

# Kwak Nohyun, Chairman of the BIKY Festival

## “We respect the uniqueness of each and every child”

For me, the BIKY festival in Busan, South-Korea, opens the gateway to Asia, to Korean cuisine (which looks even more exotic in Busan than elsewhere in the country), to Korean hospitality, urbanisation, severe weather conditions and a smoke-free city. But does the festival also open the gateway to Asian cinema for children?

The programming is broad, open-minded and progressive. The only thing missing is domestic cinema, although BIKY - with input from dynamic colleagues such as Kim Sang-Hwa and Emily Jang - is doing all it can to encourage the production of children's films in the region, through lobbying or by organising an Industry Network during the festival. It is such initiatives that make BIKY the real youth film hub in this part of the Asian continent. The city is a candidate to host the 2030 World Expo, everywhere you'll see promotional billboards with the slogan "Busan is ready!" But how ready exactly is what I want to find out with Kwak Nohyun, Chairman of the BIKY board.

**A festival is partly defined by its location, the city where it takes place. A city like Busan is hard to “read” for a foreigner like me. Can you give me a key to unlock the city?**

Kwak Nohyun: Busan is the second largest city in Korea; the basis of its economic life is the sea port where millions of goods are imported and exported. Busan is known as Cinema City, with three pillars: BIFF (Busan Int'l Film Festival), BIKY (for children & youth), BISFF (for shorts) make Busan a popular place among cinema people.

**What position can BIKY claim within this triumvirate of festivals?**

Nohyun: I'm not a cinema person - I'm a law professor - but as Chairman of the Board I can say that we're the biggest, oldest and most established children's film festival in Korea, and we occupy a crucial place in the international scene. The festival has found its home in a huge building - we call it the Palace of Cinema. Moreover BIKY is not only a festival; it's also a platform, a market place and a school.



*Busan Cinema Palace*

**Let's go one by one... When you describe BIKY as a platform, you mean that this festival can unlock the Asian market for film professionals?**

Nohyun: Definitely! BIKY is the top in Asia. We are a marketplace for the entire Asian film industry and a platform for filmmakers and festival people to meet; every year a multitude of filmmakers are invited here. We select 60 feature films out of approx. 1500 submissions, we are highly selective. During the festival we have three forums: one for young people, one for adults,

and one for the industry. Out of 150 Korean film festivals, only seven are supported by the Cinema Promotion Fund, organised by the Korean Film Council, out of which BIKY is the only children's film festival.

**You said BIKY is also a school. What do young people learn here?**

Nohyun: We call it "movie reading". Students are invited to discuss what they see in a film; both watching and discussing are a part of our educational programme. Every year around



20,000 students from 450 classes take part in it. Every day we're having movie reading classes for which 200 to 400 youngsters are welcomed in the Cinema Palace. For me this is the most striking element of BIKY as an organisation. Film education is a great medium for students to be awakened; it can open gateways to themselves, their society and to global issues. Yesterday I saw how the film SEA SPARKLE opened our students' eyes to the lives in a Belgian fishermen's village.

#### How is that programme organised?

Nohyun: We make a licence agreement to buy films' rights for educational distribution. There are 17 provincial educational authorities in our country - Busan is one of them - and 6 of them enrolled in our programme, named "Buy one, get in for free". The idea is that if each authority buys one licence, the whole nation can benefit from it. Moreover we have trained about 50 teachers to conduct movie reading sessions, in which students dedicate 3 or 4 curricular hours to cinema. In Korea school time is extremely precious; this country gives a great importance to education.

**Being an admirer of wonderful films like THE HOUSE OF US, THE WORLD OF US, KIDS ARE FINE and BOORI,**



Industry Networking Days @ BIKY

**and knowing that children's film production in South-Korea is limited, I wonder if there is a role for BIKY to play in boosting Korean production.**

Nohyun: The most deplorable thing about BIKY is that we lack a satisfying number of Korean titles. This year, out of 60 feature films in our programme, only two of them are Korean. It is like that every year, in fact. Unlike several countries in the EU, Korean cinema authorities do not allocate a specific fund for children's film making. We carefully lobbied with Korean lawmakers and currently one proposal to allocate certain funds to children's movies is submitted. In our opinion children's movies are a public booth,

they should be nurtured. Otherwise children's films will seldom be made.

**It's not only about funding. It's also about creating a 'good cinema' tradition. What does a film need to be a BIKY film?**

Nohyun: This is not my expertise, so I can not speak as a chairman, but as a regular visitor of the festival. I see how BIKY films do not intend to be educational in the first place; most of all they should be attractive. The festival audience has very different preferences; following the requirements of our time, we keep our selection as diverse and balanced as possible.

**All this brings me to one sentence that I often heard in the opening ceremony: "We are all unique".**

Nohyun: That is BIKY's slogan. Translated in Korean it sounds like: "*We are good when we are different*"; differences should never cause barriers. We respect the uniqueness of each and every child, and only by that we can nourish the diversity and richness of our culture. This should be reflected in our programming and in every action taken by BIKY.

**I see why BIKY needs a chairman that is both wise and diplomatic.**

Nohyun: We have our Executive Director Kim Sang-Hwa, whom you all know. He used to be an animation director and a professor at the art college, but he dedicated his whole life to this festival. Without him there is no BIKY tradition. He is very stubborn to keep the festival for and by children. His spiritual mentor is Bang Jeong Hwan, who 100 years ago - in 1923 - launched the declaration of children's emancipation. Today BIKY is already raising the next generation of BIFF audiences, but BIKY has the right to also exist just as BIKY.

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Gert Hermans