



Photo: Milan Malíček

Sergi López can transform a film with his riveting performances, such as in his latest work, *The Next Skin*



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ACTING ON A NEED TO KNOW BASIS

SERGI LÓPEZ DID THE NEXT SKIN BELIEVING IN THE STORY BUT NOT KNOWING THE END

Michael Stein

Sergi López has come to KVIFF to present *The Next Skin*, in which he delivers the kind of menacing but nuanced performance that has catapulted the Catalan actor into the upper echelon of the craft. López holds forth on the unique experience of making the film co-directed by Isaki Lacuesta and Isa Campo, on acting in four languages, and on agreeing to appear in a film based only upon being told a story.

***The Next Skin* had two directors – what was it like to be directed by two people at once?**

It's maybe not common; it's rare. You're not used to working with two voices. But in this case, they are really close. The problem would be if one director says one thing and the other says something else, but that wasn't the case here. Isaki and Isa write together, they live together, they have a little girl – they're a couple. They really wanted to

direct the movie together. They're a team, a real team. You speak all the time with both. You don't feel you're speaking to two different directors but to one director but with two heads – one a woman's and one a man's.

The film hinges on the suspense of not knowing if Gabriel (the son found after going missing eight years) is really someone else. Of course, you know everything from the screenplay, so how do you express this uncertainty?

The thing is we don't know, exactly, and when I talked to the directors, I said, 'But we need to know!' All this doubt was completely in the movie all the time. All the characters have secrets and you don't know what each of them is hiding. And at the end, we don't know if he is the real guy or a fake – we play with that. It was complicated (*laughs*). I kept telling the directors, 'I need to know if he's the real one,' but they laughed at me. When you look at the results, they were right,

because I love this movie; it keeps you caught to the end.

I think (Isaki and Isa) want to talk about the doubt about the identity but also the question of what is a real family. I think they want to talk about the idea that a real family is not just a real one but what you can build together. Maybe the guy is not the real guy and the mother is not the real mother, but in the end they love; they build something together; they became a family too.

But, as an actor, does uncertainty like this make it difficult for you?

Yes (*laughs*). I love to play a character when things aren't clear. I love when a character isn't just funny or you don't know if he's dangerous. I love that. But there were some moments it was complicated to play a character that you don't know, so it was complicated but it was a game and we tried to enjoy it. You know, the movie is very hard, but for us the shoot was really fun. The team, the actors are all very good. The young boy,

Alex [Monner] is excellent ... it was a real pleasure to work together.

You act in a number of different languages – Catalan, Spanish, French and English. Is that difficult, or is there an advantage for you as an actor?

You know, my first language is Catalan. And normally you might think it's closer to me, but when you act you are never *you*. You are always somebody else. So sometimes when you're acting in another language, it's easier to think you are another person, to play another character, and it helps you when you act in a language, like in English, where you don't control every word. You are forced to be somebody else, not you.

How do you choose the roles you play?

When I started out I was in France and I'm not much of a cinephile, maybe a little bit more now, but I don't know directors and actors so much. So the only thing I can use is the screenplay. And you

know, I cannot just choose the movies just about my character. Sometimes I read a screenplay and my character is very good, it's wonderful, but the story... (*shrugs*). I prefer a screenplay where my character is a normal guy but the story is good. I have to believe in the story.

When Guillermo del Toro came to Spain and presented *Pan's Labyrinth* to you, he didn't have a screenplay, but just told you his idea for the story. Is this unusual?

It is unusual – but Guillermo del Toro, he is very unusual. He's somebody very exceptional. He didn't have a screenplay. He didn't have a single word written down, but he said 'Well, we have an hour, listen.' And he just told a tale. He explained everything in great detail and very well, and after an hour he said, 'So that's the movie, do you want to do it?' And I said, 'Yes, yes, yes.' Because in the end it was incredible how when he sent me the screenplay and I read it, it was exactly what he'd described. ■

SEE YOU THERE

MAREK HOVORKA

JIHLAVA IDFF
DIRECTOR

Let's explore what the term *documentary* stands for in contemporary cinema. Czech documentaries are often characterized by their humor not always understood abroad, because they treat serious matters irreverently. But in *FC Roma* you'll see whether it's possible to translate the coexistence of the "white" majority with the Roma minority into a soccer slapstick.

In Venice last year, Austrian director Andreas Horvath presented a film portrait titled *Helmut Berger, Actor* – an existential calm following a career whose only remnants are an empty apartment and memories, fading like old photographs. The film's rawness rekindled a debate on ethics in documentary film and exemplified why many in the field eventually turn to features. However, staged or set in real time, it's always the film's auteur who knows the lim-

its of the possible – and Horvath is a director who doesn't resort to sentimentality or cheap effects. (HG)

FC Roma screens today at 5pm (Drahomíra Cinema). Helmut Berger, Actor screens today at 8pm (Cinema B) and at 4pm (Congress Hall) ■



FUTURE FILMS GARNER FEST AWARDS

KVIFF's *Works in Progress* event, one of several where filmmakers present projects in the hopes of developing them further, is part of the fest's commitment to nurturing future filmmakers.

With eight projects pitched before a jury of Karin Schockweiler (The Film Fund of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg), Kim Yutani (Sundance IFF) and Meinolf Zurhorst (Arte/ZDF), KVIFF announced the winning entry July 5, awarding a package worth €100,000 made up of the post-production services at Prague's UPP and Soundsquare plus a cash award of €10,000 from Barrandov Studio.

And the winner is... *Requiem for Mrs. J* by Bojan Vuletić, a coproduction of Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia produced by Nenad Dukić, Pavlina Jeleva and Tomi Salkovski. The film, which follows the efforts of a suicidal retired administrator to

collect her overdue pay, was honored by the jury for its "darkly humorous and realistic perspective."

They also commended a "complex performance" and portrayal of "the life of a woman whose struggle with bureaucracy forces her to take an inevitable solution."

In addition, the **Eurimages Lab Project Award** @KVIFF went to one of eight projects winnowed down from 64 submitted from Eurimages member countries. Eligible work was in production or post-production, made outside traditional filmmaking and showing international co-operation.

The best project award of €50,000 went to *Perseverance*, directed and written by Miha Knific, a coproduction of Slovenia, Croatia, Italy and Serbia; the producer is Siniša Juričić, and the cinematographer is Aljoša Suk. ■



Bojan Vuletić, Nenad Dukić – *Requiem for Mrs. J*



Perseverance wins Eurimages Lab Project Award

OFFICIAL SELECTION

NIGHTLIFE – MAN'S BEST FRIEND, AND SOCIETY'S WORST ENEMY



Renowned director Damjan Kozole's *Nightlife* is a study in fear as a driving force; how some wounds never heal

Brian Kenety

Late one Friday night in Ljubljana, a group of friends come across a middle-aged man lying naked in a pool of blood, which is seeping from wounds that paramedics soon determine are from multiple dog bites.

But an object found on his person leads police investigators to question whether the man, a prominent lawyer (Jernej Šugman), is an innocent victim or a sexual deviant who provoked the animals to attack.

Slovenian director Damjan Kozole's understated yet gripping drama *Nightlife*, shot in the style of observational cinema with handheld cameras, begins before news of the incident in question rouses the defense attorney's wife (Pia Zemljč), a university professor, from her sleep (possibly, in more ways than one).

The couple had endured a tense meal together at home only hours before, when she scornfully asks him if he was "proud of getting that piece of shit off," referring to a client he had mas-

terfully represented in court that afternoon in a case involving a public company.

From then on we watch helplessly as, still in shock, she is forced to confront her deepest fears as doctors fight to keep him alive; he has lost nearly a third of his blood, and she will lose her moral compass, her dignity, in a fight to protect his reputation by compromising her own.

Kozole drew inspiration for *Nightlife* from a fatal attack on a doctor who had been found dead, mauled by his bullmastiffs, and a scandal that followed due to rumors a high-ranking official had fled the scene. "Comments on the internet were wild, even bloodthirsty, with thousands of people commenting on each article," Kozole says.

"The country divided into two camps: those who are still convinced that the decadent post-transition elite meet in garages for canine orgies and those who defended the integrity of the deceased and his right to privacy. The latter, more normal ones, got the nickname 'dogfuckers.' In

short, the affair breached all boundaries of normality."

Although Kozole could have chosen from a number of organs to be ruptured by the fictional attack in *Nightlife*, it is likely no accident that the erudite director and screenwriter chose the attorney's spleen. The word comes from the ancient Greek, and is the idiomatic equivalent of the heart in English, i.e. to "have a good spleen" means to be compassionate, while in modern English usage to "to vent one's spleen" is to vent one's anger.

Kozole says that he followed all the "craziness" surrounding the real-life doctor's death, the speculation in the Slovene press and on social media and began to wonder if it would be worse to be mauled by dogs – or by people; to survive such a vicious attack only to be eviscerated by your fellow man.

"We live in a time when people are afraid of character assassination in the media more than they fear actual death," Kozole says. "And that's what this film is about." ■

OFFICIAL SELECTION

MY FATHER'S WINGS – A GRITTY, URBAN TRAGEDY TAKES FLIGHT



Kıvanç Sezer's *My Father's Wings* marks his first foray into features as a director

Will Tizard

The Turkey we read about in news headlines every day is a far cry from the one portrayed in Kıvanç Sezer's raw and atmospheric feature debut, Official Selection contender *My Father's Wings*.

A moving family drama centering on a crew of construction workers – tough, hardworking men who build high-rises they will never be permitted to enter – the film considers how perilous the lives of working people have become in a nation whose growing prosperity and stability are aspects far more visible, at least from the outside.

Ibrahim, a builder who has labored his whole life amid the dust, power drills and wind-blown concrete, discovers he is carrying within him another growing project of a sort – a malignant tumor that signifies two kinds of death for him, not one. For a man like this, whose life is work – and his role as a pillar of support for his family – the doctor's orders that he must stop are possibly a worse

sentence than the grim diagnosis for the future of his health.

In a telling moment of crisis, after considering the possible insurance payout for an accidental death on the job, Ibrahim realizes he may be worth more dead than alive – at least in terms of bank balance evaluations. The idea sets in motion a series of multiplying effects that soon expose the whole rotten system for what it is – and make it clear what value society really places on those so essential to its functioning.

Incorporating authentic locations, naturalistic dialogue and actors, the film marks out Sezer as a talented storyteller with a gift for compelling visuals. The gritty, understated performance of Menderes Samancılar as Ibrahim adds an air of almost Shakespearean tragedy to *My Father's Wings*, which envelopes the urban blight in which the story's set with a lyrical melancholy. The effect creates a powerful experience and a persuasive argument for taking in the film on the big screen.

Sezer's background – both as

an engineering student and as an editor of documentaries who trained at Italy's Cineteca di Bologna – offers a structural strength to the film, as the story and dilemmas unfold at a steadily accelerating pace, driving tension, which seems to ratchet up as steadily as the cranes that hover over the future offices and apartments of Turkey's elite urban classes.

The director was influenced by several important directors before he returned home from his studies abroad in 2009, making a living as an editor on TV projects and documentaries. In addition to *My Father's Wings*, he has created several shorts that have been screened at a variety of domestic and international venues. His growing body of work promises much if his next films are anything like this year's KVIFF entry in terms of depth and style.

In a story focusing on the cost to ordinary people of the kind of economic progress so embraced by modern leaders, the real sacrifices of men like Ibrahim force us to reconsider our assumptions. ■

FACES



Alejandra Márquez Abella



Faton Bajraktari



Houda Benyamina



Tatiana Huezo



Kıvanç Sezer



Anna Rose Holmer

Three directors whose films are in the A Female Take on Mexico sidebar arrive today: **Katrina Medina Mora** (*You'll Know What to Do With Me*), **Alejandra Márquez Abella** (*Semana Santa*), and **Tatiana Huezo** (*Tempestad*). Hungarian helmer **Szabolcs Hajdu** and his cast and crew are also here to present his Official

Selection – Competition film, *It's Not the Time of My Life* as is Turkish director **Kıvanç Sezer**, to present *My Father's Wings* in the same section. Coming to join other directors in the East of the West – Competition are **Ayhan Salar** and **Erkan Tahhuşoğlu**, whose *Verge* was supported by the German-Turkish co-production

Development Fund, as is Kosovo-born helmer **Faton Bajraktari** (*Home Sweet Home*).

Director **Houda Benyamina** arrives with actresses **Déborah Lukumena** and **Oulaya Amamra** are to present *Divines* (in Another View) and **Anna Rose Holmer** with *The Fits* (Variety Critics' Choice). (HG) ■



NICK HOLDSWORTH, CRITIC'S CHOICE

EASTERN EUROPE CORRESPONDENT THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

It may sound like a Hollywood summer blockbuster rich in special effects and superheroes, but this intelligent and funny take on the joys of a simple life – and the ills of our consumer society, which won director Matt Ross a best director nod in Un Certain Regard at Cannes this year, is anything but. Viggo Mortensen



CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

Director: Matt Ross
USA, 2015, 119min.
July 6, 3:30pm, Small Hall

plays a father bringing up a brood of six kids deep in a remote northwestern American

forest who is forced to return to "civilization" after a family tragedy.

I still recall the visceral shock of going to see *Blue Velvet* at the Odeon, Coventry. A group of we cynical young hacks went to see it together – but the ashen faces when we gathered in the pub afterwards proved that Lynch's film was strong stuff. No wonder established American distributors refused to show it and



BLUE VELVET

Director: David Lynch
USA, 1985, 120min.
July 6, 10:30pm, Grand Hall

the producer Dino Di Laurentiis had to found his own company to get it into theatres. The sev-

ered ear lying on the lawn stayed with me for many months after.



THE HANDMAIDEN

Director: Park Chan-wook
South Korea, 2016, 145min.
July 6, 7:30pm, Husovka Theatre

under Japanese colonial rule, is a sophisticated story of the passionate love that unexpectedly

blossoms between a would-be conman and the wealthy young woman he is targeting. ■

MAKING OF MIDNIGHT MADNESS



Mel Gibson returns to form in Blood Father

Michael Stein

Murder, mayhem and massacre. Are these three M's the not-so-secret ingredients that make up the kind of films that fill out the much-loved **Midnight Screenings** sidebar at KVIFF?

According to the director of *The Greasy Strangler*, Jim Hosking, it isn't a matter of ingredients that went into his film of a psychotic killer, an infinitude of phalluses, buckets full of grease and murders that are as absurd as they are grotesque.

"I think some films become cult films if people like the films and talk about them, but there is no recipe to follow. If you try to follow a recipe then it means that somebody has made that film before," Hosking says.

While the film contains echoes of the earliest and edgiest John Waters as well as Z movie masters such as Troma, it is clearly pursuing its own unique blueprint of weirdness. "I wasn't trying to shock people. *The*

Greasy Strangler doesn't belong to a specific genre. I just try to make something that I'd love to watch myself. Then other people feel the need to categorize it I suppose," Hosking says.

Being beyond category and calculation, together with pushing the boundaries of weirdness and taste might be the one thing all six films in the Midnight Screenings section have in common, considering they range from low-budget exploitation to ghost, monster and zombie flicks, to slick-looking films starring the likes of Kurt Russell and Mel Gibson.

Russell makes his appearance as a gruff but noble small-town sheriff in S. Craig Zahler's *Bone Tomahawk*, a gorgeously shot comic Western that adds a new element to the genre in the form of flesh-eating cannibals.

César-winning French director Jean-François Richet has brought Mel Gibson back into the sphere of ultra-violent spectacles he was once so famous for, having him star in

Blood Father as an ex-con living in willful obscurity who gets shaken out of his desert lethargy by the sudden appearance of his daughter who is being chased by a drug cartel.

Taiwanese director Chung Lee's debut *The Laundryman* throws a bag of genres in the mix with his action, Kung fu, ghost story, love story, comedy film of a laundromat being used for contract killings. While this is definitely a work with more than its fair share of murder, mayhem and massacre it takes place in circumstances and with consequences never quite seen before on the screen.

Shinsuke Sato's *I Am A Hero*, is a Japanese zombie apocalypse based on an award-winning horror manga. *Der Nachtmahr*, the feature film debut by German artist and filmmaker known as Akiz, takes the monstrousness of teen existence quite literally, following the wild child Tina as she begins to see a nasty, slug-like homunculus appearing out of nowhere. ■

A SHORT VISIT FROM PRAGUE



The Chickening, a mad 'remix' of Kubrick's The Shining, is a must see short

Each year at KVIFF, the **Prague Short Film Festival** presents a tantalizing snapshot of shorts ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous.

On the more sober end of the spectrum this year is Rungano Nyoni and Hamy Ramezan's powerful and disturbing *Listen*. A foreign woman in a burqa arrives at a police station to report a case of domestic abuse, with her young son in tow. But her translator won't tell them her real story. This stark but never heavy handed piece has struck a chord worldwide and been nominated for a European Film Award.

The French film *Jay Amongst Men* by Zeno Graton, meanwhile, invokes the tropes of social realism in telling the story of the strained relationship between a father and his teenage son, examining the violent expectations of some aspects of masculinity versus the fragility of growing up. The film's main strength lies in excellent performances, especial-

ly by lead actor Anton Leurquin.

Also invoking the tropes of social realism is *Flea*, set amongst the gray council estates of inner city Britain. Vanessa Caswill's story of a girl trying to save her mother from her abusive stepfather is told in verse, evoking rap, slam poetry and even Shakespeare. The film subverts our expectations but never feels overtly gimmicky and is an ultimately uplifting film.

Pavel Soukup's *Leshy* is a dark fantasy film about a hunter searching for his only possible equal – a creature that Czech folklore tells us is the protector of the forest. This fairytale is an impressive showcase of exemplary special effects but also presents a compelling story (thereby avoiding the "calling card" curse, i.e. a short film made simply to show off the director's talent).

Another special effects bonanza is *The Chickening*, a mad "remix" of Kubrick's *The Shining*, from which it utilizes

footage, and which is nearly as disturbing. From Jack Nicholson now finding himself in a chicken restaurant, slowly going mad, Danny now looking and sounding like a middle-aged New Yorker, to giving Shelly Duvall googly eyes, the film is just completely insane.

Rounding up the selection is *People Are Strange* about a man who looks after Jim Morrison's Parisian grave and decides to reinter the singer's remains after discovering that Morrison's family wants to take them. It's a fun, strange and entertaining road trip.

With many of this year's KVIFF features coming from directors whose shorts made a big impact (*Kills on Wheels* and *Waves* being just two examples), this program is a perfect opportunity to see works by directors you may be hearing a lot about in years to come.

Laurence Boyce is the editor of *Cineuropa Shorts* ■



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FUTURE FRAMES: NEW TALENTS UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Brian Kenety

European Film Promotion and KVIFF invited an eclectic group of European film school students and recent graduates to take part in this year's intensive film-making program **Future Frames – Ten New Filmmakers to Follow**, held from July 3–5 under the tutelage of seasoned film professionals including Oscar-nominated director **Felix van Groeningen**, who delivered a masterclass.

"They're at a point in their lives where they've made a short- or a medium-length film, and are getting to show it to people, to the festival audiences, and it's exciting," says van Groeningen, himself a veteran of a KVIFF mentoring program here years ago.

"I'm talking to them about my own trajectory, how I came out of film school, made my first feature for very little money, so that I could to make a second feature," says van Groeningen, whose film *Belgica* is screening.

Future Frames is financially backed by the **Creative Europe – MEDIA Programme** of the European Union and the respective EFP members, while the **Sundance Channel** has been a partner for two years, and has been joined by **Nespresso**.

This year, KVIFF artistic director Karel Och and Future Frames program coordinator Anna Purkrábková received 26 films nominated by EFP national film boards.

"Some students are at the very beginning of their careers while some have already won awards or recognition for their work," Purkrábková says. "For example, *Father* (Davit Pirskhalava, Georgian), won the



Future Frames 2016 participants from left to right: Maria Luz Olivares Capelle, Tonči Gačina, Karen Vázquez Guadarrama, Clemens Pichler, Rebecca Figenschau, Ahmed Abdullahi, Mariam Kakabadze, Roxana Stroe, Julia Furer, Klara Kočařská

Golden Leopard at Lacarno in the short film competition. It's a wonderful, complex social drama about 'delinquents,' but it's a smart script and very complex film that has no such one-dimensional characters."

The films are screening in groups of two or three (**July 8 and 9, at the Lázně III Cinema**; see the KVIFF website for full details), chosen so that there's a balance in terms of theme, subject matter, tone, style and length.

"For example, *A Night in Tokoriki* (Roxana Stroe, Romania) – a very black comedy about a love triangle with a twist, full of '90s disco songs – will be screened as the last film (in its grouping) because it's

always good to have people leave the cinema with a comedy and a song," Purkrábková says.

Stroe's film is screening with *Diorama* (Clemens Pichler, Germany) and *Julian* (Julia Furer, Switzerland). *Diorama* is a film that starts in a "very conventional way, where two people have a first date, fall in love, and then break up," she says, but then shifts gears and finds them "in a desert talking and their hopes and memories, which have become nightmares and we can see them, so it's a very surreal film."

"*Julian* is a painful documentary about a man forced to leave his home, where he also makes harpsichords, and it is literally

a death for him. The director is a graphic designer and at times is telling the story just through little details, though the images," Purkrábková says.

Pirskhalava's *Father* is screening with *Elephant Skin* (Rebecca Figenschau, Norway), which she says is a perfect example of a complex drama presented in under half an hour, and *Flower of a Thousand Colours* (Karen Vázquez Guadarrama, Belgium). "*Elephant* is not a coming-of-age story exactly, because the protagonist already has a child, but in just 25 minutes you see how she grows up and becomes a proper mother, and shows her father she was no longer a girl,"

EVENTS

The third annual **TorinoFilmLab** starts today for selected participants who will take on the challenge of writing a comedy consulting invited experts. The **MIDPOINT** intensive writing workshop, meanwhile, continues through July 8.

The annual Karlovy Vary open air concert at the **Outdoor Cinema** starts tonight at 8pm with a performance by Czech pop singer Aneta Langerová, accompanied by a symphonic orchestra. Tickets are available online via vstupenky.karlovyvary.cz, at Infocentrum offices, and at all regular ticket presale offices, starting at 200 CZK. (HG) ■

HBO'S WASTELAND EXPANDS SLATE OF ORIGINALS

Will Tizard

Building on its phenomenal success of *Burning Bush*, an HBO Europe original production based on the Warsaw Pact invasion of Prague in 1968, the company is rolling out its new prestige mini-series *Wasteland* at KVIFF amid much anticipation.

With the first two episodes screening at the Thermal Great Hall last night – a precedent for such a TV production – it's clear that the film noir-style story of intrigue, set in the coal fields of North Bohemia and unfolding in eight episodes that will air this fall, is a development worth following.

With veteran Czech commercial director Ivan Zachariáš, the talent behind many KVIFF trailers roasting Crystal Globe winners, directing half of the episodes, and veteran indie writer/helmer Alice Nellis the other, *Wasteland* follows a power play between an energy company that is literally destroying a town to get at the rich lignite fields beneath it and those who dare to speak up in protest.

One member of this last group, a mother whose daughter has disappeared, drives the story to unexpected places when it evolves that the buried truth is more complicated than a corrupt corporation flexing its muscle.

Set and shot in the bleak regions where real events inspired the story,



Wasteland follows a power play between an energy company and protesters

Zachariáš describes the experience of shooting four of the episodes as a surprising challenge. Having filmed dozens of advertising spots for top brands over the years, this is the director's first venture into long-form narrative, something for which he feels quite indebted to HBO.

Although the budget is lower than it would be for commercials and the amount of material needed far greater, Zachariáš has no complaints about the 56 shooting days spent for his part of the production. Nellis shot the other four episodes, based on a script by *Burning Bush* writer Štěpán Hulík, with HBO's Steve Matthews also on story.

"I have total freedom," Zachariáš says, clearly enjoying the change from advertising spots in which multiple producers often kibbitz.

Working without a storyboard,

Zachariáš instead chose to spend a "summer camp" before the shoot got underway, working with the cast, led by Zuzana Stivínová and featuring Jaroslav Dušek, Eva Holubová and Petra Špalková, to fine tune their roles, tone and pacing issues.

On shooting days, the team then decides how to do scenes based on available light, the physical location they'll be using and ideas that actors want to try, says the director. With minimal crews and maximum flexibility to experiment, Zachariáš says, the challenges of developing tension, character nuance and rhythm somehow find their way to solutions.

The most torturous suspense, of course, will be for audiences who take in the series start here at KVIFF then have to wait till October to catch the remaining six episodes. ■

DON'T TAKE ON HOLLYWOOD

Hana Gomoláková

From Oliver Twist's London of the 1830's to WWII concentration camps, war-torn Poland, and Hannibal Lecter's world – Allan Starski, the Oscar-winning production designer, has had a deft hand in creating them all. He has worked with Steven Spielberg, Roman Polanski, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Agnieszka Holland, and Fatih Akin.

Starski won an Academy Award in 1993 for best art direction in Spielberg's Holocaust masterpiece *Schindler's List*, and in 2003 a César Award for his work on Polanski's *The Pianist*.

"People always joke that the only difference between making *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist* was that one of them was black & white and the other one in color," he told a KVIFF session at the **Barrandov Studio** villa, moderated by the studio's managing director, Petr Tichý.

"But the real difference is the vision and experience of the two directors. While Spielberg grew up in Hollywood, Polanski grew up in war-torn Poland. What they do have in common is that they have to trust me to understand their experience and bring it to the film," said Starski, the son of Polish screenwriter and sound engineer Ludwik Starski.

The future design guru grew up on set but only became interested in film after he graduated from art school. At the start of his career he worked with iconic filmmaker **Andrzej Wajda**, who was known for working with a different production designer on every film. But the two just clicked and Starski went on to make 14 films with Wajda, his secret being "not only to fulfill the director's dreams and imagination but to surpass them." Wajda, having studied fine arts himself, drew sketches of the sets as well as storyboards, which made the discussions less theoretical, Starski says.

It was Starski's work on the Polish-French period drama *Danton* (a BAFTA award winner starring Gérard Depardieu and set during the French Revolution) that opened the world to him.



Allan Starski's KVIFF talk at Barrandov Studio villa

Among the most ambitious of his films was the Polanski remake of *Oliver Twist*, shot at Barrandov Studio in Prague, where whole streets of the old London center were built from several tons of cobblestones and lumber. **Peter Webber's** *Young Hannibal* was also filmed there with Starski again leading the production design team.

Having worked on the most expensive Hollywood productions as well as small indie films, he says European cinema should not try to compete with Hollywood budgets but should instead focus on the art and undiscovered subjects. "For example, Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida* is not a big-budget film but received international acclaim. For me, these films are also an inspiration."

Starski argues that European films can be more competitive by combining resources via co-productions, such as **Fatih Akin's** *The Cut*, following one family's journey after the 1915 Armenian genocide. But, Starski cautions, directors should be careful not to trade their artistic freedom for bigger budgets. ■

DAILIES

1/ Danish director Henrik Ruben Genz (*Tordenskjold a Kold*) under the spotlight

2/ Delegation for the film *Waves* led by director Grzegorz Zariczny on the red carpet ahead of the opening screening



KVIFF TALKS

Award-winning young European directors will share their secrets at 11:30am, Vodafone Lounge. The guests are **Agnieszka Smoczyńska**, whose debut film *The Lure* won the jury award at Sundance for its unique vision and design; **Tolga Karagelik**, whose second film *Ivy* premiered at Sundance in 2015 and has since traveled to 30 festivals and won over 20 awards; and **Juho Kuosmanen**, whose debut *The Happiest Day in the Life of Olli Mäki* won the Un Certain Regard section in Cannes this year.

Hosted by Scott Feinberg, The Hollywood Reporter. ■