

# Ruth Olshan about RASPBERRIES WITH MUSTARD

## Sweet combined with spicy

In her coming-of-age film *RASPBERRIES WITH MUSTARD* German director Ruth Olshan tells a fantastically exaggerated story about first love and the importance of family. With bizarre situation comedy, she describes the trials and tribulations of falling in love for the first time, but also deals sensitively with the taboo of death. What do love and flying have in common? That sooner or later there might be a crash. We met with Ruth Olshan in the Lucas (Frankfurt) and Filem'on (Brussels) Festivals, every now and then joined by the two leading actors.

13 year old Meeri has four problems. 1. She is in love with the handsome Rocco, but he does not return her feelings. 2. When her heart beats faster, she discovers in herself the weird ability that she can simply levitate and fly. 3. She has not yet come to terms with the death of her mother to whom she is writing letters. 4. Her father, an undertaker, seems to have found a new companion.

**The opening scene is pretty bizarre**

**but you make it work, with the use of a voice-over.**

Ruth Olshan: I wrote the script together with Heike Fink. Only in the editing did we understand one mistake we made: introducing too many characters in too short amount of time. The solution was in the use of a voice-over. We have this poetic image of a girl running through a forest while talking about the risks you take in life, including love, which might be the biggest risk of all.

**Love... you mean: the losing game?**

Olshan: Love is a winning game! That is what this movie makes clear. It is a story about the discovery of tenderness, about how beautiful it is to share tenderness, not just with your parents but with people from your own age. Meeri has to understand that she has to find love from the one who really supports her, and not from a boy who is too old and doesn't feel like dealing with this loose hormone-loaded cannon. In these times, with all the horror we're experiencing, you hear all the time about people sharing love with



others, because at the end of the day, that is the one thing that will save us.

**There is this idea in the film that talking honestly can solve almost every problem.**

Olshan: Father sets the example: he tells how much he loves her and that he misses his wife, but that he still has the right to be in love. When I was 15 my mother fell in love with a man and I hated him and couldn't understand why she needed a partner at her age, which was so unfair. Children don't understand this longing for love with their parents. Grown-ups fall in love and have hormones too, they also want to love and be loved.

**Just like Meeri.**

Olshan: Meeri has the bitter experience of being rejected when Rocco says: *"Your hands touch corpses."* It hurts especially since it's said by someone she is in love with. Fortunately, however, she experiences that there is more than just rejection, there are also people who love her the way she is.

**Regardless of the conflict, there is a loving bond between parents and children.**

Olshan: It's not easy for a single father to run a business while raising two kids, of which one is hitting puberty. He needs to be loud and straightfor-



ward sometimes to keep balance and harmony in the family.

**In return he gets advice from his son on how to look cool.**

Olshan: I wouldn't be too sure if it would work though. But Meeri's kissing trick works... First look in the eyes, then look at the lips... You should try it out some time!

**I very seldom find myself in a position, up in a tree with a woman to try it out with.**

Olshan: It's all a matter of organisation! We had rehearsals for the actors to make them bond with each other. In one rehearsal I saw the adult actors doing this thing with their hands; so much tenderness spoke from their gestures. The kids, observing them, all seemed to understand this loving emotion. That is when I explained how this movie is an exploration of tenderness. From then on everything ran smoothly. The kids started talking to each other in a different tone, understanding that tenderness is not something to hide. Besides fooling around with dead bodies, I mainly wanted to have lots of love in this movie.

Jonas Kaufmann (Rocco): We practised a lot, in terms of how to be physical with one another. In all these exercises, tenderness was a key word.



**I thought the biggest challenge for this film would be in the credibility of the flying. And then in some way, you made it credible! The first time she lifts off it is pure poetry.**

Olshan: We went through this script many times, especially in respect to flying. In my imagination it was never a problem, but we had to make it plausible for the audience. There are different aspects to the flying and we meticulously discussed them all in an orderly way: how she lifts off, in which direction, under what circumstances, etc. Besides being a very sweet, intelligent and funny person, young actress Leni Deschner is also tough and sporty. She admired the physical challenges that came with the flying. It needed to be poetic and beautiful in the first place, but also a bit funny

when she crashes.

**How is it possible that she can fly?**

Olshan: We took the German proverb literally: love gives you wings. The hormones kick in, bang against the top of your skull, and you take off. It is the symbolization of this first love, this great feeling that literature, music and film try to portray again and again.

**Maybe I should not ask about the technical aspects then, not to ruin the magic.**

Olshan: For the first flying scene we worked on a 15 metres high platform with safety cables for the actors and the camera, while Leni was lifted up, hanging from a wooden stick. The second, more complicated one included

a harness, many wires, a mattress to jump on and a team of four stunt people - when they jump down, Leni flies up on her cable. Other scenes, like the crash, the clouds, etc. were filmed in a studio, working with GFX, VFX, SFX, green screen and a stunt woman. We had about 70 people standing around.

**And a few dead bodies...**

Olshan: A grandmother dies, a bird falls dead from a tree, they see a war going on in Ukraine. Keeping death away from children makes no sense, they should learn all the time that death is part of life, and it should be depicted in a child-friendly way. We mentally prepared Leni for the scene in which she finds Grandma dead, and rehearsed it thoroughly. According to my observations, the children are good at abstracting film from reality.

**You must have felt a temptation to make a lot of jokes about death!**

Olshan: Together with the actor, we visited an undertaker who showed us around in his workshop. Getting an insight into his craftsmanship was essential. It is good to know that somebody will take care of our bodies, even after we die. Luk - Meeri's little brother - playing tricks with the corpses was the only scene in which we tested the limits. Initially we had even more





tricks in mind, but were somehow censored by the commissioning editor. But the farting stayed in the film. Dead bodies do fart!

#### **You held on to the initial title.**

Olshan: It stood the test. Sure, some kids say we don't like raspberries with mustard. But in the end, Meeri explains what the title stands for: the sweet and the spicy in life. When growing up, we often experience things for the first time. We discover our powers and find out that our parents are not perfect. First love, the longing for tenderness, the change of the body, the first argument... All this

we presented in a tragi-comic way, i.e. the sweetness of love and at the same time the sharpness of rejection.

#### **What made Leni perfect for this role?**

Olshan: During the casting, in the waiting line, Leni became friends with a girl named Sophie. At the end of the day, looking at me with puppy eyes, they came to tell me they both wanted to be in the movie together. Leni was really fighting for her part, and she got it. But I kept wondering how to solve the situation and decided to offer Sophie the role of Klara. Leni had the right physical constitution

and a strong will to act.

#### **Ruth, which question would you like to ask the actors?**

Olshan: I'd like to know what they have learned from this project.

Deschner: I learned everything about movie-making. The flying scenes were the best. And I learned about working in general, and about teaming up with older people. And I learned to speak English on a set.

Kaufmann: In terms of acting, I learned that if I want to become an actor, I need to have access to all my personal emotions, in order to be able to act them out.

#### **And what did you learn from them?**

Olshan: Having fun on set! Sometimes when fatigue was setting in, they giggled on, and I wanted them to cool down to shoot the next take. But then I wondered: why? Giggling is great!

#### **Will the film be shown in the co-production countries?**

Olshan: In Luxembourg, the start is planned for early 2023. When the first wave of COVID came, our producers arranged it so that we could do the entire shoot there. That was a relief. It's a small country, but there we found all the required locations and a studio. We also casted several actors

there, but needed to make sure the Luxembourgish accent didn't clash with the German. In Germany, Farbfilm will release the film in cinemas in April 2023. In Switzerland we don't have a rental yet. Instead, it has been on the Blue+ pay-TV channel.

— Reinhard Kleber & Gert Hermans