

KIDS KINO LAB TRAVELS TO CZECH REPUBLIC

When the circus comes to town

The Kids Kino Lab might look like a circus, setting up its tents in different European festival cities. But rather than circus artists, the participants live like monks, dedicating their days to a programme of writing, evaluating, and discussing. Now that the Lab has landed in Zlin, we brought together the participating Czech teams (script writer & producer), asking them for a look behind the scenes. What makes this Lab so relevant? How do they like this monastic life? And what role can events like the Zlin Film Festival play in giving visibility to their work?

How to develop a children's film or series from initial concept to a film project, ready for production? This creative know-how is offered to novice filmmakers by the Kids Kino Lab (organised by the Polish New Horizons Association), during which screenwriters and producers of children's content are guided in preparing and leading a film project on an international level. This year, thirteen teams from around Europe are participating.

The national film industry should be proud about three participating Czech projects!

Julietta Sichel (producer GAMEGIRL): This is such a prestigious project and our national industry and decision makers – including the Czech Film Centre – should be aware that we got selected for something really exceptional, taking place in our own country. That's why some extra visibility would be welcome, as for funders and colleagues to understand what this platform is all about and what it stands for. Some Czech producers may not even know how you can greatly benefit from this Lab when working on a young audience project. Maria Motovska (producer DIVINE LIGHTNING): Having somebody else promoting your achievements feels nice for a change.

How can projects benefit from this Lab?

Motovska: Being part of a lab, talking to people from different countries, might help you to add an international dimension to your project, which



our industry sometimes tends to forget.

Sichel: I spoke with our Polish colleagues who are here with a completely Polish film, and no intention to step into an international co-production, but when you ask them why they are here, they answer "because it's great to have a foreign tutor helping us to improve the script and make it internationally appealing. Even if our main audience will be Polish, we still

want to sell our film internationally and make it travel. DETECTIVE BRUNO was developed via Kids Kino Lab, it has been screened here in Zlin, it will be a big domestic success in Poland, they have Dutch Filmworks as a sales agent and they're talking about international sales and festival deals. All this wouldn't have been possible without participating in this Lab. Motovska: Most international funding schemes will ask you about participa-





tion in labs, workshops, etc. Especially now that international platforms have opened up the market, the Lab can help you to close your budget, to secure your future and credibility to get your next project financed.

How can a festival like Zlin help to secure that future?

Motovska: This festival is doing a lot for Czech production! The best thing is the Zlin Film Talent, offering opportunities to film students. The festival organises an auction of clapboards; that money will be invested in projects, among which several student films are selected. That is a

superb opportunity! For many students this will be their first pitch, and you can get good money from it. I do not know of any other event like this in the Czech Republic. Moreover, it is also about promotion; the Zlin festival is a big name in the Czech Republic! If your project gets selected, it will premiere at the festival.

Sichel: The Zlin Festival has a partnership with Czech television. Every Czech film in the programme gets TV coverage. We presented THE PACK here, which was not even co-produced by Czech television, but they did interviews, filmed the red carpet, etc. For everybody who is somehow involved

in children's cinema, it is crucial to be here.

Let's talk about what's going on in the Lab. They're really making you sweat with a super packed programme.

Jiri Sadek (producer DASHENKA): It is as intense as it is rewarding. Which speaks from the results. After two sessions, the projects went from basic treatments or even loglines, to first or second drafts of scripts; and those are pretty good scripts! The projects are very diverse; there's artistic projects that aim for a certain commercial appeal, and straightforward commercial films that aim for a more artsy take on it. You also learn how to write in a professional manner. Many of us are here with their first script, and learned how to format it correctly to make a professional impression on your project partners.

Hana Cielova (scriptwriter GAME-GIRL): I was amazed to see the quality upgrade in the projects since the first session.

What is the most challenging part of the writing and production process you're going through?

Cielova: That you're supposed to simultaneously analyse the other projects, to which you have to dedicate

lot of time.

Sadek: Normally it is really hard to push somebody to read your script; if you want professional feedback, you'll have to pay for it. I can of course give it to my grandma but I'm not sure what to do with her feedback. Here you get a lot of professional feedback from the group, which is a big time-and-money saver.

Sichel: We always start with group comments on what they like about your script. Then we talk about questions and doubts. And only then, at the end, the tutor will interfere; instead of putting you through hell, he will be asking questions. "Are you sure this is what your character really wants?" You're getting offered many interesting impulses and you have to choose the right ones. We all know where we want to get with our scripts, but there are many ways to achieve it, and picking the right way is challenging. But if four people tell you that something doesn't work – even if you're 100% convinced – you should start having doubts.

Pavla Klimesova (producer DIVINE LIGHTNING): Our tutor says: One viewer can be an idiot, but the audience is always a genius.

Sichel: The audience is always right.



And what is the fun part?

Hana Cielova: Finally getting away from my computer and meeting people in person with whom you can speak openly.

Klimesova: This is a great place to see what colleagues in other countries are doing and how they work. I've often been told: the best co-producers you'll meet through labs and workshops. Because you meet them over a longer period of time, which is different than booking a meeting in a co-production market and then after 20 minutes you should decide if you want to work together.

Marek Chalupa (scriptwriter DIVINE LIGHTNING): I like the little pieces of humour that are constantly added to the scripts. Even when a team has to profoundly change its story, still they miraculously find new sources of humour and new jokes.

Sichel: I always look forward to reading the next versions of treatments and scripts. Seeing the progress they made is rewarding. Participants also share a lot of inside information – we all feel like there should be no secrecy. You can tell that people really listen to each other and take advice into account.

Motovska: Through discussing each other's projects, there is an intimate relationship growing. For the script-



writers, having a group of people going through your work is very intimidating. This is the most fragile stage for every project, when normally you don't show it to anyone yet. But suddenly you have all these people looking over your shoulder.

Sadek: For me the fun part is everyone's cruel honesty. "You wanted feedback? Here, you get it!" There is an amazing vulnerability with everyone when people open up their souls; it is a very humane process.

Klimesova: I've taken part in several workshops, and the atmosphere here is more friendly than anywhere else, and I like it a lot. For this, the tutors

and assistants are partly responsible.

Zlin is a rather remote city. Does anyone have a connection with the region?

Motovska: I did my film studies here; Tomas Bata University is my "alma mater". And I'm currently producing a short animation with a director who has her studio at the university.

Klimesova: We've recently been doing a documentary here. This region was one of the most affected by Covid, and I have sad memories of our shooting here in the hospital. Many of those people were dying.

Sadek: It's not my credit, but in 1945

my grandfather made a stop motion film here with the legendary Hermína Tyrlova. Maybe the title REVOLUTION IN TOYLAND rings a bell? I'd like to think he was the one making the first TOY STORY movie!

Cielova: When I was working as a TV journalist on a programme about film festivals, we covered this festival many years ago.

Are you ready and willing to premiere your film here?

Sadek: It depends on the offer. No promises.

Motovska: We all agree with that. Festivals like this aren't about premieres but about high quality programming that profoundly supports Czech children's cinema, which is desperately needed.

–
Gert Hermans