

Mira Fornay about SHE-HERO

“Every loss is an incentive to move forward”

Seven year old Roma loses her beloved parakeet Mimi. She sets out to search for her in the nearby forest, and takes her new parakeet with her, because she and her friend Cypek believe that her singing could attract Mimi. Once entered into the forest, a seemingly ordinary adventure begins in which Romy makes new friends, handles tense moments, tries to do things on her own and learns that you can't control nature.

SHE-HERO is a positive film with a strong environmental message, made in Slovakia, a country with not much of a youth film tradition. Director Mira Fornay creates a unique atmosphere, which often makes you feel as if you're watching a fairy-tale.

Mira Fornay: The main idea for the story came from spending time with kids in a forest in the pandemic year 2020. Then I applied a few ideas from 'The Hero's Journey' (a method for structuring a story with plot points and character development). But the most important element was meeting

Romy and Cypko – who is my cousin. There's nothing wrong with watching fairy-tales; I believe they are important in our lives.

Nearly all people that Romy meets on her path have sad secrets to hide.

Fornay: I don't think the reality of those people is so sad. We all have to deal with losses in our lives, but - as Romy proves - they can lead towards adventures. Different from children, many adults get obsessed with life's little losses, which prevents them from living in the present. This film tells you to perceive every loss as an incentive to move forward and enjoy every moment to the fullest. Life is fun and beautiful, despite our losses.

Which war are you referring to in the story?

Fornay: There is no war in my story! Among many other characters, Romy meets a soldier in the forest; in this area you can still find many bunkers from WWII. Once it used to be a gathering place for fascists, both German and Slovak. I leave it up to the children



and parents to discuss if this soldier is real or just a ghost. This story is full of magic-realism; it's a kind of poem about 'Romy in the forest'. There is often more than one possible meaning to the story elements, and I encourage kids and parents to follow their own interpretation.

Both at the beginning and the end of Romy's journey a storm wind is blowing.

Fornay: I love this shot; as if the wind – in a magical way – pushes Romy into the forest and supports her on her journey. The forest and nature's ele-

ments have all become characters for Romy to meet.

There is this woman in a long dress who disappears in the forest with her dog. Later she will return in Romy's dream... representing Mimi?

Fornay: I'm not going to explain my film to anyone, as that would prevent them from creatively interpreting certain moments or even the overall narrative. Nothing in the film comes with one fixed meaning. Now it is up to the audience to come up with creative explanations. That is what is so fascinating about art.



What can you tell about the 'real Romy', the girl you worked with?

Fornay: She is a kind, big-hearted and sometimes very stubborn girl. She practises gymnastics and karate, and loves animals and nature. Skilled in many crafts, she is a big support to her two sisters. She loves her parents and grandparents and friends but she doesn't want to become famous. To me, she is a real personality, active and sensitive, and it was very nice to be with her and the other kids on the set.

Kids and their strength seem to truly fascinate you.

Fornay: I am fascinated by life; it is

a miracle and kids are proof of that. They know how to spontaneously enjoy life – the older some of my friends get, the more they become scared of life. Kids allow me to be myself, creative and light-hearted; maybe I'm still a child at heart. They join me in my games and they don't take things personal... for too long. I wish for all children to have a childhood as safe as Romy's, but unfortunately this is not the case. That is why we decided with this film to support two children's charities, one for kids whose parents are in prison (I am mentor of a group of teenage girls and hoping to make a film with them), and one for child refugees.

In the Berlinale – where SHE-HERO won the main prize in the Generation Kplus category – you were facing the crowd in Q&A's. How interesting was that experience?

Fornay: Very! SHE-HERO is my first young audience film and it was interesting for me to see how they enjoyed it and joined the discussions. The Berlinale was a totally positive experience, with kids acting spontaneous and happy. That was utterly cool!

What did the award mean for you?

Fornay: It could be a big support for having SHE-HERO screened in many festivals, thus disseminating the message of the film, the ecological discussion connected to it, and the charity projects that we support. I was asked to develop a cooperative board game and a kind of diary for adventurous kids, with a focus on ecology and feminism. And I'm writing a new script, telling the story of adults who decide not to have children. It would be a film about freedom of choice, while still being pro-life. Kids, forests and water all need protection, as without these entities, humanity would cease to exist.

How important is sustainability for you as a filmmaker?

Fornay: I am an ecologist by heart.

I am (a flexible) vegan, I don't travel by plane, I don't have a car, I buy only unwrapped food from a local farm, my family has a bio-vineyard... Green filming was a natural choice. It was my first time as a solo producer, so I could decide about working with like-minded people. We did location scouting on bicycle, we filmed in a local forest with only small equipment, and we tried to be as silent as possible, although we laughed a lot, but I think that is healthy, even for a forest. During the shooting we only used three cars, of which one was electric. We walked a lot and basically minimised our needs; no comfort, no luxury, nothing... That freedom was so relaxing, but also demanding, as we worked hard all the time. But it was worth it.

–
Uta Beth