

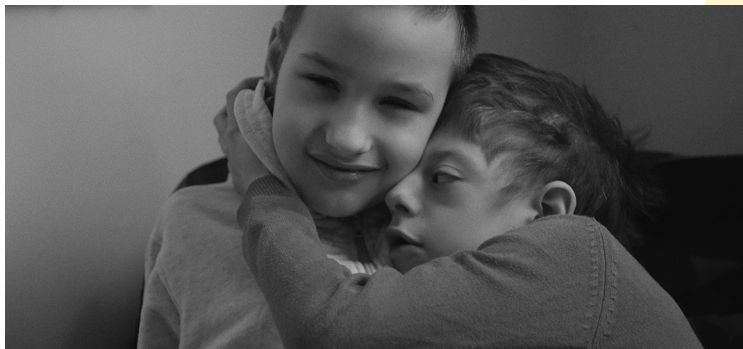
touching them with their fingers

### Did the kids already watch the film?

Duda: After the world premiere in Poland (with audio-description) Zosia

ure out which age group would fit the best as a target audience for THE FLEDGLINGS.

Duda: I made the film without any age limitations in my mind. The surprising



turned towards me and asked 'why is this film so short?', then pointed out all the scenes that she felt were missing. She remembered all the takes we did and the final film turned out to be too short for her. This movie was so important for them; it is their "film diary". Zosia, Kinga and Oskar are now in second grade. Zosia goes to singing lessons, Oskar is making huge progress in playing the piano and Kinga still helps them out.

**In the AleKino! Festival discussions with psychologists were held to fig-**

thing is that I thought it would mainly be appreciated by a female audience; now it turns out that especially men seem to like this film a lot. One thing is for sure: it is a movie about our need for closeness with another person. This is a fundamental truth, no matter our age. THE FLEDGLINGS got a 7+ qualification and I'm very happy about that.

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Gert Hermans

## Thomas Hailer (Nordic Film Days) "Bordeaux wines, Sicilian almonds and good films"

There is life before and after the Berlinale! Thomas Hailer might be known as the former face of the Berlinale's "Kinderfilmfest" (since 2002), that he renamed Generation and to which he added a youth competition. Later he became curator of the festival's international competition. Nowadays, since 2020, he is the artistic director of the Nordic Film Days in Lübeck, a festival that has – by nature – a strong connection with quality films for children.

### Can you explain why so many good films for children are coming from the North?

Hailer: I can't explain it, but one indicator is that these are countries with a very intelligent approach to film funding. As relatively small countries they know that they alone are responsible for their offspring, and that they have to make sure that children get enough incentives so that their enthusiasm for cinema carries into adulthood. Denmark for example is



the only country where Tarrantino's DJANGO UNCHAINED was not box office number 1 because the film was released at the same time as JAGTEN by Thomas Vinterberg. I assume that these societies might have a different idea of childhood in general. But most of all they are not afraid of individual voices in the film industry.

### Maybe they also have less bureaucracy?

Hailer: I'm not so sure, bureaucracy is part of the funding business anyway - there are good reasons why



ONE IN A MILLION

our constitutional fathers gave the individual federal states control over education. After the experiences of the Third Reich, they wanted to prevent a *"Gleichschaltung"* (uniformity). Of course, a tiny country that is governed centrally from the capital has an easier time with everything that concerns film funding. But a lot has happened here in Germany in recent years too, the Förderverein Deutscher Kinderfilm has been very active and has cleared a lot of hurdles, especially for independent production of children's films.

Born in the small town of Öhringen, Thomas Hailer studied theatre sci-

ence. Once moved to Berlin, he joined the artistic staff of an independent music-theatre ensemble. When the fall of the Berlin Wall heralded the end of the "fat years" for the independent theatre scene, he carried on as director, production dramaturge (for a dance company) and script doctor for cinema and television. He is also a member of the Head of Studies of the Academy for Children's Media.

#### **How did you actually get from theatre to children and youth film?**

Hailer: It was an unexpectedly successful lateral move. I had noticed that the field of dramaturgy, consulting and participation in creative pro-

cesses suited me better than directing or entrepreneurial management. When Uwe Rosenbaum, then a member of the board of directors, offered me the position as project consultant at "Kuratorium junger deutscher Film" it soon became clear to me that it's worth investing energy in making sure that children get to see good films. The foundation had decided in 1998 to also invest in children's film and additionally offered dramaturgical support on top of the financial support.

#### **Then Berlinale director Dieter Kosslick was looking for a new Section Head for his children's film festival...**

Hailer: Which really appealed to me. I thought I'd do it for two or three years - I wouldn't have thought it would turn into 17 years at the Berlinale. Yet it was a great time: implanting 14plus and transforming the 'Kinderfilmfest' into 'Generation' was great fun and one of the things I look back on with pride and gratitude. Of course the section was already in good shape when I arrived, through the flawless selection of films and this unconditional commitment that children can and must also be exposed to so called serious films.

#### **What do you remember as a particu-**

#### **lar highlight of those years?**

Hailer: 'My' first Crystal Bear for ELINA by Klaus Harö. And I will never forget that moment when the headmaster in Nils Arden Oplev's film WE SHALL OVERCOME comes telling the children that their hated teacher has died, and all the children go standing on their chairs cheering - at the premiere in the Zoo-Palast, 1000 children were also standing on their chairs cheering. That was a very, very wild and energetic experience! You saw how films can evoke physical energy when an audience gets the right stimuli.

#### **Then you became an advisor to Dieter Kosslick.**

Hailer: In a few steps I was appointed curator of the entire Berlinale, supporting Kosslick in the selection of the programmes, and in strategic questions about the Berlinale. What I enjoyed was being in contact with all the sections, holding the threads together.

#### **One year after leaving the Berlinale in 2019, you joined the Nordic Film Days as artistic director.**

Hailer: When I left the Berlinale, I really didn't think about working for a festival again. But when Lübeck asked me it immediately felt differ-



ent. There are definitely parallels to the Berlinale, because the Nordic Filmdays belong first and foremost to the audience. It was a Lübeck film club that came up with this idea in 1956: why don't we bring these modern films from the Nordic Countries to Germany? Why don't we bring that different image of women, family, childhood... here through films and see them as a means to shape society and promote modernity? Five years later, the festival was taken over by the city and meanwhile it attracts almost 500 accredited industry guests and grants a total of €63,000 in prize money. But from the heart it still belongs to the people of Lübeck, the fans of Nordic cinema. With this special focus on the eight Nordic countries and on regional production from Schleswig Holstein and Hamburg, we are indeed a unique festival.

**2021 was your first festival as artistic director of the "Nordic Film Days". Now we're at the eve of your second edition (2-6 November). Tell us what to expect?**

Hailer: First of all, we're completely back in our cinemas. Additionally we offer 70% of the films as streaming for all those who still want to avoid crowded rooms. The festival is in good shape; Hanna Reifgerst is our



WE SHALL OVERCOME

new programmer in the children's and youth area, we have a new programmer for the series area with Wendy Mitchell, a renowned journalist and expert on Nordic cinema and series. We'll see the comeback of our Infinity Dome, a 360 degree cinema where we present immersive Nordic content: Danish artist Thomas Wilfred's light-painting compositions, adapted for this venue, or the German premiere of ARRAN 360°, seven immersive works by indigenous artists commissioned by the International Sami Film Institute. Their stories, traditionally told in round tents, fit perfectly to the Dome because of their circular narrative form. The variety of

indigenous films also extends into our documentary section, where we show HISTORJÁ - STICHES FROM SAPMI, which on the one hand is a portrait of the artist and activist Britta Marakatt-Labba, who herself comes from a reindeer-herding family and whose 23 metre long embroidered frieze caused a sensation at the 2017 Dokumenta. She gives us a deep insight into the history and ongoing struggle of these indigenous people in Europe, about whom we generally know far too little.

**Speaking of documentaries - what role do they play in your festival?**

Hailer: Documentary film has a long

tradition in Lübeck. This year our Young Audience Section offers ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS, a documentary series about the phenomenon EFTERSKOLEN, a huge success in Denmark, probably because it was developed with the participation of the target group. At our industry platform we offer a workshop on documentaries for young audiences which is also held in a participatory way. Based on Joya Thomé's first feature documentary ONE IN A MILLION and the Danish documentary TSUMU, young experts from FBW Jugendjury and EFA's European Film Club will discuss with industry participants how documentaries should be made in order to be interesting for them. Children and young people don't just want to watch anymore, they want to participate - and that's why we like to take up these impulses from the Nordic countries, keeping up with the tradition of our festival. I also find it remarkable that the route that Bordeaux wines and Sicilian almonds used to travel through the Hanseatic League to the North is now being used hundreds of years later in the opposite direction to transport good films. It's a great statement for Europe.

–  
Uta Beth