristic. I don't like perfection, I love a design with a twist.

The animation style has drastically changed compared to your previous film GORDON & PADDY. How do you decide what design a story needs?

Hambäck: To be honest... This time we had a bigger budget, so we could expand our universe. I did a lot of research with art directors Ola Larsson and Morten Lund Thulstrup, circling around for months and then closing in, until we had really defined our universe. It took me and Ola six months of research before we got anything up on the table. I kept Edward Hopper in mind as a reference – even though you probably wouldn't notice it in the final result. I always keep some works

of art in mind for inspiration, to make my film move into a certain direction.

You picture the orphanage as a place of dedication, which is probably closer to the truth than the horrifying image we often find in traditional literature.

Hambäck: Our orphanage is not a horrible place to grow up, and honestly, I'm fed up with that classic image, maybe because I myself was adopted. Even though I wasn't brought up in an orphanage, still I presume there are many great institutions in this world, doing a wonderful job. This is the story of a girl longing for a mother, but finding a gorilla instead. When Jonna signs her letter with "Jonna, daughter of Gorilla", that is our tribute to the motherly love that we embrace.



The story contains more than one reference to Charles Dickens. Is that inevitable in a film about orphans?

Hambäck: I suppose so. All great stories leave a mark on us. We carry them with us and sow little pieces of inspiration in the new stories we construct.

The music in THE APE STAR is modest and subtle.

Hambäck: Music is one of the key elements in the creation of my films. It took me so long to find the right composers; I tried and listened to so many of them but more and more I felt lost. Until one day, in the south of Sweden where I have my summerhouse, I went to a jazz concert. Listening to Minna Weurlander and Tania Naranjo, I knew right away this duo would be perfect for the film. We worked closely to-

gether for over a year and they were pure magic. I simply love their score!

–
Gert Hermans

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