

# Marta Elīna Martinšone & Asnāte Sofija Rožkalne about LAME-OS

## “Dumb jokes are the answer to everything”

If the world were full of 100% reasonable people, LAME-OS would probably never have been made. Even if that film offers you the chance to see – amidst a stream of fluorescent colours and kooky nineties fashion references – many things that you’ve never seen before on the white screen. And I mean: never!

At the dawn of the new millennium, three teenage girls decide to change the course of their incomplete lives. Tired of being the athletic boys’ laughing stock, Sarmite and her friends aspire to become popular prom queens. This also includes: dating popular boys. Staying true to who they are or giving up on it, that was the dilemma, according to Latvian director Marta Elīna Martinšone and main actress Asnāte Sofija Rožkalne.

### Who were you in 1999?

Marta Elīna Martinšone: I was a dork in 1999, and I guess I still am. It was a time of big changes; all adults around me were all the time talking about the new millennium and about losing

money to the bank crisis. But in the end nothing happened. That is what I like about that era; there was all this fuzz about the end of the world, and then somebody said: I guess it just didn’t happen. In LAME-OS we used the colours and fashion of 1999; even the elements that originated from the seventies or eighties all returned in 1999, and some of them have got back into fashion again nowadays.

### Who were your role models back then?

Martinšone: Buffy the Vampire Slayer! I was obsessed with her. That show started in 1997, and when recently watching it again, I still loved it. Buffy didn’t take orders from anyone. Then there were artists like Courtney Love and Melissa auf der Maur – I envied her hair! – and I’ve always adored Virginia Woolf.

**Teenage culture is a universal thing, but can at the same time be very local. How did you make sure the film would feel both Latvian and universal?**



*The Lame-os team @ the Zlin Film Festival*

Martinšone: I love watching teen films; I must have seen CRUEL INTENTIONS at least 10 times. A few jokes and cameos are included in LAME-OS that can only be understood by a Latvian audience. I like inside jokes. But we made sure to collect some international feedback from our Czech producer Julietta Sichel (8Heads) and I checked hairstyles with our Czech makeup artist.

**Are grown-ups in any way to be taken seriously?**

Martinšone: Looking from a teenager’s perspective, adults are weird, they don’t understand anything. Asnāte Sofija Rožkalne: Even if some of the adult roles were played by impressive actors! Working with Imants Strads (playing my father) and Guna Zariņa (mother) was an immaculate experience.

**This might have been the first film that made me sympathise with a gym teacher, as he is so socially clumsy.**



Martinson: In the first draft of the script, he was more mean, like the gym teachers I remember. But I rewrote that role. This new approach suited him much better.

Rožkalne: At least this gym teacher tries to participate. Ours was always sitting in a corner, telling us to do 20 'jumping jacks', and then carried on watching his mobile.

**Some of the dialogues sound totally natural - when hearing the boys talk among each other I really believe this is how boys talk – but the context you present them in looks artificial.**

Martinson: Together with the young actors we defined the slang we would use. Then I gave them topics to talk about, like... *"Boys talk about boobs"* – *"Okay Marta, we'll talk about boobs if you want us to"*. After a while they were like *"Marta, please, we're fed up talking about boobs; it's exhausting!"* Other scenes, like the confrontation with a gang of metalheads, asked for an artificial kind of western-approach. How to balance it... I have no idea! This is my first feature, and I mainly trusted my intuition. Comedy is not just about sitting back laughing! Guna Zarina is one of the best Latvian actresses, but she felt very nervous and insecure about the level of exaggera-



tion that was needed. I basically told her: do your thing, and I'll tell you when it is too much.

#### **Did you get similar instructions?**

Rožkalne: We went through the entire script to get the feel of it. The young actresses befriended each other easily, which made things more relaxed. Our main challenge was arriving on set every day with a lack of sleep, and circles under our eyes that couldn't be covered even with makeup.

#### **How did you maintain order in the chaos?**

Martinson: I am not very good at keeping order, but I'm good at making dumb jokes to keep the atmosphere

light. For the young actors, the work was sometimes boring, and always tiring, but dumb jokes are the answer to everything. We even had a competition on who could make the dumbest joke of all.

Rožkalne: You call them dumb, but I found them hilarious.

#### **With your passion for all things kitschy, would you ever consider making a musical?**

Martinson: I'm actually planning to make one, I'm currently writing the treatment. Musicals are my favourite – I don't understand why people often hate them. It is a genre that doesn't lie.

#### **I thought musicals lied all the time.**

Martinson: When characters start singing, it is because they can't express their feelings any other way – they are singing the truth. This fake-ness tells more truth than any other genre does. I love musicals, even when they're bad. Except CATS – that was the worst thing that ever happened to me. Bad things have happened to me in my life, but that film topped them all. It was painful.

Rožkalne: My own musical scene is one of my favourite parts. Never before had I learned choreography, or recorded a song, and I had never been wearing pants like that before (and probably never will wear them again!). The scene was shot outdoors on the hottest day of the year. We were seeking shelter under umbrellas, we could only have as much sun block as our makeup allowed, and all day long my high heels were killing me. But I can watch that scene over and over again.

#### **Any special favourites for you?**

Martinson: The singing lampreys! Our fantastic – but rather serious – art director at first was sceptical, and so was the rest of the crew: *"How exactly did you imagine those dancing fish?"* But finally they were so into it that they found ways for these fish to move so that they wouldn't dis-



integrate – which they did all the time – and they even understood my instructions. *“This lamprey is a more feisty one, he has to move differently.”* – *“Okay, I got it.”*

**The girls’ uproar in class – the “tampon scene” – is certainly among my favourites.**

Martinson: I love that scene! Those kids were played by slightly younger actresses. In the first rehearsal, none of them dared to throw tampons; they looked at each other bewilderedly: what is it that she wants from us? But then we spoke about that horrible “monthly period stigma” and I told them to take revenge for every time a guy said something disgusting to them. Apparently there was a lot of hidden anger inside; it was a liberating experience. Watching them going insane, I felt proud and deeply touched.

**It is funny how they try to learn flirting from books and series. If it’s such a complicated thing that you can’t even learn it from a book, then how should we learn it?**

Rožkalne: I am wondering too. I have some of those books at home – but they are not mine, of course!

Martinson: Those flirting tips about “accidental touching and laughing

about dumb jokes” haven’t changed at all since I was a teenager. Men still like to make women laugh, they don’t like women to make them laugh. Apparently we haven’t evolved at all.

**Not many directors get away with a voice-over.**

Martinson: Martin Scorsese does! This was my first film, so I could afford taking some risks. I did it how I liked it,



and I couldn’t have done it any other way. I re-watched GOODFELLAS and WOLF OF WALL STREET, and I understood I’d have to work for many more years to achieve even 10% of what Scorsese does with a voice-over.

**In a most embarrassing scene, pupils are watching a theatre play. Do you realise one day a school audience might react exactly the same**

**way to your film, not because it is a bad movie but simply because it is a school screening?**

Martinson: I feel sorry for those teachers, underpaid and exhausted, who are made responsible to decide which movies and theatre plays their pupils should see. I remember our school taking us to performances that I found so horribly boring that I stopped watching theatre for ten

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**The peacock was amazing in that scene.**

Martinson: He was! As soon as the lights went out, he froze, standing for hours in the dark without making a single move. Suddenly I saw this tiny feather coming off in his neck, fluttering down and landing softly. We were flabbergasted - this shot couldn’t be topped.

**Last year’s circumstances weren’t easy for a debuting director!**

Martinson: During another lockdown, after postponing the shoot at least three times, I thought it was never going to happen, so I stopped working and got fat and sad. Then a phone call came: *“Marta, it’s on!”* – *“Okay, I’ll start writing again and lose weight!”*

–  
Gert Hermans