

Alexis Morante about OLIVER'S WORLD

"Difficult with adults but easy with children"

It's hard to say what is the biggest barrier in Oliver's life, his overvivid imagination or his good-for-nothing father. How will the boys escape the curse that seems to hang over all the men in his family, turning them into spineless beings? Will the solution be in kissing the sweet gypsy girl Irene, or will it be in Haley's comet that is approaching? In OLIVER'S WORLD, together with director Alexis Morante, we embark on a journey that starts in Andalusia but ends up high in the sky, somewhere among the stars.

What is so special about the 29th of February?

Alexis Morante: Wouldn't it feel special to be born on that day, celebrating your birthday only every four years? That day is a consequence of a human mistake when establishing our calendar, based upon the rotation of the earth around the sun. According to Oliver's grandfather, if you're born on that day, you're nothing.

Tell me about the place where the movie is situated.

Morante: It is in Algeciras, a harbour town in Andalusia where you can cross the Strait of Gibraltar and sail to Africa. The film is set in the eighties, when big industries were built everywhere. Just being freed from Franco's dictatorship, these were difficult times for the South. There were a lot of drugs, poverty and criminality, but it was a good place to live as a child. A place for adventures, to be enjoyed on factory grounds and beaches. It is my hometown, and the story is based on the daily lives we lived in Andalusia. Even if we were looking for the main actor everywhere in Spain, it was very important for him to have that southern accent.

What did you do to visually recreate that eighties vibe?

Morante: That was easy. My hometown didn't change a lot, we simply needed to find the right spots. Among poor people, the dress code doesn't change easily, so you're not depending on the fashion of the day. Most important were the cars. Some events are clearly set in time, like Ha-



ley's comet that came in 1986, or the famous football player Magico Gonzalez, who was a real local star back then. But I didn't want to play with nostalgia, I wanted to tell a realistic story with a hint of magic.

The eighties were a good time for magic realism.

Morante: You had a lot of movies using a deep fantasy. BACK TO THE FUTURE, THE GOONIES, STAND BY ME, THE NEVERENDING STORY, LABYRINTH... they all served fantasy for

a coming-of-age audience, helping them to overcome difficulties in their lives. These movies meant a lot to me as a child. I was like Oliver, always dreaming and imagining things.

But you can also get lost in that fantasy, and then you have to find a way out.

Morante: Fantasy can make you lose your mind, and Oliver is always on the verge of that. He pees himself, he is anxious, he has nervous tics... Today people would label that problem as



anxiety or depression but back in the eighties it was not recognised as such. They would just call him 'nervous'. That is why he has to overcome his mental problems alone.

There is this interesting thing in the film about man and wife, with Oliver's parents as the most obvious example.

Morante: In those days a man needed to work and provide his family with food, while women stayed at home. When a man couldn't provide, he had a problem, he would feel less of a man - like Oliver's father. His mother is strong. "If you don't work, I will. If you call me stupid, I will study." It is people like her who were at the cradle of women power. Also in the relationship between Oliver and Irene, she is the one in the lead.

Oliver and his father are presented as 'losers' - they fail in everything they undertake. But at the same time they need to win the audience's sympathy.

Morante: That challenge was with the actors. The father is the biggest loser of all - nothing in his life goes right. The actor Salva Reina is known in Spain for his comic talent, but I told him not to play 'in comedy' but to keep it real. It was all the time a matter of finding



the balance. It was easier with the children; you're used to seeing kids as losers and in the end you know they will win. That is why it is Oliver's little brother who scores the final goal - he is all the time the biggest loser, and finally when he is given a chance, his victory is the greatest of all.

OLIVER'S WORLD is a tribute to all grandfathers in the world.

Morante: And to my grandfather in particular. The personality of that character is exactly like my grandfather was, always speaking bad language, being grumpy, in a fight with his son, a difficult person with adults but easy with children, and with a big heart. At first he is like a cartoonish character - bigger than life - but towards the end he becomes more real, when Oliver starts to understand step

by step that his grandfather is dead. In the final farewell scene, dream and reality find each other. Grandfather is the soul of the movie, he is like Gandalf in LORD OF THE RINGS, the magician, the wise man, telling Oliver what to do to bring change to this family. A lot was in the performance of Pedro Casablanc. He is a master - like the Spanish Robert de Niro.

Another storyline is Oliver's 'Romeo & Juliet' relationship with Irene, a gypsy girl.

Morante: In my youth, gypsies were seen as problematic and put apart in separate neighbourhoods by the government. My film plays around with this stereotype - the only ones doing drugs are not gypsies. In the end you realise the bad boys aren't that bad. The actors were real gypsies - that was mandatory - and they liked the movie a lot.

What struck me the most in your cinematography was the use of different lighting: sunlight, the flash-light of a projector, the stars...

Morante: There is the beautiful light on the rooftop, shining over the bay and the town. All of it was influenced by Steven Spielberg, and by ET in particular. Another crucial decision was to work a lot with a handheld camera.

Even if it was partly a budgetary decision, the movie benefited from it. Post-production was another crucial element. In the closing scenes, when they are watching the stars and the comet, I really wanted to convey that feeling about the beauty of the universe.

The most extreme play with colour and light happens during the football game, when everything looks bright and the yellow colour splashes from the screen.

Morante: That was Oliver's imagination, this football game had to be everything that he wanted in his mind. If I would have had a bigger budget, I would have made it even more impressive. The people cheering from the balconies were the neighbours; we gave them the right clothes and had them hanging from the window.

—
Gert Hermans