

Stefan Westerwelle about WHAT THE FINN?

"A surprising amount of dentists"

Finn's recently divorced parents both have busy schedules to attain. That is why the boy finds himself alone on the train today, travelling between his two homes. On his first unaccompanied journey, he is robbed by a guy on the train. Situations get out of hand quickly and soon Finn finds himself in the company of a girl named Jola, riding a stolen tractor on their way to the Baltic seas, chased by the police and a gang of bikers.

When meeting director Stefan Westerwelle under a rainy, grey Brussels sky, the atmosphere is gloomy - "you walk through the city, meeting all these people that you will never get to know". Stefan does his best to ignore the depressing circumstances through his usual talkativeness, but just like in the film script, there is a veil of melancholy hanging over every cheerful story.

Stefan Westerwelle: Offering children a complete cinematic experience and implant in them a long-lasting love for cinema is of the utmost importance,

but I'm not sure if I want to continue doing it.

Why? With four films in five years, you're building on a true children's film oeuvre! We don't want to lose those who are investing their talent and energy in productions for young audiences.

Westerwelle: Finding good screenplays is hard. Many children's films are just shallow entertainment. I tell scriptwriters that it's okay to have a ghost story in an old castle but what about the characters? What do they struggle with? Is there an emotional arch that might help the audience in their own development? Kids love to be entertained, but they might be even more happy when being offered authentic emotions to get involved with. Behind their entertaining facade, the kids in WHAT THE FINN? struggle with profound issues. The quiet moments in the film leave room for reflection about questions like: how does it feel to be forgotten?

The adventure begins and ends with



parents.

Westerwelle: In a kid's life, parents are always involved, but it's nice to get away from them from time to time. The advice in my movie concerns the parents in the first place: listen to your children, be aware that they might struggle with certain emotions and need to learn how to share them, otherwise they will bottle them up inside. Children's thoughts can be deep and dark and they have doubts about good or bad.

For a commuter the most unwanted thing is a person joining you unsolicitedly in the train. Particularly if that person acts as hideous as the guy in the film.

Westerwelle: As a child I was a commuter with a vivid imagination. Every time somebody came to sit opposite me, I imagined it was a "bad guy" and I panicked. This guy is not another harmless, clumsy antagonist, like I often see in children's films. He might look simply annoying at first, but he is evil - this guy means danger. There is a suggestion he might hit the boy.

How long does it take in the movie before we meet the first reasonable adult?

Westerwelle: After one and a half minutes, you get to meet Finn's father. In my opinion all are acting pretty reasonable. Who would you consider a reasonable person?





I can't think of anyone. All grown-ups behave pretty silly.

Westerwelle: They are simply doing their job. The police officers arrest Finn, the train conductor does exactly what is expected from her according to her function... These kids have a specific goal in mind - to go to the sea - and all those weird adults are just a motivation for them to keep going. As a child I didn't understand adults at all. They looked weird, talked weird, and the way they interacted with me was weird.

Then she walks into the movie... your princess! From that moment on, everything changes.

Westerwelle: Jola is a devil-angel, a dark princess. Lotte Engels has a great charisma, but she is also an actress with a true consciousness about

herself. The moment she appears, the entire scenery opens up. The story started in kitchens, cars and trains, but suddenly all those wide landscapes unfold.

Nevertheless she carries a sadness inside. When feeling at her most miserable, she explains: "I'm ruining it for everybody and I just don't care."

Westerwelle: That is the only moment we get an insight into Jola's motives. Many children feel like they don't fit in, or that their energy is too big, and that therefore they're not being loved as much as they should be. What Jola says is what I felt as a child, and what many kids might feel.

The meeting with Jola initiates a big change in Finn.

Westerwelle: The talent of Miran Selcuk (playing Finn) is to make this evolution happen so subtly. He doesn't change into a superhero; he is still a sensitive boy, but now he knows about friendship. And he can drive a tractor! This is what makes me sentimental about children's films: they recall the pain of growing up. These kids are creating memories the moment they live them. The older you get, the more memories you have and the less opportunities to create new ones. Every day you can do something for the first time, but it will never be the first time again. Time is running away from you, but you still have access to the happy moments in your life by remembering them. The important thing is never to forget.

Ultimately they both accept that this is probably the end of their common story, but there might be a world out there where maybe they'll meet again someday.

Westerwelle: Jola closes the door on Finn, but leaves it ajar by saying: "*If you ever want to get lost again, just tell me.*" Throughout the entire film kids are facing the fear of being alone and forgotten. Finally they deserve a prospect, like: in your life there is room for experiments, for exploring, and for failures but in the end you know that

you're being loved, that you're part of something bigger, something that offers you safety.

You have this eye for eccentric characters, that you don't seem to find eccentric at all.

Westerwelle: I like big, loud women, I like drag queens, I like naked people.. A deus ex machina appears in the form of two Danish nudists. When they drive off, a church organ starts playing while a kind of divine light shines from the back of their car. God is a nudist!

You must have at least one story to tell about shooting with the biker gang.

Westerwelle: They look like a gang of tough rockers, but they were all dentists. Those are the only guys who can afford motorcycles like this, and they can afford taking a day off for a film shoot. They are actually the biggest fans of the movie and keep on promoting it among their friends. If you would check the ticket sales, you would find a surprising amount of dentists there.

-
Gert Hermans