

The most recent International Thessaloniki Film Festival at November 2014 already seems like a distant memory. But as 2015 has begun I would like to write something about it, as the special atmosphere it always seems to create in my hometown. As I remember it as a child and a teenager. Getting in touch with new directors and movies. Exploring avant garde and independent cinema even before I was aware what the terminology means. Now that I not am living there, I still talk proudly about it as an example of a good festival.

And in this occasion I asked the producer, Mimi Spång, and the director Jens Östberg of the Swedish movie '**Flygparken**' that they have visited Thessaloniki Film Festival as part of the international official festival selection. Sverrir Gudnason, the main character, won the 'Best Male Performance' award at the festival.

**Tell us a bit about you and your background in making movies.**

Mimi:

I have been in the film business for about 10 years now and have been working a lot with finding new talent and strong stories. We have been running our company 'Garagefilm' together with my colleague Rebecka Lafrenz since 2007. It's hard to be an independent company but it is also the best thing you can do to make sure that you always will be telling the stories you really want to tell.

Jens:

Having spent my late teens totally immersed in ballet and modern dance, I became hooked on cinema quite late - I remember seeing Reservoir Dogs and being completely blown away. From then on, I think it's fair to say that I've wanted to make my own films. I started to cross over from dance to dance theatre and performance art, I started to write for the stage, and soon decided to learn how to write screenplays - mostly through reading every script of those films that I admired. At that point, I knew I wasn't going to give up. It's been quite a long journey, Blowfly Park is my fifth completed feature film script... With film, I feel this great sense of ownership and satisfaction that comes with completing a long and uncertain journey.

**Tell us a bit about your movie, why did you want to make this particular story?**

Mimi:

For me it is a strong story about being a man in an environment that is very hard and brutal, where the expectations on you as a male person drives you in a direction that is degrading. But it is also a film about social heritage and trying to do right but ending up making the wrong decisions. Rebecka and I thought the subject of the male role was interesting and that Jens' approach to this story would make it complex and thrilling, so with that said, we just had to be part of telling it.

Jens:

The experience of growing up in an inland Swedish city, largely working class, where sports is basically the only way to be recognized, is very much my own. For me, it's an environment that is ripe with angst, desperation and potential violence. I remember weird schemes of petty crime that often escalated into panic, causing people to act with complete unpredictability.

**What is the first feeling you have when you hear the words 'Film Festival'?**

Mimi:

My first feeling is: now I am going to meet a lot of interesting people and see films I didn't know about. I love festivals! Now I am mostly going to festivals to connect with producers, financiers and sales companies from other countries and that is not only exciting but also really important for us who are making movies - to have places to meet and discuss and broaden our way of thinking.

Jens:

The feeling is one of getting to reap what you have sowed, good and bad, to relax a little and await the reactions and to have some fun, to celebrate a little, after so many years of hard work.

**The movie was in competition in Greece, what is the meaning of awards for you, do they define a filmmaker?**

Mimi:

It is always very flattering to be invited to a festival and to be invited in to a competition is even more flattering. But besides that awards have a quite big impact, it absolutely helps to define the filmmaker and also us as a company. It's a confirmation for us that we have delivered a story that really means something for an audience outside of Sweden. It also is one of the things that matters for financiers, they can see that we make movies that has an artistic height and also that we make movies that matters in a more universal sense.

Jens:

Awards do not suddenly change the quality of your film. It is the opinion of a small group of people, and with another constellation of jurors, awards would be distributed differently. So, it is quite random, subjective, and inaccurate. But - it is still a great feeling to be recognized, and for sure, the film is helped by it, in a myriad of ways. So, in a way, it can play a big part in defining a filmmaker's future opportunities - but it should never define the artistic choices of a filmmaker, and I think it's wise to not see it as any kind of 'proof' of your own excellence.

**So what did you think of Thessaloniki and the atmosphere there?**

Mimi:

It was fantastic!

Jens:

It is a beautiful city that I hope to go back soon. We had so little time to see the city this time, but what we saw really felt so alive and thriving, friendly and curious. We all know of the recession and its trials, but I really got a great feeling of vitality, curiosity and hope.

**How would you compare Thessaloniki festival with other that you have been?**

Mimi:

I must say that Thessaloniki is one of my top festivals experiences!

I don't want to compare it with other festivals but I can say that the crew was very friendly, they take

care of you very well and are super organized. The location is also very good and everything is gathered in the same part of town, which I really like. It was one of my top experiences!

Jens:

It was bigger than I expected, with a very impressive line-up of films. We felt very well received and taken care of. And the parties at night at the film center were great! All in all - I had a great experience. But you know, as a choreographer I really have minimal experience with film festivals. I've been to a few, and among them, the overall vibe of Thessaloniki is top notch, generous, curious, and smart. Between the long tradition of the festival, the great location of Thessaloniki, and the great audience, it feels like it should have a very bright future.

### **What did you make of the Greek audience?**

Mimi:

The audience was also fantastic and they had great questions.

The cinemas were full and you could feel that the audience was a film interested one. They were there because they love and care about film. The questions we got afterwards were advanced and serious, and that is fantastic to experience because it is exactly what you want as a filmmaker, the curiosity!

Jens:

What stood out in the Thessaloniki festival was the audience, how interested and invested they were, full houses on the screenings I went to, lots of clever questions afterwards. And this is what you want as a filmmaker - people who are genuinely interested in film, who's curious about what you're trying to achieve. Everybody, from the festival goers I got to talk to, to the workers at the festival, were just so nice and respectful, yet challenging in their questions.

That's the opinion of our Swedish friends. Have a bright new year, like in the movies where things can change in a magical way (for the better!)