

# Aga Borzym about GIRLS' STORIES

## "They will never be as fragile again"

Two friends meet at the playground. Now, on the eve of adolescence, Jagoda and Zuzia have a lot to discuss. The answers to life's bigger questions that adults can't give them, maybe they can find with each other, now that they are confronted with so many changes - hormone-driven or not. There's pimples, rebellion, first love, stupid rules at school, difficult dilemmas at home, and - above all - their first periods. When will it happen and how will it be? Jagoda and Zuzia introduce us to a world that every woman remembers and any boy watching this film can try to unravel.

Making young audience documentaries is not an obvious thing to do in Poland, where nowadays social and societal trends are highly polarised. Aga Borzym was brave enough to make a documentary in which young girls fully grasp the forum offered to them. More than a charming period piece, GIRLS' STORIES is also an encouraging pat on the back of an entire generation of young Polish viewers. The film premiered in May at the Mil-

lennium Docs against Gravity festival in Warsaw.

### What sticks with you most from the premiere?

Aga Borzym: The children's positive reactions. One boy, about 9 years old, said: *"Thank you for making this movie that gave me a better understanding of girls. If you ever make a movie about boys, I want to be in it."* Some girls thanked us because we helped them to overcome the fear of their first menstruation. One teacher said she is among young girls all the time, but never has the opportunity to really enter their world like we did.

### I noticed how easily the audience reduces the film to "a story about first menstruation".

Borzym: Which initially was the case. My idea was to make a short film with girls between 10 and 16 years old, talking about menstruation. But when coming across these two wonderful creatures, suddenly that subject felt too narrow. So we shifted towards a feature documentary about the end

of childhood, the beginning of adolescence and all the changes that brings about.

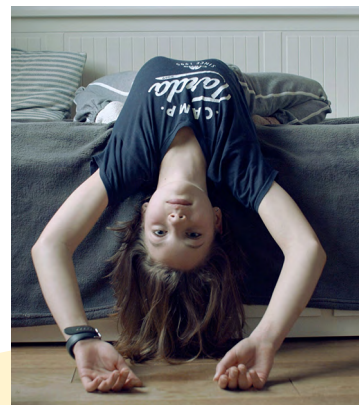
### Is GIRLS' STORIES to be considered as a grow-up-manual for girls?

Borzym: Our main goal is the normalisation of fragile subjects, as an empowerment for young people. It's also a film about friendship, about sharing things with a friend.

Agnieszka Rostropowicz (producer): This normalisation is crucial. Presenting these topics as normal aspects of everyday life should make young girls feel supported and comfortable.

### Are girls of their age still supposed to believe that babies are being born from cabbages or storks?

Borzym: No, not any more. But the expression might still be used in some schools - Zuzia went to a nunnery school - or with parents who think that children are not ready to know the truth. I guess often it's about adults not being prepared to bring up such subjects.



### Besides the story of two girls, this film also tells about a country and a timeframe?

Borzym: People might claim that Jagoda and Zuzia don't represent the average Polish teenage girl, yet they give an insight into our society, for instance in the rhetoric in Polish catholic schools. Zuzia even makes a statement about women's rights, which are not exactly considered a priority in Poland nowadays. However I didn't want to put too much responsibility on the shoulders of a 12 year old.

### Did you set an ethical code for yourself?

Borzym: People warned me that Jagoda and Zuzia would probably hate this



film if they will watch it again in five years, and that therefore the project was harmful. It made me extra careful. Getting the parents' full approval made me feel confident about both the process and the result.

### **Why Jagoda and Zuzia? Could it have been every possible girl in the world?**

**Borzym:** Together they have this unique energy. I shot some scenes with Jagoda meeting other girls, and they felt totally different. When Zuzia is around, Jagoda acts more mature, and together they discuss crucial issues. I was surprised to find out what issues they had on their mind. When I was their age, I simply didn't have a clue.

**Rostropowicz:** And they are complementary.

### **In what sense?**

**Rostropowicz:** Jagoda loves the camera; she is considering becoming an actress. She is the younger one but has a broad network and loves fooling around with people. Zuzia gives everything in a shoot, after two hours she is completely exhausted, but she has a great sense of humour.

**Borzym:** Jagoda's mother is a friend of mine, which helped us to connect at first but later became more tricky.



There was always the risk that she wouldn't see me as a filmmaker in the first place, but as an accomplice of her mother, an ambassador of the grown-up world. For instance when she decided to dye her hair without letting me know - although I would have loved to capture this process of change and her mum's resistance to it.

### **In the film Jagoda suddenly starts interviewing her parents.**

**Borzym:** It just happened and it looked great; I wanted more of that. But then she thought it was too childish so we gave up the idea. Her parents were reluctant anyway to answer her questions, which in a way is also meaningful.

### **So are the short animations that you included.**

**Borzym:** They add a new perspective to certain topics, for instance the physical transformation of the body. We had to be careful what to show in this documentary, for which animation offered a comfortable safety. Moreover the clay figures take you back to the world of childhood that we're about to leave, and moulding clay kind of symbolises the act of creating change.

### **The opening and closing scenes are shot in the same location. What happens there?**

**Borzym:** The setting is the same, but the protagonists have changed com-

pletely. In the opening scene they are little kids with flowers and ice cream, nothing but joy and 100% pure innocence. In the closing scene they still have that power, but the topics and the discourse have changed. They're no longer kids, they're teenage girls talking, making tiktoks... Something has changed, and some things have gone lost permanently.

**Rostropowicz:** The 1.5 years of age difference between them is more visible now. We filmed these girls in the most vulnerable moments of their lives. They will never be as fragile again as in the moments that we captured on camera.

### **What about that song in the closing scene? What does "essa" mean?**

**Borzym:** It was the "youth word of the year" in Poland and teenagers use it all the time. It means something like "easy going, chill, don't worry". I wanted this song to wrap up the entire film and sum up all the issues. And it should feel empowering in the first place."

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**Gert Hermans**