

Barbara Kronenberg about MISSION ULJA FUNK

“Comedy comes in many disguises”

Ulja Funk... the name sounds different, cool, almost... Funky. Which is not the first impression you get when meeting this rather nerdy girl with a passion for astronomy and a habit of speaking her mind, directly addressing the camera (and the audience). Her quest is now to travel to Belarus and observe the impact of an asteroid, which she does in a stolen car, with an underage classmate behind the wheel, while being chased by a bunch of religious fanatics. MISSION ULJA FUNK, a zany adventure by German director Barbara Kronenberg, was the opening film of this year's Zlin Film Festival.

How did you convince a producer to step in on a project as outrageous as this one?

Barbara Kronenberg: By focusing on the humour. MISSION ULJA FUNK has been made within the Outstanding Children's Film programme, a funding model to increase the production of quality films for children in Germany. That surely was more than helpful and made the financing go much easier

and faster.

Ulja is so straight forward in telling the truth, and totally obsessed with her mission. Did the thought of Autism Spectrum Disorder regularly cross your mind?

Kronenberg: It is important not to define her as a child with a disorder, just because she is intelligent, stubborn, dedicated and relentless. I wanted a main character that is not the usual happy-go-lucky kind of child — it is interesting for me as a writer, but also as a human being to deal with more complex personalities. And I hope that the audience will also find this complexity interesting, and that they will empathise with someone who comes across rather unusual. The challenge was to create a character that is not very emotionally appealing and still make you sympathise with her quest.

MISSION ULJA FUNK cracks a hard nut with the hypocrisy of organised religion. Ulja's grandmother and her circle of friends are religious fanat-



ics. Where did you find inspiration for that character?

Kronenberg: In real life, I guess. It is important to provide a place for those people who might not fit into their everyday community. And especially for children it is important that they have this sense of belonging, regardless how different they might be from others. We're talking about inclusion; organised religious fanaticism can be quite excluding, despite them preaching something else.

I never had the feeling of watching a comedy; much more of watching a

road movie, of which MISSION ULJA FUNK contains many classic elements.

Kronenberg: I think comedy is my home — and it comes in many disguises. It could be a road movie, it could be a love story or it could be something entirely else. But the common denominator is comedy.

Speaking of humour... how was it to record the singing scenes?

Kronenberg: There was a lot of giggling going on but everyone was focused and eager. The cast loved the singing parts; they had a lot of fun recording those scenes, also because they loved the music. But what is supposed to be funny in a movie is most of the time hard work and lots of rehearsal, timing, trying, failing, repeating. So there was both giggling and sweating.

—
Gert Hermans
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