



**European Children's  
Film Association**  
Association Européenne du Cinéma  
pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse

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*interviews*

**How I learned to fly**

**The Path**

**The Tesla Case**

**DYTIATKO Festival  
(Ukraine)**

**Documentary focus**

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*Photo: How I learned to fly*

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## Films about people having problems

Some quotes and moments will last. Like years ago at a Berlinale reception, when I felt overwhelmed, listening to Dutch festival representatives talking about a “documentary boost” in the children’s film scene. I was impressed by this wave of dedication. There was another moment recently when a colleague introduced her organisation to me, stating that *“we strongly believe in the power and impact of documentaries for kids.”* Are you kidding? There is a boost going on, I protested silently. No need to believe. On the other hand, ‘belief’ is exactly what documentary storytelling depends upon - the belief and trust in the credibility of what you see. When it comes to young audiences, (re)claiming the truth has always been particularly tricky. To what extent are they able to distinguish fiction from truth?

The various representation of reality in documentaries for kids is something you learn by watching. FROM THAT MOMENT ON EVERYTHING CHANGED by Eef Hilgers is not necessarily about depicting reality as it is, it is as much about performing and re-enacting a perspective and personal truth. As German filmmaker Alexander Kluge stated: *“Documentary Filmmaking is about facts, it’s about what we desire to become facts, about documenting the realness of imagination and hope.”*

This being said, I feel ready to talk about dreams coming true. It is quite extraordinary to have partners like ECFA and the Goethe-Institut making a

meeting like REALITIES (9-10 November in Bochum) happen, a European exchange on children’s docs and the challenges of presenting them, in festivals, on television or online. And on all the issues regarding “format and age” in children docs, as raised so elegantly by director Martijn Bleckendaahl in a recent column for IDFA.

The prophets from the Netherlands knew it all the time, I guess - we are having a documentary boost. Initiatives like Real Young, KIDS KINO DOC, Ket & Doc, Jump in the Doc... indicate a promising development that deserves a second gaze. So do unexpected traditions in Eastern Germany, which REALITIES will reanimate. More thoughts about young audience docs are shared in a short ‘documentary chapter’ in this ECFA Journal.

*“Documentaries are these films about people having problems,”* is another quote I remember from one of our discussions with kids in the cinema. In that sense the “documentary boost” has a bright future (as illustrated in the interviews about WHAT MAKES US BOYS? and KALLE KOSMONAUT in this Journal.) So let’s give them the artistic space to flourish. Let’s become believers.

—  
[Gudrun Summer](#)  
 Co-Curator of REALITIES

## About HOW I LEARNED TO FLY

### “This is how we spent our summers”

There is one thing that all representatives of HOW I LEARNED TO FLY seem to have in common when we meet: director Radivoje (“Rasha”) Andric, producer Maja Popovic (Sense Production) and actress Klara Hrvanovic have mischievous lights of excitement twinkling in their eyes. Perhaps because they are proud about a Serbian children’s film that is embraced so unanimously. Or perhaps because they are happy with the excellent box office figures that this Central European co-production (Serbia, Croatia, Slovakia, Bulgaria) scores in Serbian cinemas. Or perhaps because they are simply happy to be here. Klara: *“It looks like a carnival on the street.”* – *“That is not a carnival; that’s simply the Zlin Film Festival.”* – *“Really? How heart-warming.”*

Sofia (12) is forced to spend her vacation with her overbearing grandmother on an island in Croatia. Not the perfect summer experience she had in mind! But feeling embraced by this big family circle, she makes new friends and together they celebrate

everything a summer on an island can offer: sparkling sun, seawater, lots of ice cream and perhaps even a first kiss. This carefree time abruptly comes to an end when Sofia is confronted with a painful family secret. Old wounds don’t heal easily, but finally overcoming the family traumas would save much more than just Sofia’s summer.

**On the screen you can smell summer in its purest essence. Was it always summer on the set?**

Andric: Not at all! I don’t believe in God but thinking back at this shooting, maybe I should have gone burning some candles in a few Belgrade churches. We had a super tight schedule and desperately needed the sun to keep up with it, but filming in the beginning of September, the early autumn rain was ruining several scenes. Maja Popovic: We even had a little flood, with trucks getting stuck in the mud. But considering the pandemic situation and limited budget, there was this “we shoot it, now or never” feeling.



**Up to what extent did the locations influence the atmosphere on set?**

Andric: Filming in these places felt very natural to me. My grandpa built a house on the seaside where I’ve spent a great deal of my childhood. This film depicts island life like we lived it during the time of the year when you had no homework and you could see your friends again.

Popovic: That is in general how we spent our summers: climbing trees, eating watermelons, hanging out by the seaside. All of us are familiar with this nostalgic summer vibe.

**Using the word ‘nostalgia’ for a chil-**

**dren’s film is tricky. Often you might read between the lines how “things were so much better in the past”. But I didn’t have that feeling with your film.**

Andric: With this film I want to represent contemporary times; nothing much has changed compared to the old days: just put your cell phone aside for a moment and go out. When watching the kids in my family, they’re still spending their summers exactly like this. Soon they’ll be old enough to go on the water in small boats.

Popovic: Values haven’t changed, it’s just that kids nowadays have to navigate through different influences and





challenges from outside.

### How did generations mix on the set?

Andric: We had a lot of rehearsals before shooting started; they bonded like friends already before arriving on the set. The rehearsals went much further than sitting around the table reading dialogues; we took them to the park and the pool, we went for ice cream and McDonalds... We made it a fun process.

### Being familiar with different chil-

dren's film traditions, we all recognise the Scandinavian style, the Dutch, Spanish, French style... But if I have to define the Balkan style (that we still need to discover), I find this joyful energy, this lust for life rather typical.

Andric: More than in Croatia – where people often hold back a bit more than we do – in Serbian culture you feel the Mediterranean influences. We do have this typical nonchalance that might ooze also into our film catalogue. Unfortunately we can't call it a tradition yet; over the last 20 years probably not more than five young audience films have been produced in Serbia. I would be very happy if my film could help convince other filmmakers.

Popovic: The Serbian Film Centre has made a separate call for children & youth films now, which is an important first step forward.

**Meanwhile the box office proves that it can actually work. HOW I LEARNED TO FLY did great in Serbian cinemas.**

Popovic: This is our most remarkable achievement. For many children this was their first domestic film experience. We were touched by how many kids went to see the film even five or six times, promoting it among friends

and family members.

Andric: Then we should be happy that it is such a good film! Imagine they would go to the cinema and afterwards conclude: "These Serbian films aren't that good, we'll never watch another one again."

**Even if your film is not primarily about the Balkan civil war, still the subject is - somewhere underneath – gently interwoven in one of the storylines.**

Andric: I hope that this film can be a step forward towards reconnection. We mention the suffering on both sides – when you see people on the other side suffering the same way like you did, would you still be able to hate them? How many Serbs ever went to the cinema and found themselves crying over a Croatian soldier who died, or over a Croatian family in need? We didn't expect it to be such a cathartic experience. We observed the audience laughing and crying at the same time, even hugging one another, not knowing how to handle these emotions.

Popovic: When we showed the film to a young test audience, the general remark was: "These people are fighting for no reason and they need to get back together; they need to make up".

**Similar feelings were reflected among the crew members?**

Popovic: Our first Assistant Director was Croatian, the second one was Serbian, and he called the other one "his first Croatian friend ever". He had never even set foot on Croatian ground before. After the last shooting day in Belgrade, he invited his Croatian friend at home, introducing him to his family. Instead of staying two days in Belgrade – as initially planned – they've spent 11 days together.

**And what about the young actors?**

Popovic: We shot in 2020 and in 2021 they all met up and spent summer together again. They are still in contact every day. Emma, the youngest kid on set, was only 8 years old – she was full of energy and everyone fell in love with her. In the interview for the 'making of', we asked her what was the hardest thing about shooting a film, and she answered: "The days off."

–  
Gert Hermans

# Producer Daniel Ehrenberg about THE PATH

## “Nature decided to give us a helping hand”

In *THE PATH* (directed by Tobias Wiemann) Rolf, his dog Adi and his father are stuck in Southern France having fled from Berlin and the Nazis. Their goal is to travel to New York, where Rolf’s mother is waiting for them. Their only road to freedom is along a steep path across the Pyrenees, guided by the young girl Nuria. When his father gets captured, Rolf and Nuria are suddenly on their own... In Zlin we meet producer Daniel Ehrenberg: *“This family adventure is set against the historical backdrop of the second World War. While setting out on a mission to escape, an unexpected friendship grows between two children.”*

**During the festival opening in the Zlin Congress Centre you must have felt blown away by the audience’s enthusiasm.**

Daniel Ehrenberg: It was impressive; I’ve never experienced this before. This great atmosphere is the essence of why we are in this industry. That is why the word ‘entertainment’ is included in the name of my company

Eyrie Entertainment.

**On stage you stated that the relevance of this film’s topic recently has grown.**



Ehrenberg: Rüdiger Bertram wrote the original novel and screenplay after reading the biography of Lisa Fittko, a

German resistant who helped many escape from Nazi-occupied France during World War II. In the aftermath of the refugee crisis in 2015 the book inspired him to tell a story about chil-

numbers will rise again. A few weeks after releasing the film Russia invaded Ukraine, with millions of Ukrainians, including many children, fleeing their country. Those numbers are not simply rising, the consequences also become more visible.

**In what sense?**

Ehrenberg: Travelling to the BUFF Festival in Malmo, I saw the amount of Ukrainian refugees in the Berlin train station, who later accompanied me on my journey to Sweden. They seemed so determined about their goal, but without any certainty about their destiny. How long would they be here? What would happen to their families? What future was awaiting them? I asked myself if our story wasn’t taking the subject too lightly, but then eased my mind: it is already difficult enough to get family audiences into the cinema for this film, so our duty is to treat the subject with respect and not to trivialise it.

**The script makes this uncertainty very tangible.**



Ehrenberg: Father and son constantly play this game called ‘good or bad’; whoever they meet, they will guess if that person is someone who can help them and be trusted, or someone who could betray them. This uncertainty is what refugees have to live with every day. How stressful could that be? The game is a playful way to describe a situation that actually isn’t funny at all. Remember the scene in the train in which you never can tell what the conductor’s intentions are. Officials in uniforms are extra tricky.

**When the boy asks his father about how high they are on the list of ‘most wanted people’, father replies that “Hitler will not have sleepless nights about us”.**

Ehrenberg: We didn’t want to tell another story about Jewish refugees – there have been so many already. I don’t even know a single story about the intellectuals that had to flee Germany. There was a list of German subversives who got stuck in Southern France and Lisa Fittko was one of the people helping them escape. One of the first ones she helped to cross the border was the German intellectual Walter Benjamin. Also author Erich Kästner was on that list. One of his books is interwoven throughout the film’s narrative. The original screen-



play was actually called ‘The path of books’.

**Many scenes were shot in remote, bare mountain landscapes. How challenging was that?**

Ehrenberg: We had all sorts of weather; rain, snow, wind... Tobias Wiemann shot MOUNTAIN MIRACLE under difficult circumstances in the Alps but we thought the Pyrenees in summer would be different. When scouting locations we were excited about the snowy mountaintops, but they told us all snow would melt by summer. Which didn’t happen – on our highest locations we still had 3 centimetres

of snow in summer. Then there was the rain... The crew had its base camp on one side of the river, the set was on the other side. On the last shooting day when the crew had a day off, we had a drone camera making top shots. That night the rain came down so heavily that the blue water turned into brown mud and the bridge got flooded – there was no way to cross the river.

**And there was the wind...**

Ehrenberg: From the basecamp to the actual set of the partisan camp was about half an hour with a four wheel drive over a rocky path. It was a huge

hassle to get toilets up on the hilltop, but on the actual shooting day it was so windy that all toilets were blown away; it was the famous *tramontana* blowing across the mountains. Working a whole day with the wind blowing at approximately 70km/h is exhausting; you can hardly communicate and it is physically extremely tiring. In the end it came down to our main actor Volker Bruch who said: *“Keep shooting, this pressure makes every scene much more intense”*. When looking carefully, you might notice some continuity issues... For instance the French police officers sometimes wear a hat and sometimes not, as they were constantly blown away. Our initial idea was to create a thunderstorm on the set, but it was impossible to get the rain machines up the hill so nature decided to give us a helping hand.

**Another charming element in the film is a dog named Adi.**

Ehrenberg: He was the most professional actor on the set. He was like a robot, you could tell him what to do and he did it very precisely, as many times as you wanted. He was treated like a star. Whenever he performed well, he got freshly prepared meat as a treat.





**With people speaking French, Spanish, German, English... This film is a labyrinth of languages and a producer's nightmare!**

Ehrenberg: The book describes how different nationalities gathered together, like Catalan communists who fled after the civil war, refugees from Eastern and Central Europe, German intellectuals... This region is in every way confusing: sometimes you don't know whether you're on the French or the Spanish side of the border, and the Catalan language is spoken on both sides. This proves the absurdity of borders as a concept; it doesn't work like that in reality. For reasons of authenticity we wanted all characters to speak their own language

– that is how they really would have communicated. Luckily Warner never asked us to dub, which is pretty rare for a German children's film.

**What about a Spanish girl speaking German?**

Ehrenberg: Nonna Cardoner (playing Nuria) speaks Catalan, Spanish and English fluently, but not a word of German. We made her a vocabulary book and coached her not only on the pronunciation but also on emotional connotations. She learned all by heart, phonetically. When she was invited for a photo shoot, Warner's representative addressed her all the time in German as she couldn't believe Nonna was faking it.

**As long as Rolf's father is around, THE PATH is also a beautiful father & son story.**

Ehrenberg: We thoroughly discussed if we could – in a family film – have the father disappearing from the story without telling what exactly happens to him. The author Rüdiger Bertram encouraged us to do so. But somehow he stays in the film through Rolf's imagination. Obviously there is a reference to LA VITA E BELLA, with the father covering up their journey to save his son from all of the madness and cruelty surrounding them.

**THE PATH was your first young audience production?**

Ehrenberg: The genesis of THE PATH starts with Lemming Film and their German affiliate Hamster Film (re-branded as Lemming Film Germany). By that time I had just started as a self-employed producer. When meeting with Leontien Petit (Lemming) in 2018 she offered me two projects; one of them being THE PATH. I worked on it, commissioned as a hired producer. Once Leontien was sure I could handle things by myself, she pulled back from the project in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. I didn't exactly plan it like this for Eyre Entertainment, but that is how things evolved.

**How was it to enter the children's film market?**

Ehrenberg: I have to admit it was great fun. I'd love to do it again some time. Together with co-author Jytte-Merle Boehrnsen we're thinking about a new project, but the financing is tough. It is a pity that the public TV broadcasters in Germany have decided to no longer co-produce children's films due to conflicts of interest with the streaming platforms.

–  
Gert Hermans

# Andrey Hadjivasilev about THE TESLA CASE

## “Kids engaged in science aren’t destined to be losers”

Whoever mentions director Andrey Hadjivasilev will mention his determination. Determination to promote his film, to network, to speak up for the Bulgarian children’s film tradition that he wants to restore... And that same determination speaks from THE TESLA CASE, a film made with great enthusiasm.

Tony is an aspiring young scientist, inspired by great inventors like Nikola Tesla. But this summer there will be no time for science as he is sent on a summer camp with his classmates and his friend Raya, whose popularity is not only based on her looks but also on her joyful spirit. Her charm doesn’t go unnoticed by Victor, one of the boy scouts with whom they mingle during the camp. While the forest and camping site turn into a battle zone for survival games, the two boys also battle for Raya’s attention. You might remember Tony and Raya from

Hadjivasilev’s movie THE CURIE CASE, but both titles stand completely independent from each other.

### Were you ever a boy scout?

Andrey Hadjivasilev: I never was. In Bulgaria, this movement was not very popular in my childhood. But I’ve always liked the values that scouts stand for: protecting nature, helping others, supporting each other in survival. When I decided that my next film would be set in the forest, I thought it could be interesting to make city children meet with experienced boy scouts. But I would say that I rather identify myself with the school kids in the film.

**In all his being nerdy, Tony is not a scaredy-cat. He dares to speak up to Victor and isn’t afraid to face the crowd when speaking about his passion.**

Hadjivasilev: THE TESLA CASE is a log-



ical continuation of my film THE CURIE CASE (2018) about the same characters. Main actor Martin Paunov had a key role in constructing Tony’s character. I have been working with him on various projects for five years now. I discussed many ideas and decisions with him, we revised the dialogues together, working on an authentic character. Another important element was to break with the stereotype that kids engaged in science are destined to be losers. I want to show that knowledge and science – and the people involved in it – are positive things.

**I presume you also have a certain admiration for great thinkers and inventors. In what way is your film a tribute to people changing the shape of history?**

Hadjivasilev: My film is a tribute to the golden age of Bulgarian children’s films that I grew up with, focussing on the young characters and the adventures they got involved in. Unfortunately, we have lost this tradition and it is my mission as a director to revive it. It is important to cultivate a love for cinema from an early age. And there is indeed a respect for the inventors. It is a sad thing that many kids today think of Tesla just as an electric car brand.

**In those seemingly harmless days of childhood, it is love that is making everything more complex. Most conflicts in your film are set in motion by love or jealousy.**

Hadjivasilev: Love and jealousy are strong motivators. But the main





theme in all my films is always friendship and how to become a better person, as a lesson for all young viewers.

**Considering the atmosphere among the young actors, I wouldn't be surprised if you actually went on a camping trip together.**

Hadjivasilev: I'm not sure what this production mostly felt like: a film set or a summer camp. After the Covid restrictions, the atmosphere on set was a true relief to everyone. My secret to working with children is that we all get to know each other in advance and become friends - we go to the theatre or the cinema together, have pizza and play games. We keep in touch even after the shoot. The adult actors were even a little jealous of the attention I was giving the kids.

**Among all the animals in your film, the wolf is the one that stands out the most.**

Hadjivasilev: When we were training albino rats for THE CURIE CASE, I found out that our animal trainer had three domesticated wolves, which fitted perfectly with my desire to shoot my next film in the forest. The biggest challenge with the wolves was the thirty kids around them. We had a hard time shifting their attention away from the animals; they

were constantly petting them, and on screen they didn't look scary enough. The other animals, like the frog, were rather authentic forest wildlife.

**I have the impression you like matching colours... the lab in the opening scene, the children's clothes... It feels like in terms of colours nothing was left to chance.**

Hadjivasilev: You are totally right. Working with colours and colour palettes is utterly important to me. It is one of the key elements in my narration, and when it comes to young audiences, it simply is a must. Not only the colours... in the phase of preparation, the most time I spent was on costumes and set design. Small elements like the light bulb on Tony's T-shirt or the "Every adventure has a story" quote on Victor's T-shirt when he is telling the werewolf legend at the camp fire are crucial details for me. 99% of the audience probably does not notice them, but the remaining 1% and I will know about them, which gives me great satisfaction.

**Referring to your film... what do you think is most problematic, the situation of Bulgarian children's film or the situation of Bulgarian highways?**

Hadjivasilev: It's like the question of the chicken and the egg, I can't decide



On the set

which one came first and which one is most problematic. The good thing is that in terms of children's films, at least I can make a difference.

**How difficult was it for a young director to make a children's film in your country? Did you have to convince many non-believers?**

Hadjivasilev: Filmmaking is difficult throughout Europe. The sad thing is that Bulgaria lacks a support strategy for young audience cinema. The good thing is that there are some like-minded people and things are starting to improve. This year for the first time, the Bulgarian National Film Centre will specifically support two new features and two shorts for children. I'm already working on my next project.

If you'll ask me again next year, then we'll see if progress was made.

**What makes THE TESLA CASE different from all other "kids in the forest" adventures we ever saw before?**

Hadjivasilev: The positive outlook on science! Also the plot contains a few extra storylines, both for the younger and older audiences. I can honestly say that this is a movie for the entire family.

–  
Gert Hermans

# Vova Speak!

## Organising the DYTIATKO Festival in Ukraine

When, some years ago, a bunch of international colleagues gathered in India for the SMILE film festival, there was this running gag: every time Volodymyr (or Vova) Diagilev from the DYTIATKO festival in Kharkiv, Ukraine raised his voice, another (much louder) colleague shouted: “Vova, shut up!” Simply to emphasise Vova’s silent and humble nature. Now it’s time to say the opposite: “Vova, speak!” Knowing him as a man of few words, now is the moment for Vova to speak up and give us an insight into how it is to organise a children’s film festival in a war zone. The DYTIATKO festival – as always – was planned for September, but how do you continue your mission when confronted with the cruel reality of war? And what is the place for youth culture when the world around you seems to be falling apart? More than ever... Vova, speak!

When we, as an initiative group, gathered at the beginning of February to discuss the format, the change of regulations and the competition programme of the next edition of the DYTIATKO International Children’s Media Festival, we imagined the festival completely different from how it is now. We planned several changes, innovations, and a high level of interactivity. How could we know this would be our last meeting ‘in person’ up till today?

On the morning of 24 February, it was impossible to believe this was actually happening; it was kind of surreal. It wasn’t scary - as if all this wasn’t happening to us. As if a war movie was projected in the window, instead of on TV. And at the same time, we knew for sure that it was not some aliens attacking us, but a specific nation – Russia – where so many of our friends, acquaintances, and relatives are living. It was like footage shown in World War II documentaries, or like listening to the stories of our grand-



*Screening of festival winner A BUTTERFLY’S HEART in Kharkiv*

parents, who lived through the war. But when rockets and aerial bombs started exploding too closely, and military planes roared overhead, cinema with its special effects began to lag behind real life.

WAR. I heard a lot about it, read about it, and watched it in movies – fiction and non-fiction. But all this is nothing compared to when it’s on your doorstep. The first week was psychologically the most difficult. Getting used to the war, to the sound of bursts and

explosions, I ran to my office. Running made it easier to hide, now the invaders’ sabotage groups were making breakthroughs into the city. It’s strange to remember it now, but one of the first things I put in my backpack with documents was the complete and only archive of the DYTIATKO Festival. It felt like it shouldn’t get lost, so I carried it with me when leaving the house.

The life of the festival was put on hold for about two months. There

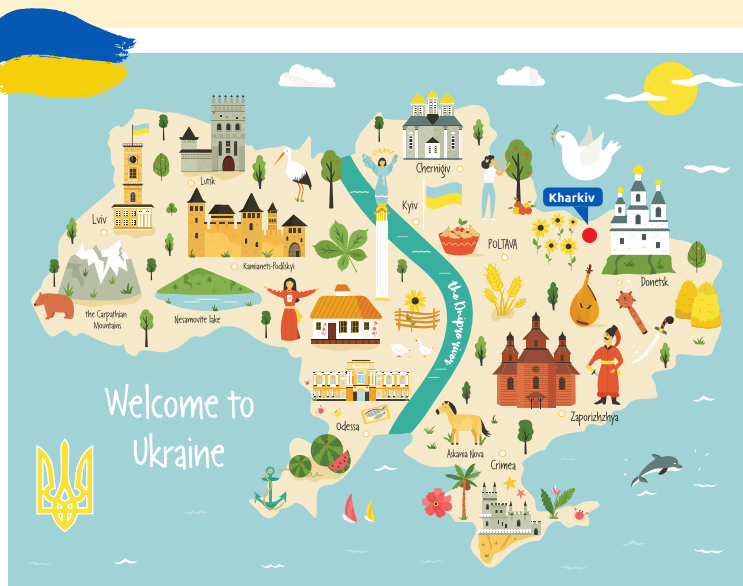


simply wasn't time to think about it. Everyone was busy trying to survive, and to make ourselves useful to the Ukrainian military and to those who remained in Kharkiv, our neighbours. Everyone supported each other.

By the end of March, the Russian army was somewhat pushed back from Kharkiv. The constant shelling remained, but less intense than before. We started thinking about the future again. With the DYTIATKO Festival as one of the conditions for a real future.

Nothing was clear about the format of the event. Back then, in April and May, we soothed ourselves with hopes for a full-fledged festival, but time arranged everything as it should be.

It was often said to me: Why would you do it? Why now? Why do we need it? Forget about it! Let's postpone it till better times. But the preparation of the festival became one of my anchors in this world-gone-crazy. Watching movies distracted me from what was happening out there. Once again, I was convinced that the feeling and aftertaste of a film - even if it is entertaining, even if it is about a war-related topic - differ profoundly from how and when you watch it. In August, when re-watching some of the titles -



the same film felt completely different from when I watched it in April.

Another anchor was the support of friends from different countries and continents, who wrote, called, and offered help and even accommodation. I am grateful to everyone for all the warmth and care you have shown towards me and my country. I realised many people are worried about what is happening to me, whether I am alive and safe... This makes it clear that for the sake of all of you and of the

Ukrainian children who are scattered all over the world, we must hold the festival on the previously announced dates, 7-10 September 2022.

Many festival elements and ideas had to be given up temporarily. There were not enough resources and not enough available hands. Probably, it would be easier to dive into online screenings to reach a wide audience, but we decided to maintain an island of everyday life for ourselves - offline screenings! Unlike previous years,

they will now take place in different cities in Ukraine - Dnipro, Ternopil, Poltava, Lviv, and Pervomaiskyi. In Kharkiv, screenings are held in subway stations, bomb shelters, and other places that are as safe as possible. Other communities in the Kharkiv region got involved; so their children will be able to watch the films. And we have planned several screenings abroad for Ukrainian children who have fled the country.

*"When the war ends, it will be the happiest day for me, because I will go home,"* says one of the heroines in a documentary film made by children. *"I understand that any victory is always difficult, but we will definitely win."*

Good movies and peace, I wish you!  
Vova Diagilev

# Bert Lesaffer & Astrid Yskout about ODDLAND

## “If there is no neck, is it still a giraffe?”

A bunch of bizarre animals are playing on the savanna. They look like giraffes, without a neck. When Gerda suddenly feels her neck grow, playing hide-and-seek becomes even more difficult.

Screenwriter Bert Lesaffer: ODDLAND tells about an animal species with a characteristic that we consider normal, but which is actually completely bizarre. A giraffe's neck is visually very striking and makes you question what is 'normal' and what is 'different'. What happens when someone deviates from the group norm? Actually, what we depict is a hyper-condensed version of the theory of evolution.

**With those long legs and necks, giraffes might seem hard to animate. Don't you regret not having simply chosen dogs or fishes?**

Graphic designer Astrid Yskout: My graphic style is not completely realistic; no biological correctness was required in the body movements. And I'm not fond of bright colours; my

style is more dampened, inspired by the Eastern European tradition from the 1970s, like *The Little Mole*.

**How many hours did you camp in front of the giraffe enclosure in the zoo?**

Yskout: We did watch YouTube videos, but then ignored most of that research. The hardest thing to animate was actually not the legs, but the spots. The pattern shouldn't be too complicated. That is why our giraffes initially mainly have short stripes on their fur.

**On closer inspection, giraffes look like a totally whacked species...**

Lesaffer: How do you recognise a giraffe? By its long neck! If that is not there, is it still a giraffe you're looking at? And will children recognise it as such? We made those little calves look extra clumsy, as they have no neck; their heads are immediately fixed to their bodies. They can't even look upwards.

**Being different also has its advan-**

**tages.**

Lesaffer: This story refers to how I felt as a child and how I look back on the fear of being excluded from the group for 'being different'. Even as an adult the urge is still there: everyone wants to belong to a group, but also claims to have something unique and special. On the other hand, 'being different' can help open a gate to a new world, which is exactly what happens to Gerda.

**You could make similar films about so many different animal species...**

Lesaffer: Why not? What about a hedgehog without spikes? There is so much more to tell about group dynamics and who knows... maybe we will...

**What about the sound? You don't use those classic kids voices.**

Lesaffer: It was certain from the beginning that we would not have dialogues but communicate through sounds and body language. Giraffes don't make a sound. Well, they do, but we don't hear it. They buzz at a



frequency that the human ear cannot pick up. So we started from a sheepish bleat, that goes from high to low – which seems inevitable with giraffes! That contrast between high/low is interwoven throughout the film, for instance with a stone rolling down the hill.

Yskout: That stone is gender fluid, by the way. With open eyes she looks neutral, but when the stone closes her eyes you see her curly lashes, which adds something girly to the character. Those are the kind of details that I adore!

–  
Gert Hermans

# Peter Budinsky about JOURNEY TO YOURLAND

## “Perfection in the imperfections”

The Slovak-Czech animation *JOURNEY TO YOURLAND* is ambitious in its storytelling and its visual approach. A 3D computer animation with characters looking like hand-made puppets, in whose footsteps we travel from one outrageous universe to the other. The film, directed by Peter Budinsky, had its world premiere at the Zlin Film Festival.

10 year old Riki runs away from home following a mysterious emergency signal that leads him all the way to a breath-taking parallel world called Yourland, where wonderful machines roam golden deserts, monkeys and ravens talk, and science symbiotically coexists with nature. But his journey brings Riki into the eye of a hurricane: a power struggle keeps Yourland in a strong grip, threatening – even literally – Riki’s weak heart.

**With its elaborate story and visual ingenuity, the film asks a lot from its audience, but it also gives a lot in return.**

Peter Budinsky: I am aware this isn’t

one of those movies you can watch while vacuuming the house, and that is how I wanted it. *YOURLAND* is dedicated to children; however the story touches several topics that aren’t easy to talk about, but the answers are all the more important. Finding the right balance was a continuous struggle with this movie that targets a wide audience without losing its in-depth approach. We overlooked the story from a distance, alternating funny and sad scenes, and colourful and grey visuals. Every time we understood that we were pushing things too far, we were ready to make a change. For example, the character of the ravens was completely redesigned, much more grotesque and silly compared to how they looked in an earlier stage.

**The first 20 minutes of the film are entirely focussed on the one main character. An unusual choice.**

Budinsky: One of my priorities was to serve the audience something unexpected. Of course I hear those opinions all the time that a movie should open with funny, colourful scenes,



but I choose a different approach, leading the audience in one direction and then suddenly making a drastic change. This is how I felt it should be done. I wanted to offer the two characters – mother and son – the space to act out their intimate relationship. If we would rush it too much, their magical bond will forever remain vague.

**You don’t hesitate to introduce us to the unpleasant aspects of Riki’s character (“you’re the worst mum in the world”).**

Budinsky: It’s important not to sug-

arcoat reality. Even when kids say unpleasant things, it is only a momentum. Deep in their hearts they do love their parents. I’m sure we all once had those moments of anger and hate towards our parents, which helps the audience to identify with Riki. Throughout all the many versions of the script, Riki was the only character that never fundamentally changed (he just got “polished” a bit). At one point all I had to do was close my eyes to teleport myself into his head.

**It feels like JOURNEY TO YOUR-**





**LAND uses the cinematography of a contemporary action movie: fast cuts, close-ups...**

Budinsky: I do enjoy long shots in live action movies, discovering about characters without a single word being said. But in animation, I like action, movement... It becomes itchy when characters are just standing and talking; I want to have them moving all the time. The framework for the narrative is created by the close-ups (showing the details that we've been working on in our set and puppet design) and wide shots (showing the complexity of the sets), that should be like a rollercoaster. I'm a fan of coming up slowly and then going down fast, giv-

ing the scenes an extra dynamic.

**Which is translated in the technique you use?**

Budinsky: I love mixing traditional animation techniques with new technologies. A stop motion animation design was the starting point for every phase of the production. For example, all the characters were designed as 20 cm tall puppets, though modelled with 3D software. All buttons on jackets have strange shapes, as our artists couldn't create perfectly round shapes for such small objects. The texture of the skin looks like an upgraded type of plaster. We were looking for the imperfections in the

movements and lip-sync – I always try to add a “human touch”; nothing in our lives is perfect; then why should it be in movies?

**The result is a very mature type of animation.**

Budinsky: The eyes and mimicry were my top priority. Once we reached a stage of “perfection”, we started creating the imperfections. Our team designed a code which was deforming the mathematically perfect movements created by a computer, to add some distortions.

**In the opening scenes we see these rigid city structures (“a grey block between grey blocks”) that contrast strongly with the colourful world we'll soon be visiting.**

Budinsky: These grey blocks are Petržalka, the ‘concrete jungle’ neighbourhood in Bratislava where I grew up. Petržalka had a bad reputation for drugs and crime, but yet I have plenty of memories connected to it. All the time I keep on advocating for the old neighbourhood where I was born, like a small town patriot. This grey, foggy, godforsaken area that Riki moves into with his mum, reflects his mental state. On the other hand, the world of Yourland is full of colours, superb inventions, and all things Riki ever

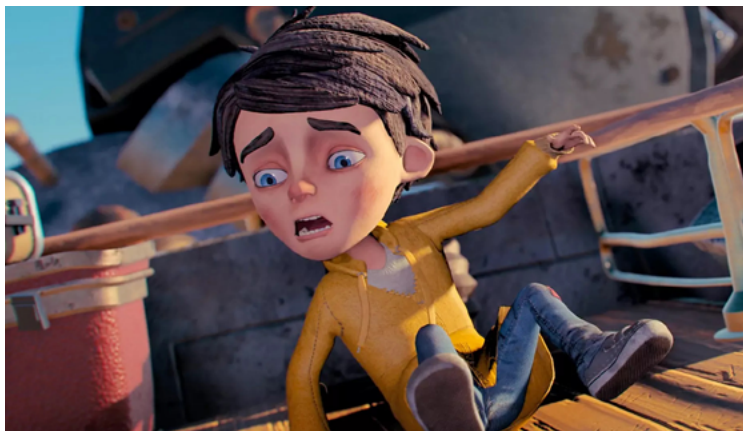


dreamed about. Due to this contrast we understand that Riki's inner world is not shaped by the exterior world. Even when living in a seemingly ugly world, we can carry a full and rich inner world inside us.

**Nothing as difficult and expensive as animating water... and there's plenty of water in JOURNEY TO YOURLAND!**

Budinsky: Which gave our team members many sleepless nights. You know... we were the first feature ani-





mation project to use the tool UNITY as a basis for our creation process. This tool is not developed as filmmaking software, so we came across many difficulties. But finally it came with so many benefits; it enabled us to create a huge number of shots on the water; I wasn't even forced once to adjust the script.

### **A great environmental concern speaks from your film.**

Budinsky: Isn't that the most important topic we should be talking about today? I wish I could have given it even more space. That is why my next film will focus even more on the environmental topic. There's simply nothing

more urgent to talk about. We can have conflicts, we can have wars... but we still need a planet to live on.

### **That's not the only contemporary problem you're tackling. Populism is another one.**

Budinsky: Many topics can make my blood boil, but in terms of populism you might know that the situation in Slovakia is running out of hand. We've "borrowed" many quotes from politicians and public figures and I should say... we never felt like running out of supply.

### **What about this small quote "Fathers are the same everywhere..."?**

Budinsky: It's not poverty or divorce or any other issue that worries children most; it is the fact that parents do not really talk with them. Emma's father is hiding his sadness, Riki's mother is hiding the truth about dad... I'm addressing all parents around the world to make them understand how important it is to be honest with your kids.

### **The film is a prototype of a creative co-production construction. How was that structured?**

Budinsky: For this I pass the word to my beloved co-producer and wife...

Barbora Budinska: The set-up of the co-production was based on what felt most natural for every partner. The Czech Republic has some experience in feature animation productions, our Belgian co-producer runs a post-production studio... The structure just created itself! Peter clearly understood this would be a different journey compared to his short films. He passed a lot of responsibilities to the team and allowed them to be creative with new ideas. It was never about giving orders or fighting for something, but rather about looking for solutions together. For that I'm very grateful.

### **How much were you held back by budgetary limitations?**

Budinsky: I tried not to think about it. Our amazing team members all did much more than they were supposed to. To any budgetary topic, there was always a creative solution. Maybe it's because of my "arrogance" not to bow to limitations, but the true credit goes to the team that was working so very hard.

—  
Gert Hermans

# Literature on Film & Media Education

Youth Cinema Network is the world-wide network that puts film and media education up front. That is why, we are more than proud to present useful literature on film literacy, published by some of our members.

## A. When cinema went to school and came back crying

*The chronicle of the “turbulent” relationship between cinema and public education in Greece from 1900 to 1997, written by Nikos Theodosiou (Camera Zizanio)*

This book sheds light on unseen aspects of the tumultuous and adventurous relationship between the educational system and cinema in Greece during the 20th century.

This relationship evolved in an environment full of contradictions, highly volatile and turbulent from a social and political perspective, involving wars, civil conflicts, dictatorships and uprisings. It was in this same period that a never-ending discourse developed about the definition of cinema genres, films’ suitability for minors,

age restrictions, films’ classification as educational or entertainment, but also about the necessity to use cinema as an educational tool.

The timeline of this research is marked by two dates: 1900 as the beginning (in 1903 the first registered school screening took place in Greece) and 1997 as the end. Not coincidentally! 1996-97 was also the moment when the relationship between schools and cinemas drastically changed due to the launch of Neaniko Plano (Youth Plan), an institution dedicated to Youth Cinema, organising the Olympia Int’l Film Festival for Children & Young People, screening and distributing quality cinema for youth for first time in Greece and introducing innovative educational actions and models.

As no relevant literature about this topic was published before in Greece, this book is based on Nikos Theodosiou’s own long-term pioneer research, involving primary sources, archives, newspapers and magazines.

## B. Film in education – setting up a model of film education in secondary schooling

*By Ana Đorđić (published by the Croatian Film Association)*

This book tackles the need to introduce film education into the secondary school education system and, accordingly, to establish a valid model of film education in schools as an essential prerequisite.

Film education for secondary school students is simply a necessity, as confirmed by the study of European and Croatian film education policies, the study of European and Croatian best practices, and the (pre)historical review of Croatian school film education based upon the available literature, and upon the former and current curricula in the second decade of the 21st century.

A survey among Croatian secondary school teachers already forecasted the difficulties of introducing film education in schools (non-compatibility with current curricula, shift work,



the current state of school equipment) but these obstacles are not insurmountable. Furthermore, from the point of view of European institutions, film is understood in two ways – as part of European culture and as part of European industry, i.e. the cultural-identitarian and the economi-





cal-industrial character of film are in a complementary relationship, and film education for young people is of the utmost importance for both.

The importance of European film literacy initiatives is evidenced by the Creative Europe Foundation, which supports film education programmes, as well as EU-funded studies that recognise the marginal position of film in education systems. Despite the fact that the European Union considers film literacy as part of media literacy

at times, it still clearly distinguishes the two literacies, insisting on film education for students, emphasising how this is a priority and should be introduced into the education systems as a school subject. There are five European countries (Austria, Denmark, France, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom) that successfully conduct film education programmes at a national level, even when film education is not a part of the national school curricula.

In addition, a large number of film



festivals for children and young people develop activities in film education. More precisely, young audience festivals are one of the four main places for film education – along with cinemas, cultural institutions, and schools. Among them, it is still only schools that do not provide it systematically. Therefore, it is a need to have film education integrated into the Croatian school system so that it can be meaningfully structured, and equally accessible to all students. This should be seen as an incentive to continue a tradition of Croatian school film education – after being returned to its prehistory in the second decade of the 21st century – offering Croatian secondary school students the indisputable access to film literacy, to critical, thoughtful, and complete consumption of cinematic works, as well as active participation in the general culture of cinema.

–  
Marija Ratković Vidaković

The Youngsters Making Film column is curated by YCN (Youth Cinema Network), a worldwide network of youth film festivals, organisations and film & media educators. YCN focusses on films made by young people, using their right to express themselves through moving images. For more info about Youth Cinema Network, check [www.youthcinemanetwork.org](http://www.youthcinemanetwork.org).

## Alfons Jitterbit – Class Trip Chaos!

Feature Film, Germany, 2022

Directed by Mark Schlichter  
Prod. & World Sales: X-Filme Creative Pool

Phone: ++49-30-23-08-33-11

[info@x-filme.de](mailto:info@x-filme.de)  
[www.x-filme.de](http://www.x-filme.de)



## Beyond the Border – Bekisisa

Feature Film, France, Italy, 2022

Directed by Alessandro Valenti  
Prod.: Scirocco Films, Rosebud Entertainment Pictures, Rai Cinema,...

World Sales: 102 Distribution S.r.l

Phone: ++39-06-62-20-59-01

[info@102distribution.com](mailto:info@102distribution.com)  
[www.102distribution.com](http://www.102distribution.com)

## Bigman

Feature Film, the Netherlands, Germany, 2022

Directed by Camiel Schouwenaar  
Prod.: Rinkel Film, Ostlicht Filmprod.  
World Sales: M-Appeal

Phone: ++49-30-61-50-75-05

[films@m-appeal.com](mailto:films@m-appeal.com)  
[www.m-appeal.com](http://www.m-appeal.com)

## Clue: The Maltese Mystery

Feature Film, Norway, 2022

Directed by Thale Persen  
Prod.: Maipo Film  
World Sales: Global Screen  
Phone: ++49-89-24-41-29-55-00  
[info@globalscreen.de](mailto:info@globalscreen.de)  
[www.globalscreen.de](http://www.globalscreen.de)



## Cricket & Antoinette

Animation, Croatia, 2022

Directed by Luka Rukavina  
Prod.: Diedra  
World Sales: Attraction Distribution  
Phone: ++1-51-43-60-02-52  
[info@attractiondistribution.ca](mailto:info@attractiondistribution.ca)  
[www.attractiondistribution.ca](http://www.attractiondistribution.ca)

## Detektiv Bruno

Feature Film, Poland, 2022

Directed by Magdalena Niec & Mariusz Palej  
Prod. & World Sales: ShipsBoy

Phone: ++48-60-78-16-342

[szymanska@shipsboy.com](mailto:szymanska@shipsboy.com)  
[www.shipsboy.com](http://www.shipsboy.com)

## Full of Grace

Feature Film, Spain, 2022

Directed by Roberto Bueso  
Prod.: Misent Prod., Mod Prod., The Nun Prod.  
World Sales: Filmfactory Entertainment  
Phone: ++34-93-36-84-608  
[info@filmfactory.es](mailto:info@filmfactory.es)  
[www.filmfactoryentertainment.com](http://www.filmfactoryentertainment.com)



## Journey to Yourland

Animation, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Belgium, 2022

Directed by Peter Budinsky  
Prod.: BFILM, Plutoon, The Pack, ...  
World Sales: BFILM  
[info@bfilm.sk](mailto:info@bfilm.sk)  
[www.bfilm.sk](http://www.bfilm.sk)

## Little Allan – The Human Antenna

Animation, Denmark, 2022

Directed by Amalie Næsby Fick  
Prod.: Nordisk Film  
World Sales: TrustNordisk Film Int'l Sales  
Phone: ++45-29-74-62-06  
[info@trustnordisk.com](mailto:info@trustnordisk.com)  
[www.trustnordisk.com](http://www.trustnordisk.com)

## Little Nicolas – Happy as Can Be

Animation, France, Luxembourg, 2022

Directed by Amandine Fredon & Benjamin Massoubre  
Prod.: On Classics, Bidibul Prod., M6 Films, ...  
World Sales: Charades Int'l Sales  
Phone: ++33-62-98-74-504  
[sales@charades.eu](mailto:sales@charades.eu)  
[www.charades.eu](http://www.charades.eu)



## Lucy Goes Gangsta

Feature Film, Germany, Netherlands, 2022

Directed by Till Endemann  
Prod.: Indi Film, Senator Film, Bos Bros., ...  
World Sales: Indi Film Production



Phone: ++49-71-41-64-80-820

[info@indifilm.de](mailto:info@indifilm.de)

[www.indifilm.de](http://www.indifilm.de)

## My Robot Brother

Feature Film, Denmark, 2022

Directed by Frederick Nørgaard

Prod.: Nimbus Film

World Sales: Sola Media

Phone: ++49-711-96-89-44-40

[post@sola-media.com](mailto:post@sola-media.com)

[www.sola-media.com](http://www.sola-media.com)

## One in a Million

Documentary, Germany, 2022

Directed by Joya Thome

Prod.: Flare Film, NDR

World Sales: Syndicado Film Sales

Phone: ++1-72-52-22-93-83

[greg@syndicado.com](mailto:greg@syndicado.com)

[www.syndicadofs.com](http://www.syndicadofs.com)



## The Robber Hotzenplotz

Feature Film, Germany, Switzerland, 2021

Directed by Michael Krummenacher

Prod.: Claussen+Putz Filmprod., Zodi-

ac Pictures, Studiocanal Film,...

World Sales: Studiocanal

Phone: ++33-1-71-35-35-35

[www.studiocanal.com](http://www.studiocanal.com)



## The Sleeping Beast

Feature Film, Estonia, 2022

Directed by Jaak Kilmi

Prod.: Stellar Film

World Sales: Media Luna

Phone: ++49-221-51-09-18-93

[info@medialuna.biz](mailto:info@medialuna.biz)

[www.medialuna.biz](http://www.medialuna.biz)



## Sonata

Feature Film, Poland, 2021

Directed by Bartosz Blaschke

Prod.: Mediabrigade

World Sales: IKH Pictures Promotion

Phone: ++48-51-42-54-490

[iza@ikh.com.pl](mailto:iza@ikh.com.pl)

[www.ikh.com.pl](http://www.ikh.com.pl)

## Super Furball Saves the Future

Feature Film, Finland, 2022

Directed by Joona Tena

Prod.: Yellow Film & TV

World Sales: Attraction Distribution

Phone: ++1-51-43-60-02-52

[info@attractiondistribution.ca](mailto:info@attractiondistribution.ca)

[www.attractiondistribution.ca](http://www.attractiondistribution.ca)

## The Tesla Case

Feature Film, Bulgaria, 2022

Directed by Andrey Hadjivasilev

Prod. & World Sales: Revive Vision Cinema & TV Prod.

Phone: ++359-888-73-68-22

[andrey@revivevision.com](mailto:andrey@revivevision.com)

[www.revivevision.com](http://www.revivevision.com)

[www.theslacas.com/en](http://www.theslacas.com/en)

## Too Old for Fairy Tales

Feature Film, Poland, 2022

Directed by Kristoffer Rus

Prod. & World Sales: Pokromski Studio

Phone: ++48-22-61-62-601

[mikolaj@pokromskistudio.com](mailto:mikolaj@pokromskistudio.com)

[www.pokromskistudio.pl/en/pokromski-studio](http://www.pokromskistudio.pl/en/pokromski-studio)

## Valentina

Animation, Spain, 2022

Directed by Chelo Loureiro

Prod.: Abano Prod., Antaruxa & El Gatoverde Prod.

World Sales: Pink Parrot Media

Phone: ++1-51-42-70-25-22 ext.268

[info@pinkparrotmedia.ca](mailto:info@pinkparrotmedia.ca)

[www.pinkparrotmedia.ca](http://www.pinkparrotmedia.ca)

## The Websters

Animation, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, 2022

Directed by Katarina Kerekesova

Prod.: Fool Moon, 13ka, PFX,...

World Sales: 13ka

Phone: ++420-721-01-13-57

[info@13ka.eu](mailto:info@13ka.eu)

[www.13ka.eu](http://www.13ka.eu)

[www.webstersfamily.tv](http://www.webstersfamily.tv)



More information on all these films you will find on our website:

[www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films](http://www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films)

## Nancy Florence Savard

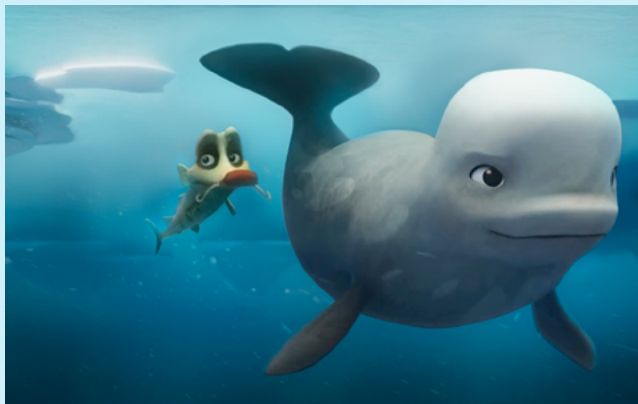


### Personal impression by Xiaojuan Zhou

I've known Nancy Florence Savard for about ten years (we actually could have met much earlier in another Canadian province, in Alberta where we both studied). She is a native Québécoise – a proud French Canadian – and a mother of three beautiful young adults,

who runs an animation studio in *la belle province*. She is a writer, director and producer. With her fifth film near completion, this pioneer is the most prolific animation film producer in Quebec (and probably in Canada). She sponsored Cartoon Connection events held in Quebec and is

an active participant in multiple associations and institutions. For the entire body of her audio-visual work targeted at children and families and for her dedication to the industry, Nancy Florence Savard received the inaugural edition of *Prix Rock Demers* last spring. This passionate professional with her roots deeply grounded in the fertile Quebec soil has shown us how, through sweat and determination, you can have both a happy family and a successful career, and – as a bonus – many friends (real and animated).



KATAK THE BRAVE BELUGA

## THE 'MEET THE MENTORS' Q&A

*Nancy Florence Savard, Canadian producer & director*

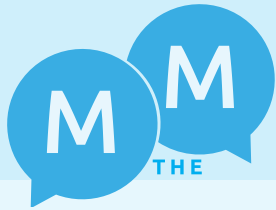
### Congratulations on winning the inaugural Prix Rock Demers. Can you tell us what this prize means to you?

Nancy Florence Savard: Rock Demers was one of Quebec's most significant producers of films for young audiences. He made a lasting impression, producing 24 live action family films which were all well sold internationally. Some would even say he sparked a whole generation of film lovers in Quebec. In 2013, while I was directing the first 100% Canadian 3D animated feature THE LEGEND OF SARILA, Mr. Demers came to see me during an animation test and told me that in his opinion, the future of filmmaking for young audiences would be in animation. His comments encouraged me to pursue my efforts in that direction. So it's an honour to receive the inaugural Prix Rock Demers.

### By producing your fifth CGI animated feature, you're ahead of other Canadian producers. Tell us how it all started.

Savard: It's been a long road. It took us over 10 years to develop and produce the first 100% Canadian animated feature. Before we came on the scene, there





had been no other stereoscopic CGI animated feature films. We started out by producing four computer-animated half-hour Christmas specials, to show our investors and partners that we had the necessary skills and that our stories could trigger interest on international markets. At the same time, for *THE LEGEND OF SARILLA*, everything had to be done from scratch. There were funding programmes available for screenwriting, but nothing for illustration, storyboarding or technological research. We had to move the project forward on all these fronts while proving that we could complete an 80 minute animated feature on 10% of the budget that a US production would have had. But one sales agent who had worked for Miramax believed in us, and after ten years of development effort,



production began. After the film was presented at the Ancey Animation Festival, rights were sold to over 40 countries.

**Who, fictional or real, inspired you the most?**

Savard: I draw inspirations from real life. At 10th Ave Productions, we carry out profound research on the subjects of our films. We do location scouting, we study plants, animals, architecture, costumes, colour palettes, reference files, etc., documenting all the details. Even our fictional stories are inspired by reality. For our upcoming

feature *KATAK THE BRAVE BELUGA* we explored the St. Lawrence River from Tadoussac all the way to the far north, spoke to biologists, shot reference footage, compiled sketches and recorded animal sounds. Our writer Andrée Lambert spends her summers on a sailboat, with belugas accompanying her on her voyages. They are her companions for several weeks every summer.

**You have produced films based on books and original stories. How do you pick your projects?**

Savard: It's a question of what I love.

Among books, I have a soft spot for Johanne Mercier, a Quebec author writing for young readers. I enjoy her sense of humour and the lively way she creates likeable characters. Since her husband is one of our favourite directors at 10th Ave, the connection with her happened naturally. When it comes to original stories, I've written a few; I've called on established writers of youth fiction; and I've had some referred to me by friends. We have a precise framework for the themes of our projects, and we try to respect the values that 10th Ave seeks to promote.

**Through your films we often get to appreciate Quebec. Was it intentional?**

Savard: Having travelled to places around the world, I find that Quebec has an exotic quality all on its own. This place possesses an immense wealth of landscapes, with its great river and its mountains, its forests and wheat fields, its four seasons, its cultural attachments to France and Britain, and its proximity to the United States. I love my corner of the world, and I hope to share it with others. If viewers should visit Quebec someday, I dream that they'll say, "Ah, yes, I saw that in one of 10th Ave's films." Promoting local talent on the interna-



tional scene is part of 10th Ave's DNA.

**How much did your own childhood memory influence your filmmaking?**

Savard: I try to create unifying moments like the ones I once knew, and the ones I tried to share with my own children. When I was young, animated features were a holiday tradition. Every day during the winter holidays, we would watch at least one animated film. These were shared moments of delight within the family, when everyone would curl up in front of the TV. And once a month, we'd have a Tuesday night outing to a restaurant, followed by a movie, with popcorn as everyone's dessert. We loved animation... but none of it was made in Quebec. That saddened me to the point that I decided one day to make films with settings and stories from right here.

**What are the do's and don'ts in animation?**

Savard: Animation conveys a kind of magic that I really enjoy. It can bring us into an imaginary world where the trees talk and experience adventures with animals living on their branches – but animation also allows us to illustrate, in poetic ways, some of life's painful moments.

**You're also an animation film director. What's the role of a director in animation? Is it necessary for him or her to have an animation background?**

Savard: It's necessary to understand how the medium works. Depending on the production pipeline, you need to grasp the limits and possibilities of each of the stages of production in order to maximise them. One piece of advice: never hesitate to ask questions and seek input from your team. You need to have a clear vision of the story, the characters, their attitudes, their way of advancing, their fixations, their expressions, their habitat, in order to transmit that vision onto the creative team, so that they can enrich it through their talent. In animation, everything has to be created, drawn, illustrated, textured... Solid preparation is the key: knowing how you want to tell the story, where you want the audience to look, what you want to convey to them, and how. Compared to a live action film, you edit an animated film before you shoot it. You create a storyboard, an animatic of each sequence, then you create and animate only what you really need. In the kind of productions that we make, with our Quebec budgets, there isn't much leeway; retakes are rare. You

really need to avoid throwing away sequences.

**Do you plan to make live action films for children?**

Savard: We're currently developing seven animated features. But 10th Ave already makes documentaries for family audiences. Last year, I produced and co-directed a documentary about young people who have suffered concussions, and about the measures that are available to help prevent young athletes from experiencing permanent damage.

**You are a producer, director, entrepreneur, a member on multiple boards, and a mother of three kids. How have you been juggling all these hats?**

Savard: I started my career on live action shoots, until one day I realised that 3D animation was the ideal choice for me as I was starting my family. If I needed a sunrise, it was no longer necessary to be on a film set at three in the morning. I could have breakfast with my little ones and create my sunrise after the kids went to daycare. Animation gets made slowly, it doesn't suffer delays because of bad weather. It can be generated locally, but the final product can be sold in other countries – which fits with my

international ambitions. Animation draws on many art forms: writing, drawing, painting, acting, dance, music, singing, sound design, sculpture, mime... I became a producer out of defiance, because there were none in my region, and because no one had produced a 3D animated feature in my part of the world, and no features had been made in stereoscopy. I took the plunge because I had many friends and teams of collaborators with whom 10th Ave had started out, and they were all ready to join us on the adventure. Some creators who worked with us at the very beginning, 24 years ago, are still working with us today. We've grown and gained experience together. It's fantastic to see talents flourish, and at the same time to be able to enjoy family life and watch your children grow. I created a job for myself so that I wouldn't have to choose between my family and my career. It's been my good fortune to have a happy, healthy family and a harmonious career because my partner in life, my family, my friends, my colleagues, my agents and also my financial partners have always been by my side, supporting me! I'm deeply grateful to them.

## REALITIES - a DOXS RUHR seminar

### BE YOUR OWN CROWD

The children's documentary genre is so vibrant and very much alive that you can hear it banging on the door of its nursery room, ready to break out. This growth spurt sets things in motion in terms of aesthetics, narrative and perception. Changes that are worth taking a closer look at. Therefore, European youth documentary experts will gather on November 9-10 in Bochum, Germany for **REALITIES**, an initiative in co-curation with ECFA, that has the intention to go back to the core of what children's documentaries are all about and discuss all the basic questions.

Some questions come up time and time again and so sound timeless, like the ones about quality and perspective. But there are also questions for the future. Like the ones dealing with the context of a digitalised world, and the impact this might have on people producing and presenting children's documentaries. The one asking these questions is Gudrun Sommer, co-hosting the seminar as the director of DOXS RUHR (a spin off from the *doxst!*

festival that she has been leading for 20 years).

**Do you still have to explain from time to time what exactly children's documentaries are?**

Gudrun Sommer: Definitely, but things have been changing. Fifteen years ago, festivals and events with an interest in launching a documentary programme came to *doxst!*, asking for advice or curation. But meanwhile the genre has spread widely and all these festivals have created their own identity. Today there is a much wider variety in profiles of festivals and distributors, which is an indication for the progress that the genre has made over the last few years.

**At the eve of the seminar, what are the striking tendencies you have recently observed in the documentary scene?**

Sommer: Professionals are getting convinced about the qualities and even the necessity for young audience documentaries. At the same time you see the genre evolving narratively and



aesthetically. This typical 15 minute model for which Dutch filmmakers have set the ultimate standards, is nowadays blurring completely. More and more documentaries try out new narratives, feature formats etc. One tendency in the children's documentary movement that has become more important is the fictionalisation - the discussion was already there in

grown-up documentaries for ages, but now it has been adopted by the children's documentary scene. Which is a positive sign; it means that filmmakers and producers nowadays trust the young audience so much that they have the courage to offer them hybrid ways of dealing with reality. But we're still talking about a small piece of the media cake. For the preschool age

group there is a wide range of productions using original ways of storytelling – but that does not happen so often for the older (6+) kids. There we still feel a need for what could be called “creative” or “observational documentaries”.

### Other tendencies might have directly resulted from our contemporary society.

Sommer: Due to social media, there is a new way of telling stories visually - the way images are used and understood today differs greatly from how images were used in classic documentary filmmaking. It is interesting to see how young filmmakers are using this language and combine it with traditional approaches. It's not only about being short and compact, it's more in the way of what you expect from an image, what images are supposed to tell. That element is changing drastically nowadays.

### In what sense?

Sommer: The world of social media is particularly interesting for documentary makers because on one side now protagonists might produce their own footage for a film - all the time they are producing moving pictures. On the other hand, as a filmmaker never before have you had so much respon-



sibility for your images - as soon as they appear on the web, how private or intimate they might be - they can be used and even reproduced. Like freeware. I don't think fiction film makers will feel this responsibility in the same way as documentarists do. Would you allow your kids to take part in a documentary? I know a lot of media professionals who would answer 'no' to this question.

### It is questions like these that will be discussed during REALITIES?

Sommer: Rather than financing or distribution – for these discussions, there are other regular events like IDFA or this year the Nordic Film Days in Lübeck. The approach of Margret

Albers and me was from the beginning no pitches, no talking about production nor about money but about films and how to present them. Therefore we invited European experts with different backgrounds, from contemporary production over film heritage till education. Also festivals are involved, as they have an interesting background to compare certain issues on a European level; several phenomena could be perceived very differently in other countries. For example in Germany we have this issue about trigger warnings not even in media, but also in theatre, education, even in universities. Very often it is a debate between generations.

### Will there be also films to watch?

Sommer: For one special screening we have a cooperation with IDFA, we will look back on historic traditions in East Germany and the Prix Jeunesse made a selection of films that over the years have raised commotion and discussion. Mainly we will be working all together - the format of a seminar might have been somehow forgotten, but it's definitely not about sitting back and listening to presentations. There is nobody to present things to - we will be our own crowd.

REALITIES is organised by the Freunde der Realität, in the course of the 10th DOXS RUHR festival, in partnership with ECFA, and funded by the Goethe-Institut and the city of Bochum.

**In the aftermath of the REALITIES seminar, in the next ECFA Journal you'll read more from Gudrun Sommer, looking back upon 21 years of doxs! and explaining about the new format for the DOXS RUHR festival.**

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Gert Hermans.



# Nothing about us without us

## The JUMP in the DOC programme

In Poland, differing from countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium or Denmark, the production of documentary films for young audiences is limited. Many films are being made (as student etudes, but also by experienced documentary makers) choosing young people as protagonists. But this doesn't qualify them automatically as young audience documentaries. This gap needed to be closed! We accepted the challenge by launching the "Jump in the Doc – Documentary Ideas Laboratory" in 2020.

Jump in the Doc is a trajectory through which filmmakers - professionals and amateurs – develop their ideas for young audience documentaries. ECFA member 'The Warsaw institution - The Andrzej Wajda Centre for Film Culture' found inspiration in the Kids & Docs programme, co-organised by IDFA. The films made in the Netherlands were developed by directors and producers over several months as part of specialised workshops, in which filmmakers were tutored by experts from the festival world as well

as the Film Fund and the public broadcaster. This synergy is what we also strive for; our goal is to convince Polish producers, financing institutions and film funds that this specific genre is worth being supported and promoted. Especially in today's world of crises, young people need a medium through which they can be addressed about this complex world and its problems. In our experience, non-fiction content works like nothing else.

### Distinguishing elements

What distinguishes Jump in the Doc is, on the one hand, that the invitation is not only open to experienced professionals. The project also welcomes educators, teachers, parents, and everyone willing to develop an idea for a film. That is how different experiences and perspectives can be combined; the exchange between amateurs and professionals is truly inspiring. The other distinguishing element is that projects are developed in cooperation with the target audience for whom we create. Children and



*GIRLS' STORIES*

teenagers are the experts, they are consulted about the ideas, evaluating them and actively participating in the workshops. That is how both age groups get to know each other and gain an understanding of each other's perspectives. Our motto is: "Nothing about us without us".

Jump in the Doc is about to launch its 3rd edition; each edition spans over several months and consists of several sessions conducted by experienced documentary makers. In the first phase the topic is deepened through research. Later, the idea is presented to a panel of industry experts during the Millennium Docs Against Gravity





festival. For this year's edition, already 12 ideas for documentary films have been incorporated. One of them, PINKI (directed by Ewa Martynkien) – about a dog in a shelter – has already been made and is now screened in both children and documentary festivals. The director emphasises that “I wanted to find an interesting perspective for this story, which was made possible through this programme”.

### Consulting young people

Jump in the Doc also helps filmmakers overcome their fear of documentary cinema, which they associate

with great ethical responsibilities. “In this programme, I discovered that I can approach a protagonist in an empathetic way and make a film that can be important for both me and him,” says former participant Marek Głuszczyk. Participants emphasise that the most valuable element in the programme is meeting young people and having a chance to consult them in an early stage of the project. This goes especially for films dealing with topics that so far haven't been addressed in Polish cinema, like the film GIRLS' STORIES (directed by Aga Borzym), about girls growing up and about the experience of their first menstruation.



### Convincing the industry

Jump in the Doc offers a space for experimenting where cinematic ideas can be tested, involving various forms of tutoring and mentoring. We try to break with the school structure, in which young people are simply seen as students. We make them teachers, educating the adults – a truly refreshing approach! However, our biggest challenge for the future is to convince the Polish film industry that for launching a true young audience documentary tradition, a synergy between different partners, and a friendly, supportive space for cre-

ation are needed. This is our mission for the future.

Organiser: Andrzej Wajda Centre for Film Culture, Warsaw, Poland  
Partners: Millennium Docs Against Gravity Film Festival, Krakow Film Commission, Krakow Festival Office, Polish Producers Alliance, Embassy of the Netherlands in Poland, Wladyslaw Slesicki Film Foundation

–  
Karolina Śmigiel

## DOXSPOT

### SEE YOU TOMORROW

Nick and Michi are inseparable friends. As they roam the streets and meadows of their neighbourhood each day, they share their thoughts about school and memories or remain in comfortable silence, as only true friends can do. But when Michi surprises Nick with unexpected news, they each try to suppress it in their own way.

*"Why are you moving to London?" - "Because I belong to London."*

In SEE YOU TOMORROW we are silent witnesses of the boys' blissful summer days. They spend almost every day together, building bonfires, flying kites, and climbing trees. Nick and Michi understand each other blindly, even if there are fights between them on occasion. As the realisation of their time together coming to an end is setting in, they both try to push away the changes that are imminent once Michi is moving to London during the upcoming holidays. While Michi thinks he is more English than German anyway, Nick does not understand how he

can just pack up everything and leave. After all, what about all his toys?

Director Kevin Biele manages to authentically capture the boys' friendship. Carefully and timelessly wrapped in minutes, we are carried away in myths and stories full of adventures. The often playful, but also whimsical and wistful portrayal creates a quiet, intimate atmosphere, supported by the rejection of direct communication of his protagonists with the camera. We either sit alongside them on the grass, walk behind them, or observe them as they are eating ice cream, but always at eye level.

During all their shenanigans, the ups and downs friendship entails, time and space lose their relevance. What will become of the long-distance friendship in the end remains uncertain and is left to the viewers' imagination.



#### SEE YOU TOMORROW

Director: Kevin Biele

DE 2022 | 20 min.

Producer: Anna Weber,

Produced by / sales: IFS Internationale  
Filmschule Köln

Contact: [festivals@filmschule.de](mailto:festivals@filmschule.de)

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Camilla Böttinger & Linda Teutrine

The Doxspot column is published with the help of the doxs! festival for children & youth documentaries in Duisburg and other cities in the Ruhr Area. [www.do-xs.de](http://www.do-xs.de).



# Tine Kugler & Günther Kurth about KALLE KOSMONAUT

## “We all should have a camera following us for 10 years”



She was a lecturer in media sociology at the University of Konstanz who discovered her passion for film when working on a documentary film; he was a self-employed director, editor and producer. Together Tine Kugler and Günther Kurth (KMOTO production company) have made the touching feature documentary KALLE KOSMONAUT about Pascal, known as 'Kalle'. With great sympathy and unlimited respect, they lead us into Kalle's world, primarily characterised by shortcomings.

KALLE KOSMONAUT premiered at the Berlinale 2022. The directing couple Kugler/Kurth first met their protagonist in Berlin, more than 10 years ago...

Tine Kugler: In 2011 I was at The Arche children & youth centre in Berlin-Hellersdorf, when suddenly the door opened, Kalle walked in and started talking. I thought he was just great; curious, self-reflective and open. I called his mother about 50 times to get her consent and finally we started

filming. The result was broadcast in 2011 under the title PASCAL ALONE AT HOME - Kalle suggested that title in reference to the film HOME ALONE. Günther Kurth: The film got great responses and donations kept on coming in the shape of money and gifts, including a skateboard and - unfortunately - a Playstation. Apparently we weren't the only ones touched by Kalle's story...

### Afterwards you kept in touch?

Kurth: We are from Munich, but we met whenever we were in Berlin, and Pascal often spent the holidays at our place. At some point we started following him again with a camera. We applied for a feature documentary TV grant (Kleines Fernsehspiel) and then later the BKM (Federal Government's Film Funding Agency) came on board.

**So you were back at his house, with his buddies with whom he performed his stunts on the city's heating pipes; with his mother who was still working in the hardware store;**



**with his grandparents who wished for the GDR to return and his grandma who gained control over her alcohol problem over time. You followed Kalle throughout his years of initiation: his mother's wedding, his first girlfriend and yes... also at the police station.**

Kugler: I was touched by this police-woman, coming from the same neighbourhood, who stood up for him and got upset when Kalle started to stray

from the right path again. Sometimes he told us he couldn't be filmed; he was simply feeling too bad. Then we just stayed around for days in Berlin, sitting and talking together.

Kurth: Right from the start we were aware of our responsibility towards him; that also applied dealing with his criminal offence. We had to carefully think about a) what exactly we wanted to tell about it and b) how to incorporate it into our story. All this



was thoroughly discussed with Kalle.

### Did you foresee Kalle's criminal future?

Kurth: Never! We knew there had been some minor skirmishes and petty crimes, but not such a punishment! Two years! In those days we had little contact and Kalle didn't reach out to us either. He was on drugs and for no reason hit a man, for which he felt bitterly sorry. Yes, I blamed myself for that! I'm not a social worker nor am I his father, but it appeared to me that a father figure was missing - he simply didn't have a male reference person in his life.

Kugler: The detention system is totally frightening, locked away in a place where nobody can help or protect you. A judicial officer told us that you can't protect yourself in this system, you simply have to endure it and deal with it.

Kurth: Each of us - his brother, his mother, the police officer, the social worker and we too - asked ourselves what we could have done. But Kalle said: you couldn't have done anything at all, I have to pay for it myself...

### Then you came up with the idea of comic book drawings.

Kurth: We weren't allowed to film Kalle in prison, and we couldn't get



inside his head without visualising it. That's when we remembered Alireza Darvish's minimalistic drawings in CAMP 14, a documentary about North Korea's infamous prison camp. Throughout the project we developed a time-consuming but very nice collaboration with this German-Iranian artist.

### What did Kalle think about it?

Kurth: He basically saw himself as a cartoon character, and a stranger to himself. After the first screening, Kalle said: In fact, we all should have a camera following us for 10 years, to get to know ourselves better.

### How much material did you collect

### in the end?

Kurth: We calculated 34 days of shooting, and did maybe 10 more. All the scenes are 'one-takers', you can feel that nothing was staged or rehearsed or re-shot. Kalle had his own idea of how he wanted to see himself represented. It was important for him to also show his negative sides, even if it scared him somehow.

### Despite everything, Kalle seems to be grounded.

Kugler: Which gives me hope for his future. Because the difficulties after two years in prison cannot be underestimated. There is hardly any help there - he was of course supervised in keeping him away from drugs, but

furthermore there was nobody. He doesn't have an apartment, and he can't find one because he doesn't have a job. From time to time he works in demolition, but still lacks the stamina for an apprenticeship. He takes care of his former girlfriend's child; although they are no longer together, they support each other.

Kurth: It would be nice if this film could stimulate offering chances to people, no matter where they come from, even if there is no way to sugar-coat their criminal background

### What about the title?

Kugler: The word 'Kosmonaut' explains a lot... the hope that if you want to fly to the stars, you can do it.

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Uta Beth

# Janet van den Brand & Timothy Wennekes about WHAT MAKES US BOYS?

## “That running through alleys is still like it used to be”

Together with his younger brother, family, and friends, 12 year old Daan is growing up on camera. In **WHAT MAKES US BOYS?** fragments of Daan's life are combined with the clips that he posts on his YouTube channel, while his voice is leading us deeper into his inner world. Is it a coming-of-age film? A documentary about the digital world of today? A mosaic of funny and awkward moments? Film-makers Janet van den Brand and Timothy Wennekes came to present their film at the JEF festival.

Timothy Wennekes: We wanted to make a film starting from the virtual space that young people use to express themselves, like Daan does. But he stands out among the others because for him this virtual world is but a playful, creative outlet.

Janet van den Brand: We loved the way he presented himself on YouTube. While other kids try to come across as professionals, Daan is totally pure, with his headphones taped together

and his mic not even plugged in; you can see the cable dangling. Then we discovered the huge story behind his YouTube channel: his illness, his transition to high school, his sister who became a brother... By zooming in on a small story, we tell about changes that children go through at that age.

### The entire family is brought under the spotlights.

Wennekes: His parents initially remain in the background, but they are there for Daan whenever he needs them. Those are the moments when they appear more upfront.

### Because of his illness?

Wennekes: EDS (Ehlers-Danlos syndromes) affects the connective tissue, and makes your joints too flexible. Daan is able to do sports, but then sometimes the pain in his joints becomes unbearable, or his arm gets dislocated.

Van den Brand: The disease only manifests itself around the age of 12, when



puberty causes a growth spurt. When we started filming, Daan had only just been diagnosed. It was utterly important for us to make a film about Daan who had a disease, and not about a sick boy named Daan.

### How important was the location to the story?

Wennekes: Daan lives in a neighbourhood, just next to the one where I grew up. I was born and raised there. The gang I had with my brothers was always at war with other neighbour-

hood kids; we made our own blowpipes and axes. I remember how important those alleys were to us. Children play in all kinds of ways today, but all that running through alleys is still exactly like it used to be. And there is a central playground where you gather with your friends, like Daan and his neighbour Axel do. Van den Brand: Daan's small world, in which you go to school on a scooter, suddenly opens up. Suddenly you have to cycle to school and your life no longer revolves around your own



residential area. This has a major impact on the bond between Daan and Sam, who still lives in that safe bubble.

### **Daan experiences this new school as an enormous change.**

Van den Brand: He was in a lot of pain during this period; EDS gets worse when you feel insecure. The school had a lot of understanding for his needs, but there are always practical obstacles that Daan has to overcome: thresholds, iron doors...

Wennekes: This says something about our society. Just when your body is going through its biggest change, you are brutally taken away from your familiar surroundings. Exactly at the moment when your need for certainty is the highest, you are offered maximum uncertainty. Men's greatest fear is the one to be noticed. Everywhere I go with my camera, passers-by always look at the lens. But when we followed Daan on his first day of school, no one looked at me. Everyone looked at him in his rattling chair. All the kids in that busy hallway turned their heads towards him.

### **You started the project with an enormous treasure in footage.**

Wennekes: In addition to the recordings we made ourselves in 2018 and



2019, his YouTube channel contained at least 1000 videos, in which you see a young Daan at work at the age of six. He literally grew up on YouTube.

Van den Brand: After Timothy had made a first selection, I dedicated three weeks to listing all the usable fragments. Such a bliss for a filmmaker! I like found footage; sifting through those videos was like a dream coming true.

### **I smile when thinking back to the scene in which Axel swings across the river on "a vine" and ends up with a wet suit...**

Van den Brand: ... and then takes the time to pose! Axel lives by the idea: a day spent without falling is a day wasted.

### **After two years of filming, you must have almost felt like a part of the family.**

Wennekes: We bonded from the first moment. We often had coffee with them. Actually, chilling with Daan's parents on the couch was a crucial part of the filming process.

Van den Brand: We always loved hanging out with that family; it's a bond for life. After my first interview with Daan I was deeply moved. He told us such beautiful things, sometimes very mature for his age, and sometimes very childlike. I didn't want anyone around during those conversations. Even if sometimes things went wrong with the sound recording (for which I was also responsible), in terms of content these were the best moments. Daan could express very clearly how he felt and indicate when he was worried about something. In his family everything could be discussed. We found him chatting with his mother about sexual education while washing dishes.

### **I appreciated how you brought structure and beauty in a location like a living room, which is chaotic by nature. Or the quiet moments, like when they're throwing socks through the bedroom.**

Wennekes: You can set specific ac-

cents via the soundtrack; without the right sound even the most beautiful images lose their power. In those intimate moments, we zoom in on certain details that we emphasise in image and sound. A living room is usually an untidy place with a giant TV that is always on and that scatters a coloured light throughout the room. By isolating separate elements, you can still find beauty in ugly places.

### **Did certain elements remain under the radar due to your approach?**

Van den Brand: Sam's transgender theme. Which was a conscious choice. We wanted to stay close to Daan; we fought hard for that. We wanted to know how Daan felt about that change, but we avoided it as a major theme.

Wennekes: Initially, the focus of the film is on a bunch of boys growing up. The audience might go looking for an overarching theme, but for us this was precisely the essence: the major changes that we observe up close and through which we get to know Daan.

–  
Gert Hermans.

# Frederik Norgaard about MY ROBOT BROTHER

## “I wanted people to feel welcome in a warm future”

School life sucks for 12 year old Alberte with her old android Robbi being such an embarrassment to her. Here comes the perfect birthday present – the newest model of humanoids! New robot Konrad looks and acts completely as if he were human and suddenly Alberte’s popularity spikes as she is now the kid with the most advanced technology at school. But can the connection between Alberte and Konrad hold up to a real friendship? Director Frederik Norgaard: *“It’s a sci-fi about people and technology, and what happens when we choose technology over real life relationships.”*

**For which specific tasks in life would you consider it practical to have a robot at your service?**

Frederik Norgaard: I wouldn’t say no to a lawnmower robot, one for cleaning, tidying up or shopping groceries. A robot caddie for playing golf would be nice!

**The future depicted in your film is not exactly dystopian; it’s optimistic and colourful, with just a few glitch-**

**es in the pattern.**

Norgaard: I obviously didn’t want to make another dystopian sci-fi film about the future; there’s plenty of them already. Children and adults need hope; I created a future that was positive, hopeful and green, in which all problems regarding global warming are solved.

**How were they solved?**

Norgaard: The key element is recycling, refurbishing and not using more than what we need. We print the food that we eat, we don’t overproduce, we refurbish our cars. Each household grows its own food, generates its own power and classic cars have been changed into electric ones.

**But people’s status - just like nowadays with mobile phones - is still defined by fashionable technology.**

Norgaard: I wanted to make a film about the future with a topic that was relevant today for the audience to identify with the story and the characters, like every good sci-fi film. I see with my own kids how whoever



is holding the newest technology, is considered more interesting and cool. However we shouldn’t define ourselves by the technology that we hold but by the relationships that we have.

**The main character of your film is a robot...**

Norgaard: In the universe that we created, everyone has its own robot; like having an iPhone or like talking to Siri. Robots are everywhere and every kid at school has one personal assistant robot following him around. That’s

where Konrad comes in. He is the newest, coolest model on the market, which makes Alberte extremely popular among friends.

**One of the key scenes in the film is the arrival of Konrad, an almost magical moment.**

Norgaard: If that scene didn’t work, the audience wouldn’t believe the premise of the film. We wrote it according to the procedure of configuring an iPhone, or installing Siri. *“Hello Siri, my name is...”* There is a scene in





which kids ask their robots about the meaning of life. That is another reference to today's technology. If you'd ask your iPhone, the manufacturers have programmed a response.

**Even when immersing us in the future, there is a lot of nostalgia to your story, impersonated by Robbi the old teddy bear robot. Everybody has warm feelings for him.**

Norgaard: Technology is not all bad; there are good and bad sides to it. It's all about how we humans use this technology. Robbi is actually good technology. Our goal was to create a clash of different periods - 70s, 80s, 90s... - Robbi is the result of that. He is a very positive character, friendly to everybody, and the film shows that if you are good to the people you meet, positive things will happen to you. Even more important, Robbi represents Alberte's innocence and purity. Caught between childhood and adulthood, she is going through a difficult, insecure period in life.

**I suppose Konrad's design was well-over thought. Why does he look the way he does?**

Norgaard: As the scenes between Konrad and Alberte often express poetic and complex emotions, three things were important about Konrad's



design: 1. That he was more cool and futuristic than Robbi. 2. That his looks would convince the audience that he actually is a robot, not an actor. 3. That he'd fit the pod he arrives in.

**On the other hand Robbi's design is utterly charming.**

Norgaard: Robbi was one of our main challenges. I knew that the best way to make it work was by putting a man in that suit, without getting people to think "oh, there's a man in a funny suit". It was important that the kids on set had somebody to talk to, instead of doing it all in CGI. We decided to keep the costume super basic. When the designer sent me the first clip of

the actor walking in it... kaboom! It worked. Everybody loved Robbi. Except the actor inside the costume - he felt super lonesome and extremely hot. Kudos to him!

**How did you pick your locations, or how did you make them look extra futuristic?**

Norgaard: For a sci-fi film, MY ROBOT BROTHER had a very limited budget, so we had to be very precise with our locations. We were so lucky; there wasn't much upgrading to be done. The only set we constructed was the interior of Alberte's house; we needed a greenhouse on the roof.

**Your hope for the future speaks through the film's colour design.**

Norgaard: As the future had to look bright and positive, we used mainly earthly colours and organic materials, except for the factory scenes in the end. I wanted people to feel welcome in a warm future.

**One thing is clear: even with the most developed technology, adults will always remain clumsy and far from perfect.**

Norgaard: The film is seen from Alberte's point of view and all children between the age of 11 and 18 consider their parents super awkward. Moreover, the parents in the film are actually the children of today. Their online lives are the result of children today spending too much time online - a meta reference towards the future.

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Gert Hermans

# KIDS KINO LAB TRAVELS TO CZECH REPUBLIC

## When the circus comes to town

The Kids Kino Lab might look like a circus, setting up its tents in different European festival cities. But rather than circus artists, the participants live like monks, dedicating their days to a programme of writing, evaluating, and discussing. Now that the Lab has landed in Zlin, we brought together the participating Czech teams (script writer & producer), asking them for a look behind the scenes. What makes this Lab so relevant? How do they like this monastic life? And what role can events like the Zlin Film Festival play in giving visibility to their work?

How to develop a children's film or series from initial concept to a film project, ready for production? This creative know-how is offered to novice filmmakers by the Kids Kino Lab (organised by the Polish New Horizons Association), during which screenwriters and producers of children's content are guided in preparing and leading a film project on an international level. This year, thirteen teams from around Europe are participating.

### The national film industry should be proud about three participating Czech projects!

Julietta Sichel (producer GAMEGIRL): This is such a prestigious project and our national industry and decision makers – including the Czech Film Centre – should be aware that we got selected for something really exceptional, taking place in our own country. That's why some extra visibility would be welcome, as for funders and colleagues to understand what this platform is all about and what it stands for. Some Czech producers may not even know how you can greatly benefit from this Lab when working on a young audience project. Maria Motovska (producer DIVINE LIGHTNING): Having somebody else promoting your achievements feels nice for a change.

### How can projects benefit from this Lab?

Motovska: Being part of a lab, talking to people from different countries, might help you to add an international dimension to your project, which



our industry sometimes tends to forget.

Sichel: I spoke with our Polish colleagues who are here with a completely Polish film, and no intention to step into an international co-production, but when you ask them why they are here, they answer "because it's great to have a foreign tutor helping us to improve the script and make it internationally appealing. Even if our main audience will be Polish, we still

want to sell our film internationally and make it travel. DETECTIVE BRUNO was developed via Kids Kino Lab, it has been screened here in Zlin, it will be a big domestic success in Poland, they have Dutch Filmworks as a sales agent and they're talking about international sales and festival deals. All this wouldn't have been possible without participating in this Lab. Motovska: Most international funding schemes will ask you about participa-





tion in labs, workshops, etc. Especially now that international platforms have opened up the market, the Lab can help you to close your budget, to secure your future and credibility to get your next project financed.

### How can a festival like Zlin help to secure that future?

Motovska: This festival is doing a lot for Czech production! The best thing is the Zlin Film Talent, offering opportunities to film students. The festival organises an auction of clapboards; that money will be invested in projects, among which several student films are selected. That is a

superb opportunity! For many students this will be their first pitch, and you can get good money from it. I do not know of any other event like this in the Czech Republic. Moreover, it is also about promotion; the Zlin festival is a big name in the Czech Republic! If your project gets selected, it will premiere at the festival.

Sichel: The Zlin Festival has a partnership with Czech television. Every Czech film in the programme gets TV coverage. We presented THE PACK here, which was not even co-produced by Czech television, but they did interviews, filmed the red carpet, etc. For everybody who is somehow involved

in children's cinema, it is crucial to be here.

### Let's talk about what's going on in the Lab. They're really making you sweat with a super packed programme.

Jiri Sadek (producer DASHENKA): It is as intense as it is rewarding. Which speaks from the results. After two sessions, the projects went from basic treatments or even loglines, to first or second drafts of scripts; and those are pretty good scripts! The projects are very diverse; there's artistic projects that aim for a certain commercial appeal, and straightforward commercial films that aim for a more artsy take on it. You also learn how to write in a professional manner. Many of us are here with their first script, and learned how to format it correctly to make a professional impression on your project partners.

Hana Cielova (scriptwriter GAME-GIRL): I was amazed to see the quality upgrade in the projects since the first session.

### What is the most challenging part of the writing and production process you're going through?

Cielova: That you're supposed to simultaneously analyse the other projects, to which you have to dedicate

lot of time.

Sadek: Normally it is really hard to push somebody to read your script; if you want professional feedback, you'll have to pay for it. I can of course give it to my grandma but I'm not sure what to do with her feedback. Here you get a lot of professional feedback from the group, which is a big time-and-money saver.

Sichel: We always start with group comments on what they like about your script. Then we talk about questions and doubts. And only then, at the end, the tutor will interfere; instead of putting you through hell, he will be asking questions. "Are you sure this is what your character really wants?" You're getting offered many interesting impulses and you have to choose the right ones. We all know where we want to get with our scripts, but there are many ways to achieve it, and picking the right way is challenging. But if four people tell you that something doesn't work – even if you're 100% convinced – you should start having doubts.

Pavla Klimesova (producer DIVINE LIGHTNING): Our tutor says: One viewer can be an idiot, but the audience is always a genius.

Sichel: The audience is always right.



**And what is the fun part?**

Hana Cielova: Finally getting away from my computer and meeting people in person with whom you can speak openly.

Klimesova: This is a great place to see what colleagues in other countries are doing and how they work. I've often been told: the best co-producers you'll meet through labs and workshops. Because you meet them over a longer period of time, which is different than booking a meeting in a co-production market and then after 20 minutes you should decide if you want to work together.

Marek Chalupa (scriptwriter DIVINE LIGHTNING): I like the little pieces of humour that are constantly added to the scripts. Even when a team has to profoundly change its story, still they miraculously find new sources of humour and new jokes.

Sichel: I always look forward to reading the next versions of treatments and scripts. Seeing the progress they made is rewarding. Participants also share a lot of inside information – we all feel like there should be no secrecy. You can tell that people really listen to each other and take advice into account.

Motovska: Through discussing each other's projects, there is an intimate relationship growing. For the script-



writers, having a group of people going through your work is very intimidating. This is the most fragile stage for every project, when normally you don't show it to anyone yet. But suddenly you have all these people looking over your shoulder.

Sadek: For me the fun part is everyone's cruel honesty. "You wanted feedback? Here, you get it!" There is an amazing vulnerability with everyone when people open up their souls; it is a very humane process.

Klimesova: I've taken part in several workshops, and the atmosphere here is more friendly than anywhere else, and I like it a lot. For this, the tutors

and assistants are partly responsible.

**Zlin is a rather remote city. Does anyone have a connection with the region?**

Motovska: I did my film studies here; Tomas Bata University is my "alma mater". And I'm currently producing a short animation with a director who has her studio at the university.

Klimesova: We've recently been doing a documentary here. This region was one of the most affected by Covid, and I have sad memories of our shooting here in the hospital. Many of those people were dying.

Sadek: It's not my credit, but in 1945

my grandfather made a stop motion film here with the legendary Hermína Tyrlova. Maybe the title REVOLUTION IN TOYLAND rings a bell? I'd like to think he was the one making the first TOY STORY movie!

Cielova: When I was working as a TV journalist on a programme about film festivals, we covered this festival many years ago.

**Are you ready and willing to premiere your film here?**

Sadek: It depends on the offer. No promises.

Motovska: We all agree with that. Festivals like this aren't about premieres but about high quality programming that profoundly supports Czech children's cinema, which is desperately needed.

–  
Gert Hermans

## Uri Lotan about BLACK SLIDE

### “Waiting in line with fear building up slowly”

Together with a friend, Eviah sneaks into the water park and prepares for a scary ride on the ‘Black Slide’, the most terrifying ride in Aqua Fun. Queuing in line, the tension is rising. Later that day, a dramatic phone call will change Eviah’s life forever. The short animation BLACK SLIDE has a light-hearted design, but a dark shadow is hanging over all the colourful scenes. That is why Israeli filmmaker Uri Lotan speaks about “a film about childhood, death and adulthood.”

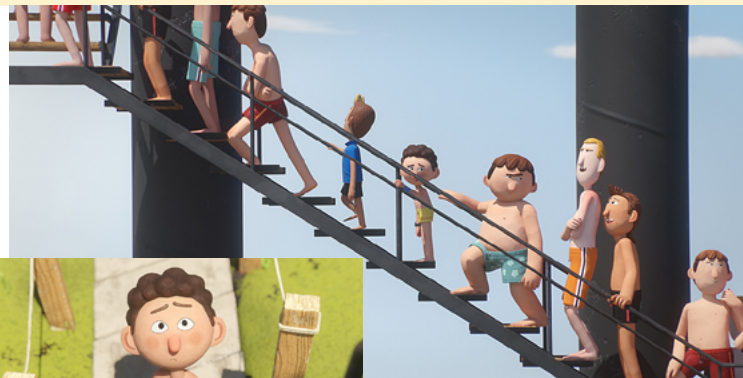
Uri Lotan: The film is based on a memory in which fun and tragedy got strongly entwined. As a kid I went with my friends to an aqua park. After I went into the water, I had the feeling that something had gone wrong, instinctively, so I went back home to my grandma who was taking care of us while my mother was sick. While preparing for a shower, I took the phone with me into the bathroom, as if I was expecting a phone call. Which came indeed, just like in the film. That tragic call was a monumental moment that got forever engraved in my mind.

I was maybe too young to completely understand, but old enough to pick up a few hints and connect them in my mind.

**That black slide is a frightening presence.**

Lotan: I remember being a kid, queuing for any sort of scary thing like a water slide, you had to wait in line with adrenaline and fear building up slowly. There always was one friend who already had done it before, scaring you all the way. You knew that in the end inevitably you would go in, with no idea what to expect. Sometimes our imagination goes wild! Once inside things turn out not to be as dark and scary as Eviah expected them to be. The slide represents many things, like the experience of losing a beloved one, the white light people see through a near-death experience, or a notion of the transitoriness of all things.

**Almost throughout the entire film, Eviah has a bleeding wound on his arm.**



Lotan: The scar is a rather superficial symbol. Eviah is wounded, the scar is bleeding, but he uses his friend’s shirt to hide it – he pushes it away, much like he does in his reality back home. There are certain things that he knows but rather would not like to know, so he denies them. One of the tricky parts of the film was the timeline being rather unclear: what happens in the present, the past, or the future? The wound helps us to establish an actual timeline; in my mind the trip to the water park takes place in the morning, and he gets home – wounded – in the evening.

**How do the animated aesthetics fit the story?**

Lotan: The main intention is to give a better understanding of Eviah’s inner journey. This is a story about crossing the border between childhood and adulthood, an idea that I liked to see aesthetically represented in the film, combining rather childish, playful elements with a deeper understanding of life. That is the process Eviah is going through; he is still a kid, but after this experience he will have a slightly more adult outlook on things. Moreover, the part inside the slide allowed me some extra fun as an animator. Because that is what I am, and how I think and communicate.

Q&A at the Olympia Film Festival



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ECFA's goal is to support cinema for children and youth in its cultural, economic, aesthetic, social, political and educational aspects. Since 1988 ECFA brings together a wide range of European film professionals and associations, producers, directors, distributors. ECFA aims to set up a working structure in every European country for films for children and young people, a structure adapted to Europe's multicultural interests.

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