



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

interviews

Raise the Bar

My Dad is a Sausage

**Martin and the Magical
Forest**

I, Julia

Lame-os

Journal

No. 1 | 2022

February

Photo: Raise the bar

www.ecfaweb.org

3 RAISE THE BAR

Interview

6 MY DAD IS A SAUSAGE

Interview

9 SUN CHILDREN

Interview

10 I, JULIA

Interview

12 Recommended by Eva Novrup Redvall

ECFA'S Academic Committee

14 MARTIN AND THE MAGICAL FOREST

Interview

16 FILMS ON THE HORIZON**18 Ewa Karlström**

Meet the Mentors

20 TO VANCOUVER

Short Cut

16 FILMS ON THE HORIZON**21 Mythos**

Youngsters make films

22 KIDS ARE FINE

Interview

24 Firdoze Bulbulia

Festival interview

26 VALENTINA

Interview

27 LAME-OS

Interview

Bye Bye Big Catalogue

I grew up in the tradition of “big catalogue festivals”. The relevance of events was often measured by the size of their catalogue, which I dragged back home afterwards in the shape of an extra kilo of luggage. We’re proud to count those big catalogue festivals among our members, unlocking the international production market for us all.

But we are equally excited to see a new type of festival popping up. Small-scaled initiatives, based on social commitment with a profound impact on the lives of people in their city or region. Civil responsibility is the basis for many of these organisations, who are using film and media education as their most important tools. The social network in which they operate comes with specific responsibilities and obligations, which might raise some new obligations for ECFA from now on.

This trend stood out during ECFA’s extraordinary AGM at the Zlin Film Festival, where we met several of our new members and were touched by their enthusiasm and passion. As is the case in a healthy organisation, it is the new, young members who challenge the established values and point out new evolutions. The new batch of ECFA members are fully engaged in this, and we are extremely grateful for that.

Last autumn the ECFA Board gathered in Oslo for the Abloom festival, which has made diversity and

inclusion its main reasons for existence. We saw how far some of our members have gone in their dedication towards audiences whose way to the cinema is often blocked by seemingly insurmountable obstacles. We were confronted with the new responsibilities that await ECFA in these times, and we want to take them up with pride and pleasure. A new intention, which I hope you will recognise in the coming months not only in the pages of the ECFA Journal, but also in the work of ECFA as a contemporary and committed organisation.

We hope to be able to discuss these resolutions with you very soon at ECFA’s Annual General Meeting.

–
Gert Hermans

Gudjon Ragnarsson about RAISE THE BAR “I felt like walking into an NBA game”

If controversy is the mother of a good documentary, **RAISE THE BAR** is of good breeding, burdening you with sky high dilemmas. Whichever side you choose, you never know whether you have chosen well. **RAISE THE BAR** may disguise itself as a sports movie, but constantly tests your guilty conscience as we follow the development of an Icelandic girls' basketball team. Their training programme is intense, and they are led by an over-qualified coach who constantly raises the bar. This team is ready to change the world, but is the world ready for them?

How to start an interview when a film addresses a dozen topics, and you find them all equally intriguing? Probably by asking the most obvious question of them all...

What is this film about?

Gudjon Ragnarsson: It is about a young girls' basketball team that has the goal to change the paradigm in which girls are coached. As adults we

have the pre-assumption that they're young, they want to have fun, but with these girls, when they were about 10 years old, a lightbulb just went off in their head and they understood things weren't right: we're treated differently than the boys! Their coach Brynjar Karl Sigurðsson is a charismatic character. There are scenes in which he addresses them as if they were a group of CEO's, and the girls are listening and taking it in. Many children around the world are heavily involved with sports at a very young age. Some parents think of it as babysitting, but some don't. The movie is not about basketball, it's about a group of people trying to do something about a problem, not talking or whining about it, but actually doing something.

How much do you admire Brynjar?

Ragnarsson: I admire him for his experience, his dedication and I admire him as a father. For five years I have spent almost every day together with him (I knew that I had to be in the innermost circle to hold the camera

in someone's crying face) and I have never in my life seen a more intimate and beautiful relationship between a father and his children. They trust him implicitly. People who see him yelling during tournaments might think he is a terrible father, but the moment the game is whistled off he goes back to his normal self. It is all theatre to him.

When you gave him a platform, you knew what was coming?

Ragnarsson: Controversy! I knew it and he knew it too. That is what got me hooked on it.

You recognised it in him from the very beginning?

Ragnarsson: After I finished my studies in Los Angeles I was looking for a reason to go back to Iceland. That is when a friend back home sent me a text: 'I met a guy and I have to introduce you to him'. I took all my clothes and sold them at Goodwill; with those 300 \$ I bought a ticket to New York and asked my parents to get me a ticket back home. Three days later



my friend introduced me to Brynjar in his tiny office, and we sat down and talked for hours. How was it possible I never knew who this guy was? He had an amazing background as a basketball player and coach. When I called him a few days later, he didn't have time to talk - "I'm about to go to practice. I'm coaching my daughter and her friends." That didn't make sense. Wasn't he overqualified to coach seven-year-old girls? I went to see it, and my first reaction was that I was





witnessing something really wrong – he was yelling at them so loud. But they were running around, smiling. After practice everybody was just happy and cheerful. I thought this was the most interesting thing I had ever seen, and it needed to be documented. So I filmed 10 practises over the course of half a year, not knowing what I was going to do with it – documentaries hadn't even entered my mind as of me making them. Then I went to film school in Iceland. There was a documentary course and I told my teacher I had hours of footage of this crazy coach and his team. When he watched it, he said: *"You're lucky, you don't have to pick a project, you*

already have one."

The result was a student short film?

Ragnarsson: It went to a festival and got so much controversy that I had to take it off the internet because there were people "losing their shit" over it. I sent it to producer Margrét Jónasdóttir, and she liked it; this could become a small, local production with an initial €20,000 budget. But then I filmed them when they put on their pink hoodies to protest against gender inequality in sports, and the day after the reaction was so harsh! They were lynched for it. That moment I knew this was an international story and the budget went from €20,000 to

€350,000.

Did you realise there was a danger in giving Brynjar a forum? He might turn into a kind of guru for the kids working with him.

Ragnarsson: For me, there is nothing in the film that endangers anyone, but when it's taken out of context... Oh boy! There were harsh moments when he was really hard on them, that I had to take out of the film, because they demanded too much explanation. This was a difficult film to edit, but the final version puts out a lot of good questions and hopefully starts a healthy discussion. The scene in which he tells them not to just follow their friends, is an incredible lesson that I would have loved to hear at that age. He says: there are times I will force you to criticise everything that I'm saying, as I don't want you to become robots.

Parents react in different ways to his methods.

Ragnarsson: Dealing with the parents was one of the biggest obstacles for me. I also had very hostile interactions with parents on other teams. That was the most traumatic aspect, when they came up to me and said nasty things, like how I seemed to enjoy filming young girls. Sports tour-

naments can bring out the worst in people, especially when their kid is losing a game. At one time I was even banned from every tournament in Iceland. I can understand one aspect of it, me filming those kids and nobody knows my true intentions, but those were difficult moments.

Some parents are shocked by the language Brynjar is using. What shocked me more is how he motivates girls by making them trash talk to each other during practice.

Ragnarsson: You don't have to teach this to boys, they obviously have it in their nerve system. But he wanted to find out if these little girls had it in them too, and they did, although he told them not to do it in a game. When Brynjar was invited to a panorama show on Icelandic TV, the interviewer asked him: *"Do you think every coach in Iceland should use your methods?"* Of course not! He has been developing them for 31 years. You can't screw around with them if you don't know what you're doing.

Already when watching the opening scenes, I was totally captivated by the intensity that you read on these girls' faces.

Ragnarsson: The first practice I watched in, I felt like walking into an



NBA game; there was electricity in the air. They are playing for different reasons than any other kids I've seen in sports. They aren't doing it to chase fame and fortune. They do it for themselves. Making this film made me lose all interest in professional sports. Watching billionaires play football, I don't get anything out of it. The stakes are too low; they're being paid millions to tighten their shoes. But these girls have a new team now, and recruited a bunch of new players. Some of them are living far away, driving 1,5 hours every day to come to practice in a run-down facility in the countryside, because the federation doesn't grant them a venue for training. Isn't that the perfect Hollywood underdog story?

A similar intensity Brynjar invests in this fight about girls competing with boys. It is the moment in the film when his profile changes. He is not just a maniac basketball coach, he is someone who fights with a huge intensity for the things that he believes in.

Ragnarsson: I wanted people to be shocked at first, and then they get to know him during the film and make their own assumption, after they've heard his speech: *"We'll have nail polish, red lipstick, and we'll be dressed in*



pink, and we're gonna kick these boys' butts." He hates the system!

Basketball doesn't seem the easiest sport to capture on camera.

Ragnarsson: To me that was a thing I hit myself in the head with. I had to bring in a professional photographer to do the beauty shots. But I decided very early on that with the cheap equipment that I had, I would just focus on the girls, the bench, the locker rooms... To me the games and how they went, that isn't the part of the story I wanted to tell. That's why almost every frame is a close-up, from chest to forehead. I told every cinematographer working with me: when-

ever you have the chance, stay close. The result doesn't look perfect but it feels personal, rough and in your face, and I wanted it to be like that.

Imagine a bunch of kids in sports clubs coming to the cinema, what should they take home after the screening?

Ragnarsson: The idea to be critical thinkers about what you want to take with you from sports. There is a scene that puts it all in one box, when Tanya says: *"When I'll stop playing, the basketball isn't going to matter anymore, it is what I take with me from it."* I've talked with lots of women who have devoted their entire lives to the world

of sports, and came out of it as broken people. They've been stepped on, they've been treated badly as women in very subtle ways. It has always been different for men, and it still is. I'm coloured with years of listening to Brynjar, but a lot of the things he says are true. My instinct as a person is not to go to see women compete – I'm not afraid to admit it – but if I'd find a girls' team that makes a statement like *"we're going to scratch their eyes out and we're going to win this game"* I might want to go see that game and pay for it. Because I know they are not there for the pay cheque. They're paying with their own sweat, tears and blood. Or maybe not the blood.

You wish!

Ragnarsson: I do!

–
Gert Hermans

Anouk Fortunier about MY DAD IS A SAUSAGE

“With a silly title like this, the content had to be extra strong”

When dad decides to give up his steady job as a banker to become an actor, the family is perplexed and not exactly pleased. Is it a burnout? A midlife crisis? His youngest daughter Zoë is the only one who believes her dad is an aspiring star, and joins him in his quest. Even if that makes her skip school. While father and daughter are constantly out and about together, the confusion about their role and responsibilities in the family grows out of hand.

Debuting Belgian director Anouk Fortunier observes the warm scenes between father and daughter as well as the painful confrontations with the outside world, and even a maddening sausage suit doesn't keep her from delivering a subtle portrait of a family in decline.

Did you ever consider the ramifications of such a great title?

Anouk Fortunier: When the producer suggested this title, I really liked it, but I was also worried that it would be a bit over the top. It was a motivation

for me to make it a super powerful film; with a silly title like this, the content had to be extra strong.

MY DAD IS A SAUSAGE is an observation through the eyes of the youngest child in the house.

Fortunier: Her siblings are busy growing up, already conditioned in their thinking and their behaviour while Zoe is still a child. Her gaze is pure, and she is still connected with her intuition. From that position she feels that something in this family is not right.

Although she is still a child, there is a harrowing loneliness about her.

Fortunier: Zoë has a rich inner world and no way to express those thoughts than through her drawings. Just like in my short film DRÔLE D'OISEAU, there is in her a love for her father that is so big that she even protects him. As small as she is, sometimes she is more mature than him. I wondered whether such a child who takes on the caring role for her father could be justified from a pedagogical point



of view. That's why I made sure there was also something in it for her – she can skip school! She does it not only for her dad, but also for herself.

What brings them together?

Fortunier: Their creativity, their doubts and their loneliness. She doesn't feel well at school, just like he doesn't feel well at work.

Is dad's persistence brave or just pitiful?

Fortunier: I really wanted Johan

Heldenbergh for this role, because he carries that insecurity, that clumsiness inside him. That sausage was not at all to be bland! How to ensure that a man in a sausage suit doesn't look like plain slapstick? After all, for Zoë, that silly sausage costume is just as impressive as a superhero suit; it is her father's ultimate goal.

How did you make sure there was enough space for the daughter in her father's story?

Fortunier: That was an issue that we



had to elaborate in the screenplay. That's why we use those animations; they fill the gap when Zoë's voice is missing. I worked on them together with animator Pascale Petterson. Our brainstorming in her attic room while cutting endless supplies of animation eyes were a blissful process. For example, Pascale had drawn our rocket way too technically, but then we called on her children to recreate that drawing, and so we created the right universe for those animations. That artisanal character was very important; it wasn't supposed to look perfectly streamlined.

Why wasn't it burnout? At least that's what dad keeps saying.

Fortunier: Zoë's teenage brother and sister are categorical: Dad has burnout. But actually it is mainly his cry for attention: look at me, and see me as I really am! I recently read that a burnout has almost become a normalised phase of life, that is hardly questioned anymore. There are positive sides to burnout. Your head may still want to move forward, but if your body and your gut feeling are screaming 'halt', it all stops. You can't keep rationalising everything. That's why the first COVID lockdown came as a relief for some, like a mandatory, collective burnout.

Today we see new types of fathers emerging in children's films. I think your film is the ultimate example of this because of the depth you give to the interpretation of fatherhood.

Fortunier: In the original scenario, dad was a lot more clumsy, leaving behind



some collateral damage. I've toned that down because I want to keep believing in him; he's not just an idiot. For example, he does a really good audition even though he doesn't get the part. It's not about his success as an actor, it's about the development he

goes through, the process, and how it affects his daughter and family.

Did the film make you question your own father-daughter relationship?

Fortunier: Sure. I recognised the daughter who protects her father,

along with your thoughts and philosophies, but now can you just explain to me how to fill out a tax return?

You could have turned Zoe's mother into an "evil witch", and you sometimes get close to it, but in the end it doesn't happen.

Fortunier: She has her own ideas about how to lead a good life: stability, wealth, a steady job etc. The film shows where that vision comes from: it is what she learned at home from her father and now she is repeating his words; she thinks this is what will make her happy. The moment when she finds Zoë's notebook is crucial: that is the moment when she comes to an understanding.

That way you show a lot of understanding and compassion for people.

Fortunier: There's no such thing as the good guy and the bad guy. Why did the bad guy turn bad? What is his pain? Why does he do the things he does? That's how I look at the people and things around me.

In the most blissful scenes you can feel the dynamics crackling within that family.

Fortunier: Each one of them is stuck on his little island and feels the rut





within the family, but all express it in a different way. One flees into perfectionism, the other into anxiety neuroses, and Zoë has her drawings to cling on to. They all have their personal survival mechanism.

That also brings some liveliness to those cool, sleekly designed interiors.

Fortunier: I imagined the atmosphere in the house of this wealthy family and expected it to be white and cold and very structured. The scenes in the theatre were shot with a lively camera, but in the living room we always used a tripod - clean and clinical. But the more daddy follows his dreams,

the more clutter and colour enters the picture.

I suspect you to be an excellent actors' director. After ROSIE & MOUS-SA, Savannah Vandendriessche is now fully blossoming, and so are her brother and sister.

Fortunier: Even though they had little acting experience. We worked a lot, rehearsed a lot and talked a lot. Also with the adult actors, we discussed relationships and how they experience their parenthood. Moreover, I can sense whether or not someone is completely 'in' a scene. Sometimes an actor says a line but I feel that his eyes and body are not there. Then I shut-

down the scene and we try to reconnect the actors with their characters. I am very tenacious: I won't stop until I get what I want.

My favourite is Dimitri, the boy with the violin.

Fortunier: Isn't he a cutie? He was actually Zoe's sister's best friend, for real. I saw him enter the audition and immediately knew: that's the one! Johan Heldenbergh was a huge help; he is so passionate and helped the young actors to get the best out of themselves.

You had the guts to use the first 5 minutes of your film for a long monologue, very present and very verbal.

Fortunier: Thanks to screenwriter Jean-Claude Van Rijckeghem! I had my doubts about that voice-over, and we had ongoing fights about it. The movie apparently needed it, and once you get into the story, you're willing to forgive that laborious introduction.

Were those sausage scenes shot in public?

Fortunier: They were! Everyone in the street looked up astounded at a sausage suit passing by; people even started taking pictures of that cycling sausage. Zoë was really scared on the

bike. If you would zoom in on her face in that first image, you can read the sheer fear in her eyes. It makes me feel a little guilty.

Are you afraid of your own big dreams?

Fortunier: I used not to be. That's why I dared to accept a film like SAUSAGE when it was offered to me. But I was also naive; making a film is tough and sooner or later you'll get knocked around. Yet I believe that you should keep dreaming, even if it is only about small things. Achieving something that is truly yours, that was not imposed on you by others, is what I believe brings the greatest happiness.

-
Gert Hermans

Majidi Majidi about SUN CHILDREN

“Dreams flying up in the sky like pigeons”

12 year old Ali is handling his business in the streets of Tehran, walking and talking like a grown man. With his nose in so many (slightly criminal) cases, he is like a juggler keeping too many balls up in the air. One day he and his friends are hired for a mission: it is said that a treasure is hidden in the underground river, underneath a school building. Only by enrolling into that school, they might have a chance of getting their hands on the valuable goods. For a boy like Ali, school might be an even more challenging environment than the city streets.

Majidi: The story stands close to the life of main actor Rouhollah Zamani's, who had always worked as a child labourer. That is why he perfectly understood his role and why his body language looks so credible. In fact all young actors had similar backgrounds. Engaging them in this film was a positive thing - we added their life's experience to the story, and offered them something in return.

When the boys talk about their

dreams, they sound very practical. They don't dream of a sports car or a trip to Disneyland. They dream of having their own falafel shop or car wash.

Majidi: These are common dreams for child labourers. Regarded as poor nobodies, they have a big desire to prove themselves successful in the eyes of the world. By making this film, we did not only change their lives but also their dreams. They don't dream about money or cars anymore, they dream of becoming good actors. And they succeed. Rouhollah and the others are now involved in other film and TV projects. Now that people treat them with more respect, they are even motivated to continue their studies.

When a girl in the film is arrested, you are suggesting more than you actually show about how she is treated.

Majidi: She might get fined, or scolded, sometimes they might cut off her hair, but in my opinion state officers shouldn't act like that. We should help them to study, to learn a trade

and find a job. This is the ambition of the “School of Sun”. Such institutions are often financed through gifts. By showing this film in Iran and abroad, we grant them extra visibility.

You regularly ‘open up’ the imagination, having your camera looking up to the sky, to the roof of the shopping centre, the pigeons, the school bags flying over the wall...

Majidi: That is how children let their dreams fly up in the sky. Like pigeons high up in the air, there are no boundaries to their dreams.

The courtyard of the garage, the doors and windows, the housing block of the Afghan family... all your colours are rich and intense.

Majidi: The colours in this film are like characters, guiding us through the story and adding an extra layer of sensitivity. Some of these locations were real, others were constructed for the film. Some might look like black and white, like the lives of the main characters, but under a golden sun they grow rich in colours.



How did you shoot the final scenes in the underground canal?

Majidi: An underground river was constructed for the film. Working conditions there were extremely tough for all of us; me, the actors, the DoP... I had to descend through a narrow hole and into the canal to give instructions, with hardly room to move. Those were the most challenging days on the set.

–
Gert Hermans

Arvin Kananian about I, JULIA

Don't talk about it to others; this is a family matter

This year the Olympia Festival campaigned actively to draw attention to women's rights, and the prevention of abuse and ill-treatment (see Page 13). One of the festival titles underlining this ambition was the Swedish short film I, JULIA, about a 14 year old girl, living what seems to be a normal life, but there is a darkness growing, as her father controls the family with physical and mental abuse. The jury granted the film the ECFA Short Award and wondered what enabled director Arvin Kananian to capture so precisely the mechanisms behind that suffocating terror.

Arvin Kananian: The Agera Women's Shelter in Sweden contacted my producer Mistre Tesfaye and me regarding making a film with a certain educational input. At an early stage, we decided to write from the perspective of a child with a violent father, involved in a case of physical and mental abuse. We wouldn't show any act of violence – the moment you see it, you might shut off your emotions; we wanted to put your imagination to

work. Mistre and I started working on a couple of stories that we discussed with the people from the shelter, and then decided about one storyline to be further developed.

What could be the role of a child in the process described in I, JULIA?

Kananian: The bond between two parents will not easily be broken. Swedish laws value the family as an entity, even if a father's violent behaviour has traumatised all family members. One of the main reasons why women would leave their partner is for the sake of the children, and one common reason why they would return to him is for the sake of the children too. Statistically it takes on average six attempts of leaving, before a woman actually manages to leave for good. Often the children are the first to realise their living conditions aren't normal. Even if only one child recognises the situation in I, JULIA, realising what is going on at home is not normal, and then finds someone to talk to, then we've completed our mission. Seeing this film can be an in-



centive to take action. This is what we hope to achieve, now that the film is going to be screened in schools across the country.

And what could be the role for women's shelters like Agera?

Kananian: Agera is a local initiative, offering help to women in abusive relationships. Here they can escape with their children and stay for a while, adapting again to a normal lifestyle, and being offered therapy.

Wasn't it surprising they asked a male director for the job?

Kananian: Socio-politically it can be considered weird, but for me personally it didn't feel like that. I've been collecting all required information to honestly write someone else's story. For three months we absorbed as much information as possible through books and articles, we spoke with people at shelters and their lawyers, we met women who actually lived such stories. Our story combines sev-



eral of those cases.

What were the striking elements you came across in your research?

Kananian: That it happens so often, and on all levels of society. So many have been living in abusive relationships for many years, without seeing a way to escape. I never realised how many children are traumatised, normalising the abuse as “this is how parents behave”. Julia leads a double life: there is the abusive life at home, while among friends she acts as if nothing is wrong. For many years she has just normalised the situation, while this film emphasises: it isn’t normal at all!

Julia can keep up the façade perfectly well, keeping her situation a secret for the outside world. What is the mental mechanism behind that?

Kananian: Basically she wants to protect her parents, which is normal at that age. Often parents will assure that things are okay - “Don’t talk about it to others; this is a family matter, and it is okay like this.” While dad is bribing her with expensive presents, her mother is paralysed by shame.

The father’s viewpoint is hard to elaborate on. What goes on in the

mind of the perpetrator can’t be understood through reason or rationality.

Kananian: I guess jealousy might often be at the basis of it all. This seems to transcend our comprehension, but I think it doesn’t; the foundation of it might be something that we all carry inside us. We all know these dark feelings of jealousy, but most of us have a way to shut them off.

For an actor this must have been a tough role to play.

Kananian: Olle Sarri realised this role was important to truthfully depict a situation. I wanted him not to hate his character. We talked a lot about jealousy, and about the ways the father has found to blame his wife for a relationship gone wrong. This seems absurd, but it is his way of understanding the situation.

How was it to work with Ylvali Rurling on her wonderful performance as Julia?

Kananian: It was easy, because Ylvali is so good! I’m an actor myself, so I guess I speak the actors’ language. Already during rehearsals, she understood her character perfectly well and got into it really quickly. Ylvali is super smart!

How did you use the camera to build up a tension that is continuously growing tighter, until the audience feels like choking?

Kananian: We used a well-known tool among kids of Julia’s age: as an aspiring youtuber, she films herself with a mobile phone. In Julia’s daily routine, we established a certain feeling of uncomfortableness. Even when all seems to be normal, you feel something is playing underneath, for example through the image of a broken glass. When her father comes home and starts asking questions, you wonder why this makes her feel so nervous, even while clinging on to her YouTube façade. I wanted to jump in and out of those two different worlds she’s living in.

If not woken up by her teacher, Julia might have never even thought about an escape. Are there any helpful mechanisms implemented in the Swedish school structure?

Kananian: There are, but it can always be improved. Teachers need to be educated in how to recognise it, and how to cope with it.

We should not give away the ending, but we can say it balances between hope and despair.

Kananian: I fought hard for that end-



Director Arvin Kananian

ing. My point was: it is just not that simple. It is not like you realise what is going on, then you leave, and then you’re done. In reality, things work differently. Meanwhile we have finished a new film in cooperation with the Agera Women’s Shelter. It is not a sequel to I, JULIA, but it tells about the next step in a young girl’s journey.

–
Gert Hermans

As recommended by Eva Novrup Redvall

Research from the Reaching Young Audiences research project and material from the Children's Media Foundation as selected by Associate Professor Eva Novrup Redvall from the University of Copenhagen.



Within the ECFA Academic Committee researchers, academics, and experts are gathering with one mission: to provide better access to inspiring data and research reports for youth film professionals on the workforce. In every edition of the ECFA Journal, you'll get to know one of the Committee members and the research projects they recently curated for the ECFA website's Knowledge section.

I. Catch up with Eva Novrup Redvall

Why are you the right person to be a member of the ECFA Academic Committee?

I was honoured to be asked, since ECFA is an important association that we follow closely as part of our research project. In the Reaching Young Audiences project I try to keep track of the latest academic research as well as main industry trends and discussions in both film and television fiction for young audiences. Having regular meetings with the colleagues on the committee is a great way to exchange knowledge, also learning from other fields working with children.

"Research is something for books and reports." Not true! Research can also be implemented on a practical level in our work. Do you have suggestions on how this could be done? My main field of study is screenwriting and production studies, meaning that I have always been interested in studying how practitioners work. For me, this research always involves trying to give something back to practi-



tioners and the industry, for instance in meetings, talks or workshops. I'm convinced that there is great value in having a close dialogue between scholars and industry practitioners. For instance, it seems like many people outside of academia have found my previous research on writing and producing Danish television drama or issues of film education useful in practical screenwriting and production contexts, which feels very rewarding.

Name one person, alive or dead, famous or obscure, that you would consider a valuable member of this committee, and why?

Astrid Lindgren! Her books are an

endless source of inspiration. There's a beauty and simplicity to her writing and yet she deals with big and important issues that are still relevant to children and adults today – and probably always will be. Her work is marked by a wonderful sense of humour and humanity, two important aspects in life. I have a coffee mug with one of her quotes on my desk: "Give the children love, more love and even more love, and then common sense will come by itself." I think she would have been incredibly inspiring to engage in conversations about the current media landscape and the life of children today.



There is this theory that everybody working with media education has a strong film-related memory from their childhood. Do you have one that still influences your professional approach?

I saw a lot of Scandinavian fiction as a child, but I remember watching François Truffaut's LES QUATRE CENT COUPS in school and being completely fascinated by its portrayal of Antoine Doinel's world and its approach towards storytelling, ending with the famous shot of Antoine by the sea. I wrote a very long school paper on the film and started watching other French films and took up French because of this cinematic encounter. Truffaut's nouvelle vague classic and Roman Polanski's short film TWO MEN AND A WARDROBE are probably the main reasons why I ended up in film studies. I often think about them when reminding myself where it all started and how film and TV storytelling can have a lasting impact on our view of the world and our lives.

II. For the ECFA Academic Committee Eva Novrup Redvall curated...

...the research project 'Reaching Young Audiences: Serial Fiction and Cross-Media Storyworlds for Children and Young Audiences' (RYA), that combines production and audience analysis when studying the current production, distribution and reception of film, TV and online fiction for young audiences. The project is based at the University of Copenhagen with me as Project Leader and runs from 2019–2024 (supported by Independent Research Fund Denmark). Several publications coming out of the project have been selected for the ECFA website, most recently [a report on quality audiovisual fiction as seen through the eyes of 8-17 year old Danish children](#), an article on new strategies for educating talent for children's film and television from *Film Education Journal* and an [editorial](#) on writing for children in a special issue of *Journal of Screenwriting*.

About the RYA research project

In the RYA research project we started by focusing mostly on television fiction, but there are several different strands of research between the

scholars in the project team which is reflected in the selection of publications on the project website. I have pointed people in the direction of the important work of the UK based non profit organisation The Children's Media Foundation which brings together academic researchers, the children's content industry, regulators, and politicians. The Foundation recently published the report [Our Children's Future](#) (2021) which focuses on public service media, but also contains many valuable points for people with an interest in children's cinema.

A few conclusions...

Several of the studies that I have been part of selecting, point to current changes, for instance in how to think of what people should learn to be able to tell engaging stories for children today, or in the way that public service broadcasters think of quality content for children. As recently evidenced by the UK government's decision to not continue the Young Audiences Content Fund beyond its three year pilot stage, there are many major discussions and challenges related to both the funding and making of content at the moment. While the worlds of children's film and television can sometimes seem far apart, I



think there is great value in trying to learn from best practice and having a close dialogue across formats, genres and borders.

Petr Oukropec about MARTIN AND THE MAGICAL FOREST

“Classic fairy tales contain crucial information about growing up”

This summer, city boy Martin is sent to a forest camp. Sleeping in tents, eating from a field kitchen, daily morning gymnastics... life couldn't get more terrible than this! Oh yes, it could. The forest has secrets to hide, and Martin is the first one to discover the mysterious creatures that dwell here by night: elves, squeaking branches, fighting cones all willing to leave their hiding places and pick a fight as they prepare an uprising against the mining company taking over the forest. Instead of a horror story about nature's cruel revenge, Czech producer and director Petr Oukropec made **MARTIN AND THE MAGICAL FOREST** as a playful environmental comedy about a boy who starts seeing the world through a different eye.

THE BLUE TIGER, telling a story about saving the environment, was located in the city. Your new film has a similar message, but takes us into the forest.

Petr Oukropec: Both films tell about the activism of children preserving a place of beauty. **MARTIN AND THE**

MAGICAL FOREST has a rather classic approach towards nature, that is depicted as fragile but at the same time wild and untamed. In her script, Kateřina Kačerovská used the classic fairy tale archetypes with a contemporary twist, for instance in the dynamics between boys and girls. The girls are open-minded and empathic, they are more open to magic and more determined to solve the problem.

What is your personal relationship with nature?

Oukropec: Growing up as a city boy, I've been spending every holiday in the village, where my friends took me into the forest. As an adult I returned to those places. I started working as a producer at an early age, but took a break after a few years to raise a family in a small village.

Already very early in the film you give us a clue about those forest creatures. With a classical build up it would have taken us much longer before picking up a glimpse of them.



Oukropec: From the very first moment I wanted to create a mystery through the use of tiny elements: a few leaves, a flower, a breeze blowing through the grass. It catches your attention and makes you wonder what it is exactly that might come to life.

For a pine cone hanging from a tree, all you need is two eyes to make it look alive.

Oukropec: The design of those creatures was a joint effort by the writer,

a team of animators and me. We created a versatile and organic world – a universe that looks real but created by human hands. We used several types of animation to create different layers of visual effects, combining puppets, stop-motion and classic camera effects with 2D and 3D animation. A part of the magic was visible on the set; we wanted to confront the young actors with nature's mysteries and capture their honest reactions. Whenever we brought them face to face



with a puppet, put in motion through strings or remote controls, a surprised smile appeared on their faces.

Martin is not questioning these creatures' existence.

Oukropec: Kids are accepting much more than we are. Martin is surprised for a moment, but then accepts them and starts using them to his own benefit. At first, he is the only one to see them. Only after a while he is joined by the girl named 'Little Fox' who loves reading, as books might stimulate your imagination.

Even if those creatures look kind of cute, nature can also act strong and determined.

Oukropec: Nature is responding to us; it is reacting to human behaviour. These tiny creatures are not powerful enough to change the world by themselves, but they know what they want – a flower is more than just a fragile object of beauty!

Little Fox does not only believe in fairy tales, she almost lives them.

Oukropec: It is inspiring for children to read the classic fairy tales, that will tell you about organising your life, and about obstacles you might face. I guess children nowadays do not read them anymore.

Not even in the Czech Republic?!

Oukropec: You would be surprised. Not as much as our generation did, and certainly not the classics, that contain crucial information about growing up (which was the original purpose of fairy tales). That information often got lost in the animated adaptations that kids nowadays might know. They'd better read the original stories or – even better – have them read to them by their grandma, or father or big sister. And then once you're able to do it yourself, you can read them again and grow up with them.

Do you have a favourite?

Oukropec: Oh my, I'm not prepared for this question! I find them all truly inspiring. Sometimes when working on a script, I consult them to set straight my dramaturgy, as part of the script editing process. But I'm not a fan of today's Czech TV fairy tales, with ongoing new princess variations. They have become a franchise. We're the last country on earth where this kind of storytelling is still popular, although the scripts are too obvious, and they miss out on the true mystery and the classic archetypes.

You shot the film in a typical Czech



forest.

Oukropec: The main scenes were shot in a forest near my house. There is a camping place where we stayed for three weeks.

Camping?

Oukropec: Surely! I wanted to make the situation feel real for the children and capture some authentic feelings of friendship. For three weeks we organised a parallel programme of outdoor activities, and every now and then we called the kids to the set for specific scenes in which their presence was needed. It might sound rather old-fashioned, but for this film it was the right method, and it helped us to work very focused and condensed. We had them running through the forest

all day, wearing their costumes, and they had a fantastic time. It was the last autumn before Covid came. We shot in 2019 and did the post-production while waiting for the re-opening of the cinemas.

Did life in the forest come with special surprises?

Oukropec: One foggy morning when arriving on the set, we found hundreds of salamanders everywhere around us, like I had never seen before. That was magic, a gift from nature to the film!

With a different budget would it have become a different film?

Oukropec: Not much. Maybe we could have bought ourselves a little more time. But we were able to do most of the CGI that we wanted within our budget, and Covid offered us more time for post-production. Suddenly professionals had plenty of time and nothing much else to do.

–
Gert Hermans

Aya

Docufiction, Belgium, France, 2021
 Directed by Simon Coulibaly Gillard
 Prod.: Michigan Films, Kidam, RTBF,...
 World Sales: Taskovski Films
 Phone: ++44-387-65 92-08-57
sales@taskovskifilms.com
www.taskovskifilms.com



Back to Those Days (aka: Return to Legoland)

Feature Film, Poland, 2021
 Directed by Konrad Aksinowicz
 Prod.: Chroma Pro, Miasto Aniolów, Coloroffon
 World Sales: Kino Swiat Int'l
 Phone: ++48-22-84-06-801
kinoswiat@kinoswiat.pl
www.kinoswiat.pl

Besties

Feature Film, Franc, 2021
 Directed by Marion Desseigne Ravel
 Prod.: 31 Juin Films, Tripode Prod.
 World Sales: Le Pacte
 Phone: ++ 33-1-44-69-59-59
c.neel@le-pacte.com

www.le-pacte.com



Comedy Queen

Feature Film, Sweden, 2021
 Directed by Sanna Lenken
 Prod.: FLX, Film i Väst, SF Studios
 World Sales: Reinvent
sales@reinvent.dk
www.einvent.dk

Eve and Adam

Feature Film, Norway, 2020/2021
 Directed by Caroline Cowan
 Prod.: Filmlance
 World Sales: Reinvent
sales@reinvent.dk
www.einvent.dk



Flee

Animated Documentary, Denmark, 2020/2021
 Directed by Jonas Poher Rasmussen
 Prod.: Final Cut for Real
 World Sales: Cinephil
 Phone: ++972-54-49-61-114
info@cinephil.com
www.cinephil.com

Futura

Documentary, Italy, 2021
 Directed by Pietro Marcello, Francesco Munzi & Alice Rohrwacher
 Prod.: Avventurosa, Rai Cinema
 World Sales: The Match Factory
 Phone: ++49-2-21-53-97-090
info@matchfactory.de
www.the-match-factory.com



Girl Picture

Feature Film, Finland, 2022
 Directed by Alli Haapasalo
 Prod.: Citizen Jane Prod.
 World Sales: LevelK
 Phone: ++45-48-44-30-72
tine.klint@levelk.dk

www.levelk.dk

Imad's Childhood

Feature Film, Sweden, Kurdistan, Latvia, 2021
 Directed by Zahavi Sanjavi
 Prod. & World Sales: AVB Prod.
 Phone: ++46-70-72-56-073
zahavi.sanjavi@gmail.com



Kind Hearts

Documentary, Belgium, 2021
 Directed by Olivia Rochette, Gerard-Jan Claes
 Prod. & World Sales: Accattone Films
contact@accattonefilms.be
www.accattonefilms.be

Little Warrior

Feature Film, Russia, 2021
 Directed by Ilja Jermolow
 Prod. & World Sales: Leopoldis
 Phone: ++7-49-56-46-73-04
info@leopolis.ru
www.leopolis.ru



Murina

Feature Film, Croatia, Brazil, USA, Slovenia, 2021

Directed by Antoneta Alamat Kusijanović

Prod.: Antitalent, RT Features, Sikelia Prod., ...

World Sales: The Match Factory

Phone: ++49-2-21-53-97-09-0

info@matchfactory.de

www.the-match-factory.com

info@sahakyants.am

www.sahakyants.am



The Quiet Girl

Feature Film, Ireland, 2021

Directed by Colm Bairéad

Prod.: Inscéal, BAOfI, Fís Éireann/Screen

World Sales: Break Out Pictures

Phone: ++353-86-77-01-019

hello@breakoutpictures.com

www.breakoutpictures.com



info@catndocs.com

www.catndocs.com

Rookies

Documentary, France, 2021

Directed by Thierry Demaizière, Alban Teurlai

Prod.: Falabracks, Tohubohu

World Sales: Le Pacte

Phone: ++ 33-1-44-69-59-59

c.neel@le-pacte.com

www.le-pacte.com

Supercool

Feature Film, Finland, 2021

Directed by Teppo Airaksinen

Prod.: Yellow Film & TV

World Sales: Reinvent

sales@reinvent.dk

www.reinvent.dk



Phone: ++49-711-96-89-44-40

post@sola-media.com

www.sola-media.com



The Wolf and the Lion

Feature Film, France, Canada, 2021

Directed by Gilles de Maistre

Prod.: Mai-Juin Prod., Galatée Films, Studiocanal, ...

World Sales: Studiocanal

Phone: ++33-1-71-35-35-35

www.studiocanal.com



Olympicos

Feature Film, Armenia, 2021

Directed by David & Hayk Sahakyants

Prod. & World Sales: Sahakyants Animation Studio

Phone: ++374-55-22-20

Raise the Bar

Documentary, Iceland, 2021

Directed by Gudjon Ragnarsson

Prod.: Saga Film, Pystymetsá

World Sales: Cat&Docs

Phone: ++33-1-44-61-77-48

Three Wishes for Cinderella

Feature Film, Norway, 2021

Directed by Cecilie Mosli

Prod.: Storm Films

World Sales: Sola Media

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

www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films

EWA KARLSTRÖM



Personal impression by Xiaojuan Zhou

I can't stop myself using the cliché that Ewa Karlström somehow reminds me of Pippi Longstocking. Well, it's true that she grew up in Sweden, held spellbound by Astrid Lindgren and other wonderful Scandinavian writers who created empowering female characters. Ewa is a warm spirit – you feel it when you talk with her. You feel it from the films she selects to make. Another immigrant to Germany, like Maryanne Redpath, Ewa chose to focus on the production of children's films after she had become a mom. No surprise here, over the years her films have made 20+ million admissions in German cinemas alone. She is the Queen of the Box Office! But she is more than that. Films from her firm also have substance, win distinctions and manage to travel far beyond their national borders. She is not too shy to state: "we

want to make great movies that lots of people want to see." She has produced blockbusters from best-selling novels, such as THE WILD SOCCER BUNCH and FAMOUS FIVE. She has also transformed the original script of WINDSTORM into a popular film and book franchise. You may say whatever she touches turns to gold, but before putting her

hands on something, she has done her homework. In her I see the perfect combination of a rich literary Nordic upbringing and the power of German cinema. What will come next from this prolific producer will be worth watching. Ps. Ewa, for cultural revenge, you may call me 'Mulan'!



THE WILD SOCCER BUNCH

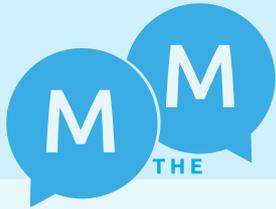
THE 'MEET THE MENTORS' Q&A

Ewa Karlström, German co-founder of the SamFilm production company

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

Ewa Karlström: Andreas Ulmke-Smeaton and I founded SamFilm in 1997 after I had become a mother in 1995. Our first film, the comedy LOVE SCENES FROM PLANET EARTH was a big success in German cinemas. One day it just struck me that I would love to produce great feature films for children. Shortly after that we met with our former student colleague at the Munich Film School, Joachim Masannek. Joachim was developing characters for a fictional soccer team inspired by his own sons' team, which Joachim was coaching. We first planned to produce a TV series based on those characters, but all doors for finding financial partners remained closed. Not until we decided to develop a feature film instead, did all doors suddenly open. This project eventually became THE WILD SOCCER BUNCH (DIE WILDE KERLE), the most successful German franchise for kids' cinema, a tremendous hype with six movies and over 10 million admissions in German cinemas.





Who or what, fictional or real, inspired you the most?

Karlström: I grew up in Sweden where I had a childhood like in Astrid Lindgren's *Bullerby*. Of course I read all her books and other fantastic Scandinavian children's novels. Enid Blyton's

books were also very inspiring to me. Luckily three decades later we were



WINDSTORM

able to acquire the rights to Blyton's 'The Famous Five' ('Fünf Freunde') books and produced five adventurous feature films with almost five million admissions in Germany.

Any guiding principles in developing and producing children's films?

Karlström: I follow my gut and I am guided by what I would love to watch on screen myself. So I suppose it is important to keep your inner child alive.

What gives you gratification from your films?

Karlström: The greatest gratification I get from seeing the incredible joy

children gain from films. And to experience how they are inspired and keep on re-enacting the characters and stories from those films in their everyday lives. It is an incredible feeling to see how our films have left a mark on generations of children.

How do you keep connected with today's children?

Karlström: There are many children of all ages from friends, family and neighbours who I am in touch with.

Some say that what's national is also international. What do you think?

Karlström: If a film works well at the national market it has good chances to travel internationally. Especially adventurous children films, they work well across borders and of course animated films which can be easily synchronised. European comedies may be more of a national thing, but of course also here the exception proves the rule.

What would be your next dream project?

Karlström: To take children to the stars... Just working on it!

Artemis Anastasiadou about TO VANCOUVER

“Scarecrows make the birds fly away

The landscape is wounded with scars of industrial decline. More than a place to stay, this is a place to leave. Which is what a young boy will soon do, leaving behind his little sister. The imminent goodbye brings up new feelings, but not the words to deconstruct them. In 2019 the script of TO VANCOUVER was awarded at the Olympia “Creative Ideas” Pitching Lab. Now the short film by Artemis Anastasiadou has been selected for the Berlinale’s Generation competition.

This story is somehow geographically defined. Where exactly was it shot?

Artemis Anastasiadou: In Aliveri, on the island of Evia in Central Greece. This industrial region with gas and cement factories is rich in lignite (known as brown coal). The mining industry came to an end in the eighties, leaving a trail of environmental pollution and unemployment. The place perfectly reflects the themes I wanted to address. From the visuals you can sense how these people are

trapped with no way out.

In one scene we follow both protagonists on a motorcycle ride. What exactly are we looking at?

Anastasiadou: At a girl enjoying a ride with her big brother, alongside a power plant by the sea. The scene establishes the contrast between the idyllic Greek seaside landscape as we fantasise it, and the reality of it.

How does this relationship between two siblings fit into Greek family structures?

Anastasiadou: Their father died many years ago, a loss that she experienced at a very young age. Ever since, her brother has been like a father figure to her. Now again, she will be facing a loss. Her brother’s departure is a family decision that she has to accept, but she tries to find ways to cope with it, wishing and praying that maybe she can make him stay.

She even casts a magic spell on him.

Anastasiadou: That spell is inspired by a local folktale about the Lamia,

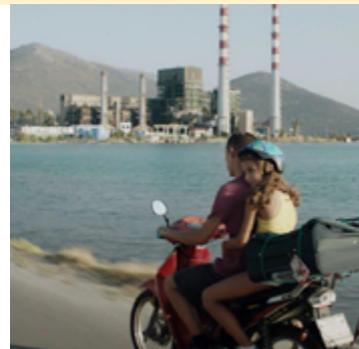
a monster that makes people vanish. The roots of the tale are in the coal that sometimes ignites, turning the soil into ashes, creating holes in which people would disappear. People have always been “disappearing”, whether it was because of the Lamia in mythic times, because of mining accidents later or because of the economy nowadays.

The film contains a picture of an intriguing scarecrow.

Anastasiadou: You don’t see many scarecrows in the Greek landscape. When spotting this one on the island, I realised how it incorporated many themes of the story. Scarecrows make the birds fly away. Like a bird, Yorgos will soon fly away too.

Why Vancouver?

Anastasiadou: I wanted it to be a faraway place; once you get there it won’t be easy to return. Greece has experienced different waves of immigration, for instance to Germany and other European countries. But migrating to Canada or Australia is a big thing;



there is something mythical about those destinations.

In 2019 your project was awarded in the Olympia Script lab.

Anastasiadou: The lab comes with a series of workshops. When I applied, I had already finalised the story and part of the funding. But throughout these workshops my ideas have matured. The award was very helpful. Even with the script ready, I wanted to invest in finding the locations and the cast. This prize helped us to establish the pre-production that we needed to end up where we are now.

—
Gert Hermans

MYTHOS

55 young people from 10 different countries met in Pyrgos, Greece to make inspiring films together. A glorious return for the legendary Mythos project.

In December 2021, Camera Zizanio – the European Meeting of Young People’s Audiovisual Creation, a fundamental project for the Youth Cinema Network movement, brought young filmmakers from around the world together in Pyrgos. After a digital edition in 2020, this year’s 21st edition was held with physical presence. *“We did it! We were able to meet again in a real cinema, with real workshops and real friends”*, said Manolis Melissourgos and Lito Theodosiou from Camera Zizanio’s organisational team.

In Camera Zizanio’s signature project Mythos, short films are created through which young people express their opinions about the world today. Multinational teams are formed and assigned with a theme to shoot, edit and complete a film within the festival’s duration. With Greece celebrating the 200th anniversary of the revolution, and reconnecting with life



after two pandemic years, “freedom” as a topic was only a logical choice. Besides freedom, Mythos also celebrates cultural exchange, a shared love for cinema, young people’s imagination, creativity and friendship.

55 participants and their educators travelled to Pyrgos to send a strong and promising message! Young people from Belarus, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Israel, Poland, Serbia, Sweden and the Netherlands were divided into eight teams, allowing us to witness the richness of their artistic skills. By making every corner of Pyrgos and the nearby beaches their film set, and over five days shot eight short films about freedom as every one of us perceives it, personally or socially. As often before, NFFS – the Dutch National Film Festival for Students – was a precious collaborator to the project.

The films were presented during a special screening on the last day of the festival and received a generous round of applause. *“We have had a very good time and would love to do it once*



again. It was hectic and exciting at the same time and we are so grateful for this opportunity. We learned a lot and met with other filmmakers from different countries. We still cannot believe that we were able to meet in person”, said Alwa and Hanna, young filmmakers from Sweden. The results of this multinational audiovisual meeting for young people are available through Camera Zizanio’s YouTube channel. Don’t hesitate to watch them!

–
 Manolis Melissourgos, Marija Ratkovic
 Vidakovic & Lito Theodosiou

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.

Lee Ji Won about KIDS ARE FINE

“When the fence is broken, kids can grow up”

Da-yi’s mother is in the hospital. But why? Da-yi doesn’t know, as his father didn’t say, in fact, he doesn’t say much at all. But when mom is transferred to another hospital, Da-yi is determined to go and visit her, even if he has to head out on a trip to an unknown destination, in the company of some new friends and classmates.

Korean children’s films (like THE WORLD OF US, THE HOUSE OF US, BORI) often know how to tell a story with a deep tenderness and empathy. When combined with the theme of a young kid on a search for his dying mother, you might wonder if anyone can watch KIDS ARE FINE keeping the eyes dry.

Lee Ji Won: What else can you expect from a film about a farewell to beautiful moments and beloved people? Making people cry was never my main intention. In fact, I was probably the one who cried most.

Kids in films should not always look cute, but your main actor surely

does!

Ji Won: Lee Gyeong-hoon (playing Da-yi) can express his emotions in a very controlled way through his shiny eyes. Once he finds his concentration, he can immerse himself completely in his character, as if Da-yi had always existed somewhere inside him. He is a great actor, combining modesty and innocence.

The atmosphere among the kids seems very relaxed. When we see them playing, it feels like all their laughter was for real.

Ji Won: It was our most important task to make the young actors feel relaxed on set. Instead of having them acting out artificial emotions, I searched for kids that stood naturally close to their characters. I didn’t share the script with them. Rather, I explained to them the background of every scene, and then they improvised. They didn’t just mimic key lines, but truly deepened the emotions.

Only slowly do we come to understand the gravity of the situation...

Nobody dares to tell the boy that his mother is actually dying.

Ji Won: Adults think too easily that kids are too young to deal with reality. Children can independently reflect and judge for themselves. This is something I wanted to address in this film.

Hospitals in general don’t look like exciting sceneries for films. But in this case, the hospital scenes are among the most exciting ones in the movie.

Ji Won: Scenes located in particular places – like the hospital and the school in KIDS ARE FINE – often ask for an extra layer of detail and realism. As for the hospital scenes, I thoroughly researched the cinematographic options, I’ve been watching hospital documentaries, and I included a few personal experiences. Hospitals are usually depicted as fearful places, but not in this movie! It is Da-yi’s favourite place – the only place to meet his mum – and he is always eager to go there.



He even wonders if he should feel guilty about his mum’s illness.

Ji Won: That is a heart-breaking part. This guilt is born from doubt: does mum feel sick because of me? Is she getting more sick because I visit her too often? It’s the words of adults that have planted these seeds – often the wounds on a child’s soul are caused by an adult’s thoughtless remarks.

The most heart-breaking scenes might be the ones with the yellow flower, an image so very powerful.

Ji Won: The colour yellow stands for





the protection that Da-yi needs, just as much as his mother needs his love and protection. The yellow flower is the medium that connects them, planted in a pot, as this is a story about a child surrounded by fences. Those are constructed by adults to protect, and at the same time hold back the child. Only when the fence is broken, kids can grow up in their own way.

When parents' ambitions are passed on to their children, is it a child's duty to make their parents' dreams

come true?

Ji Won: Absolutely not! Children should have their own dreams, and adults should make the world a place where kids can dream as wide as possible. Korean parents often try to adjust their kids to the world's criteria; they focus on uniformity rather than on individuality.

What was your 'big project' as a child?

Ji Won: I lived halfway between the city and the countryside. I saw the tall buildings ahead of me, and the mountains and farms behind me. My mission wasn't as big as Da-yi's, but I remember packing my gear to go climbing those mountains, searching for insects to catch, like dragonflies and grasshoppers.

Another striking picture in your film is a pile of schoolbooks lying by the roadside.

Ji Won: There are two kinds of children; those who are lonely due to their parents lack of attention, like Da-yi, and those who are lonely due to their parents overprotection, like his classmate Jae-kyung. His parents all the time arrange private tutoring to secure his future; in Korea we call them 'round and round kids', caught in the infinite 'Home – School – Acad-



emy' cycle. The schoolbooks by the roadside reflect the reality of Jae-kyung's life. By making him join on this trip, I wanted to set him free from his burden, though only for a little while.

I was told KIDS ARE FINE is based on a series of web comics.

Ji Won: That is true. The elements of the story are mainly the same; Da-yi and his friends, a sick mother and a busy father. The webtoon shows Da-yi's life as a diary in simple black and white drawings, not complicated nor fancy. It doesn't explain much about situations or emotions, leaving it up to the readers to fill in the blanks with their own imagination.

I guess it wasn't easy to find a prop-

er ending to the story, which you solved by including a short animated clip.

Ji Won: I didn't want a sad ending, but neither should we pretend as if nothing happened. Da-yi's face in the end reflects my wish for him to live a full and happy life. Through the animated clip I'm hoping to transcend the idea of motherhood, using the example of a child and a tree taking care of each other. The animation refers to the original webtoon as a small tribute, a wink to the fans.

–
Gert Hermans

Firdoze Bulbulia about the Nelson Mandela Children's Film Festival

There is a great curiosity in Europe about how the landscape of children's content could develop on the African continent, but that curiosity is seldom founded on knowledge or experience. Firdoze Bulbulia has been the point of contact for everything related to youth content in Africa for years. From her background as a producer, director, educator, lobbyist, activist, and festival organiser, she is a familiar face at the major international festivals, where she stands out with her sense of decorum, and the evidence with which she shares her message with the world.

Next July you'll be celebrating the 5th edition of the Nelson Mandela Children's Film Festival. What can you still remember from the very first edition?

Firdoze Bulbulia: The first edition was a partnership with the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, a partner loaded with all the correct ingredients for a politically and socially relevant and sound grounding. We honoured Soheir Abdel Kadr from Egypt

and Joan Gantz Cooney from Sesame Workshop. It was an emotional and uplifting festival as we celebrated the legacy of Tata Nelson Mandela and we celebrated our friends – our partners from Africa, Asia, Latin America, USA, Caribbean, etc. Who have been so supportive for decades and helped us to place African children's culture on the international agenda.

You have come a long way ever since.

Bulbulia: Our work in this sector started in 1993 and continues to date. We produced the South African Children's Rights Charter which became part of the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights. In 1995 I attended the World Summit on TV for Children in Australia, in 1996 we hosted the Southern African Development Countries Summit on Children & Broadcasting, in 1997 we hosted the All African Summit on Children & Broadcasting in Accra, Ghana, in 1998 we attended the 2nd World Summit on Media for Children in London, and we ensured that the 4th World Summit should be

hosted in Brazil. In 2007 we hosted the World Summit on Media for Children in Johannesburg, South Africa. We are very proud of this achievement and leading up to it we hosted several global and regional events. In 2010 we launched ABC - Africa's Best Channel (a children & youth channel) on MiTV in Nigeria. In 2018 we launched the African Animation Studio and produced 30 public service announcements on Covid19 for children.

How is Nelson Mandela's legacy reflected in the festival programme?

Bulbulia: He set up the Nelson Mandela Children's Foundation; his commitment to children is well known. In 2018 for his 100th birthday, we decided to create a children's film festival to celebrate Mandela's legacy, using film as a medium to encourage peacebuilding and innovation. The Nelson Mandela Children's Film Festival (NMCFF) has a curated film section since not enough African films are



produced for children; we invite films from our partners globally and we curate about 10 features and 10 shorts.

The NMCFF is often referred to as “the only African children's film festival”. Is that really the case?

Bulbulia: I think we are, unfortunately, and it makes me sad, because we really need to create more film festivals for African children. We have proposed that we share our NMCFF curation with other festivals so that they can take the package and create a section for children within their events, like we did this year in the Durban Int'l Film Festival. In the NMCFF 2019 we were lucky to have Sannette Naeye participate with a wonderful digital playground for 300 children during



the Zanzibar Int'l Film Festival that we hosted.

Could Johannesburg be the cradle of an intensified South - South festival partnership?

Bulbulia: We would like that to be the case. We also have partnerships with Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, Brazil, and these opportunities make for vibrant connections and development.

Your organisation CBFA (Children & Broadcasting Foundation) launched the African Charter on Children's Broadcasting, in which you emphasise the importance of edutainment.

Bulbulia: This Charter was signed by every broadcaster in Africa and the Commonwealth and it is an important guideline for broadcasters. Edutainment is the best way to engage with young people. We offer an opportunity for creative and critical thinking, allowing young people to focus on what is important and relevant to them.

We know you as a regular guest at European festivals. What did you take home from those events to implement in your festival?

Bulbulia: Partnerships, expertise and mentorships. European festivals are well resourced, and really generous in

their support for the NMCFF. Cinekid as a festival has been a huge inspiration because of the digital space it created since the early 2000s. I have always admired and respected their way of working within the children's media space.

Can a festival be the motor behind an active film production for children in your country?

Bulbulia: We hope so, but it's been a long and arduous road. We hope that we can influence filmmakers to see children's content as viable and important. However, our film industry is still comparatively small and lacks resources. Everyone still wants to make a "Hollywood-type" films and children are at the bottom of that pyramid. We started the African Animation Studio as another way of encouraging the production of animation content for African children. We are hopeful that our efforts are not in vain.

When I interviewed the ECFA Jury at the Zlin Film Festival, they suggested that a focus on African cinema is something we are all waiting for.

Bulbulia: We need resources and partnerships. Our friends at m:brane in Sweden have supported us on the pitching sessions this year and we hope that they will help our filmmak-



ers to get to pre-production and production phase. We hope that co-producers will be interested to partner with African filmmakers.

You often welcome festival guests with a strong political and educational message. Who would be your "dream guest" that you'd love to welcome at your festival?

Bulbulia: George Lucas! In 2007 during our 5th World Summit on Media for Children I was lucky to attend Cartoons on the Bay in Positano, Italy and I met Roy Disney there so I invited him to the 5WSMC and he came! Dr. Milton Chen from the George Lucas Educa-

tional Foundation also attended the 5WSMC and he was a great supporter and mentor. These connections are profound and iconic and allow a spotlight on the importance of quality, creative content for all children.

– Gert Hermans

Cássio P. Santos about VALENTINA

“She’s just a girl trying to fully live her life”

Tonight Valentina wants to party until she drops, as tomorrow she’ll be leaving the city. Maybe moving to the countryside will help her escape from the obstacles she is facing everywhere as a transgender teen in Brazil. In her new town, she builds a loyal network around her, only trusting her mother and two dear friends. But when information about her gender identity is leaking, trouble might start all over again. Unless Valentina can firmly look her haters in the eye.

The impression Valentina makes in the first minutes of the film is crucial: “I am a girl, I am young and I am enjoying my life.”

Cássio P. dos Santos: VALENTINA is indeed a celebration of life, but also shows the challenges that trans people are facing in Brazil. The film makes clear that society should change and learn how to accept diversity.

Those opening scenes make it easy to identify with her.

Dos Santos: First and foremost, we wanted to create a character that felt

real and appealed to young audiences. Valentina is surrounded by a loving mother and a few good friends whom she can trust. People identify with her because she’s just a girl trying to fully live her life. Thiessa Woinbackks wonderful performance surely helps to achieve this instant identification.

The situation of trans people these days is a topical issue in plenty of books and films.

Dos Santos: Art can create wonderful new worlds, but it can also reflect what is real and urgent in our society. In the quest for rights for trans people, it is vitally important to gain more visibility. In Brazil nowadays more trans characters appear in films, soaps and in the media in general. But we should grab the opportunity to do much more, also for trans actors and actresses. We all know how visibility creates more awareness, offers possibilities to shine a light on the challenges this community is facing and dismantles prejudice.

The obstacles that Valentina has to



overcome are everywhere. Luckily her mother is extremely supportive.

Dos Santos: These obstacles still exist, both on a social and an administrative level, when Valentina has to deal with bureaucracy. Her mother’s role is crucial. From the beginning we wanted to create a character that was supported by a mother who gives her the strength to fight for her rights.

Fathers on the other hand are seldom around.

Dos Santos: In Brazil, it’s very common to see single mothers taking care of their children alone. Many fathers refuse to take responsibility for their children and just vanish. Brazil is a male dominated country and since Valentina is a woman, many of her

challenges are related to how society treats her gender. Not only because she is trans, but because she is a woman. VALENTINA is a proof of the strength of women fighting for their rights.

In one impressive scene, Valentina poses what is the most essential question of the film: “What is it that bothers you about my freedom?”

Dos Santos: It doesn’t make sense why society treats people differently because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Valentina asks this question not only to confront her nemesis, but also to make the audience reflect. The film doesn’t give you an answer, but we want you to hear the question.

—
Gert Hermans

Marta Elīna Martinšone & Asnāte Sofija Rožkalne about LAME-OS

“Dumb jokes are the answer to everything”

If the world were full of 100% reasonable people, LAME-OS would probably never have been made. Even if that film offers you the chance to see – amidst a stream of fluorescent colours and kooky nineties fashion references – many things that you’ve never seen before on the white screen. And I mean: never!

At the dawn of the new millennium, three teenage girls decide to change the course of their incomplete lives. Tired of being the athletic boys’ laughing stock, Sarmite and her friends aspire to become popular prom queens. This also includes: dating popular boys. Staying true to who they are or giving up on it, that was the dilemma, according to Latvian director Marta Elīna Martinšone and main actress Asnāte Sofija Rožkalne.

Who were you in 1999?

Marta Elīna Martinšone: I was a dork in 1999, and I guess I still am. It was a time of big changes; all adults around me were all the time talking about the new millennium and about losing

money to the bank crisis. But in the end nothing happened. That is what I like about that era; there was all this fuzz about the end of the world, and then somebody said: I guess it just didn’t happen. In LAME-OS we used the colours and fashion of 1999; even the elements that originated from the seventies or eighties all returned in 1999, and some of them have got back into fashion again nowadays.

Who were your role models back then?

Martinšone: Buffy the Vampire Slayer! I was obsessed with her. That show started in 1997, and when recently watching it again, I still loved it. Buffy didn’t take orders from anyone. Then there were artists like Courtney Love and Melissa auf der Maur – I envied her hair! – and I’ve always adored Virginia Woolf.

Teenage culture is a universal thing, but can at the same time be very local. How did you make sure the film would feel both Latvian and universal?



The Lame-os team @ the Zlin Film Festival

Martinšone: I love watching teen films; I must have seen CRUEL INTENTIONS at least 10 times. A few jokes and cameos are included in LAME-OS that can only be understood by a Latvian audience. I like inside jokes. But we made sure to collect some international feedback from our Czech producer Julietta Sichel (8Heads) and I checked hairstyles with our Czech makeup artist.

Are grown-ups in any way to be taken seriously?

Martinšone: Looking from a teenager’s perspective, adults are weird, they don’t understand anything. Asnāte Sofija Rožkalne: Even if some of the adult roles were played by impressive actors! Working with Imants Strads (playing my father) and Guna Zariņa (mother) was an immaculate experience.

This might have been the first film that made me sympathise with a gym teacher, as he is so socially clumsy.



Martinson: In the first draft of the script, he was more mean, like the gym teachers I remember. But I re-wrote that role. This new approach suited him much better.

Rožkalne: At least this gym teacher tries to participate. Ours was always sitting in a corner, telling us to do 20 'jumping jacks', and then carried on watching his mobile.

Some of the dialogues sound totally natural - when hearing the boys talk among each other I really believe this is how boys talk – but the context you present them in looks artificial.

Martinson: Together with the young actors we defined the slang we would use. Then I gave them topics to talk about, like... *"Boys talk about boobs"* – *"Okay Marta, we'll talk about boobs if you want us to"*. After a while they were like *"Marta, please, we're fed up talking about boobs; it's exhausting!"* Other scenes, like the confrontation with a gang of metalheads, asked for an artificial kind of western-approach. How to balance it... I have no idea! This is my first feature, and I mainly trusted my intuition. Comedy is not just about sitting back laughing! Guna Zarina is one of the best Latvian actresses, but she felt very nervous and insecure about the level of exaggera-



tion that was needed. I basically told her: do your thing, and I'll tell you when it is too much.

Did you get similar instructions?

Rožkalne: We went through the entire script to get the feel of it. The young actresses befriended each other easily, which made things more relaxed. Our main challenge was arriving on set every day with a lack of sleep, and circles under our eyes that couldn't be covered even with makeup.

How did you maintain order in the chaos?

Martinson: I am not very good at keeping order, but I'm good at making dumb jokes to keep the atmosphere

light. For the young actors, the work was sometimes boring, and always tiring, but dumb jokes are the answer to everything. We even had a competition on who could make the dumbest joke of all.

Rožkalne: You call them dumb, but I found them hilarious.

With your passion for all things kitschy, would you ever consider making a musical?

Martinson: I'm actually planning to make one, I'm currently writing the treatment. Musicals are my favourite – I don't understand why people often hate them. It is a genre that doesn't lie.

I thought musicals lied all the time.

Martinson: When characters start singing, it is because they can't express their feelings any other way – they are singing the truth. This fake-ness tells more truth than any other genre does. I love musicals, even when they're bad. Except CATS – that was the worst thing that ever happened to me. Bad things have happened to me in my life, but that film topped them all. It was painful.

Rožkalne: My own musical scene is one of my favourite parts. Never before had I learned choreography, or recorded a song, and I had never been wearing pants like that before (and probably never will wear them again!). The scene was shot outdoors on the hottest day of the year. We were seeking shelter under umbrellas, we could only have as much sun block as our makeup allowed, and all day long my high heels were killing me. But I can watch that scene over and over again.

Any special favourites for you?

Martinson: The singing lampreys! Our fantastic – but rather serious – art director at first was sceptical, and so was the rest of the crew: *"How exactly did you imagine those dancing fish?"* But finally they were so into it that they found ways for these fish to move so that they wouldn't dis-



integrate – which they did all the time – and they even understood my instructions. *“This lamprey is a more feisty one, he has to move differently.”* – *“Okay, I got it.”*

The girls’ uproar in class – the “tampon scene” – is certainly among my favourites.

Martinson: I love that scene! Those kids were played by slightly younger actresses. In the first rehearsal, none of them dared to throw tampons; they looked at each other bewilderedly: what is it that she wants from us? But then we spoke about that horrible “monthly period stigma” and I told them to take revenge for every time a guy said something disgusting to them. Apparently there was a lot of hidden anger inside; it was a liberating experience. Watching them going insane, I felt proud and deeply touched.

It is funny how they try to learn flirting from books and series. If it’s such a complicated thing that you can’t even learn it from a book, then how should we learn it?

Rožkalne: I am wondering too. I have some of those books at home – but they are not mine, of course!

Martinson: Those flirting tips about “accidental touching and laughing

about dumb jokes” haven’t changed at all since I was a teenager. Men still like to make women laugh, they don’t like women to make them laugh. Apparently we haven’t evolved at all.

Not many directors get away with a voice-over.

Martinson: Martin Scorsese does! This was my first film, so I could afford taking some risks. I did it how I liked it,



and I couldn’t have done it any other way. I re-watched GOODFELLAS and WOLF OF WALL STREET, and I understood I’d have to work for many more years to achieve even 10% of what Scorsese does with a voice-over.

In a most embarrassing scene, pupils are watching a theatre play. Do you realise one day a school audience might react exactly the same

way to your film, not because it is a bad movie but simply because it is a school screening?

Martinson: I feel sorry for those teachers, underpaid and exhausted, who are made responsible to decide which movies and theatre plays their pupils should see. I remember our school taking us to performances that I found so horribly boring that I stopped watching theatre for ten

teacher; they assigned a school librarian to take care of us. She was the most underpaid person in the entire school, and also the most interesting one, doing whatever she could to culturally educate us.

The peacock was amazing in that scene.

Martinson: He was! As soon as the lights went out, he froze, standing for hours in the dark without making a single move. Suddenly I saw this tiny feather coming off in his neck, fluttering down and landing softly. We were flabbergasted - this shot couldn’t be topped.

Last year’s circumstances weren’t easy for a debuting director!

Martinson: During another lockdown, after postponing the shoot at least three times, I thought it was never going to happen, so I stopped working and got fat and sad. Then a phone call came: *“Marta, it’s on!”* – *“Okay, I’ll start writing again and lose weight!”*

–
Gert Hermans

years. At the age of 23, realising how much I actually adored theatre came as a shock. I wanted that scene to be done as a highly exaggerated Robert-Wilson-kind-of-performance, with actors dramatically shouting. The actor in that scene asked me all the time: “Is the yelling okay? It feels so uncomfortable!”

Rožkalne: Our teachers didn’t take us to the theatre. We didn’t have a class



ECFA Journal

Published by ECFA

European Children's Film Association

Place de l'Amitié 6, 1160 Brussels, Belgium

Phone: +32 475 55 02 97

Email: mail@ecfaweb.org

Website: www.ecfaweb.org

Please send press releases, advertisements, questions & information to:
Gert Hermans, journal@ecfaweb.org

ECFA's goal is to support cinema for children and youth in its cultural, economical, 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):

ECFA

European Children's Film Association

Phone: +32 (0)475 55 02 97

Email: mail@ecfaweb.org

Website: www.ecfaweb.org

The European Children's Film Distribution Network:

www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/network

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

ECFA Journal No. 1-2022

Contributors to this issue:

Gert Hermans (Editor)

Reinhold Schöffel, Felix Vanginderhuysen, Margret Albers, Xiaojuan Zhou, Marija Ratković Vidaković, Jaroslava Hynštová, Lucie Mikelová, Marketa Pasmova, Hilde Steenssens, Sara Plantefève-Castryck, Amir Esfandiari, Melina Sidiropoulou, Pantelis Panteloglou, Edita Bilaver, Eva Novrup Redvall, Renate Zylla.

Proofreading: Adam Graham

Design: Stefan Koeneke

ECFA website: Udo Lange
