**OFF17 – Odense International Film Festival**

For the 42nd time Odense International Film Festival took place here in Odense, Denmark. This year from August 28th to September 3rd.

The International Film Festival (called OFF17 this year) consisted of 104 short films, animations and documentaries placed within three competitions: the main competition, the Danish competition, and the animation competition. There used to be a documentary competition as well, but not anymore, so now the documentaries are placed within the other competitions.

Up to seven films were shown at each screening, the screenings taking place in different theatres within the Brandts Cultural Centre complex in Odense City. The screenings were free of charge, but you had to book tickets in advance to be sure to get a seat and you had to do it fast. I booked tickets one day PRIOR to the release of the final programme, but even then, all tickets to the screenings of Danish short films were gone, so I only saw the Danish films that were also included in the main competition and/or the animation competition.

Very many school classes take advantage of the booking system, and of course it is great that the kids and youngsters are able to see modern short films and animations, but especially the teenagers are usually sooo noisy, disturbing the rest of the audience with their mobile phones, talking and throwing objects in the theatre, that there ought to be special school screenings, in my opinion!

Anyway, the festival also includes what is called “OFF Focus” events, which this year was everything from free of charge screenings of films by up and coming film directors, animated music videos and short films for young children over open-air screenings of top notch feature films, David Lynch short films and electronic goth concerts to film quiz nights, talks with film directors and expensive film music concerts by Odense Symphony Orchestra.

Last year in my review of OFF16 I complained that although there were no really bad films, there were no extraordinarily good films either. This tendency had increased this year, as there were no good films at all amongst the ones that I watched, but several really bad.

Don’t get me wrong. Technically, most of the films were of a very high standard, but the contents sucked. Most of the time, there was no REASON for making the films. They didn’t tell a story, they didn’t illustrate a feeling or mood, they didn’t do sh\*t except displaying the craft, the technical ability that went into the production and to me that is not quite enough.

The jury of the main competition wasn’t particularly international this year as it consisted of the Danish film producer Stine Meldgaard, the Danish actor Christian Tafdrup and the Danish actress Marijana Jankovic. They chose the following winners:

**Winners of the main competition:** The HCA Award (the International Grand Prix): “Written/unwritten” by Adrian Silisteanu, Rumania, about a Roma family.

The OFF Storyteller Award: “Domesticated Wolf” by Elad J. Primo, Israel, about a father trying to protect his daughter from growing up.

The OFF Artist Award for the film with the strongest artistic expression: “Red Apples” by George Sikharulidze, Armenia, about having to be a virgin when marrying.

The jury of the Danish competition was a bit more international as it consisted of the American Vimeo senior curator Jeffrey Bowers, the Danish film director Peter Harton and the Danish artist Gudrun Hasle. Their picks were:

**Winners of the Danish competition**: Best Danish Short Film: “Übermensch” by Jesper Dalgaard about childhood demons.

The FilmFyn Talent Award: ”In a Month” by Jonas Kjærup Hjort about a group of factory workers’ journey into meaninglessness.

The jury of the animation competition consisted of the Danish film director Claudia Bille Straede, the Danish directorTobias Gundorff Boesen and the French animation filmmaker and visual artist Juliette Viger. They chose these:

**Winners of the animation competition:** The Borge Ring Award for the best animated film: “Nothing Happens” by Michelle and Uri Kranot, Denmark, about being seen.

The Animation Talent Award (Danish filmmakers only): “Related” by Ida Andreasen about living with anger.

**Other winners:** The Audience Award as well as The OFF Youth Award, where the jury was an 8th grade school class, went to “Abu Adnan” by Sylvia Le Fanu, Denmark, and was about Syrian emigrants.

As you can see, the winners this year were at least as political correct as the winners last year, whereas the artistic and imaginative short films had very little impact on the juries. Had I been the jury, I would have selected quiet different films, as I would have picked winners based on their artistic and cinematic merits and nothing else.

As winner of the main competition, the International Grand Prix, I would have picked “Home Swim Home” by Valérie Préel-Cléach, France, a funny and endearing story about a swimming champion without a pool.

The OFF Storyteller Award I would have awarded to “Before The End” by Chenghua Yang, France/China. It didn’t have a chance in the real competition, because at first glance you just think, “What the heck just happened?” If you look a little deeper, though, it is actually a great story about self-fulfilling prophecies. Still, I guess “Home Swim Home” would have had a better chance to win this category as well or maybe “Fry Day” by Laura Moss, USA, about the night of mass murderer Ted Bundy’s execution.

The OFF Artist Award for the film with the strongest artistic expression I think belonged to “Mr. Sand” by Soetkin Verstegen, Denmark, but as it would be my winner in other categories as well, I think I would pick either “The Absence of Eddy Table” by Rune Spaans, Norway, or “Lilac” by Carlin Diaz, France to win the OFF Artist Award. The first one is based on cartoonist Dave Cooper’s work, the second is a music video made for the Norwegian band Kakkmaddafakka.

As winners of the Danish competition, I would have picked “Mr. Sand” by Soetkin Verstegen as Best Danish Short Film, as it was a both technical and narrative highlight about filmmaking, storytelling, and E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “The Sandman”.

The FilmFyn Talent Award I would have awarded “Night Witches” by Julie Herdichek Baltzer, Denmark, which mixed real film and animation in telling the story about a Russian all-female night bombing squad during WWII. A special mention should have gone to “Cream” by Lena Ólafsdóttir, Denmark – real WTF?? animation!

As winners of the animation competition I would have picked “The Burden” by Niki Lindroth von Bahr, Sweden for The Borge Ring Award for the best animated film. It’s an animated musical with apocalyptic undertones consisting of five scenes. Admittedly, it was a bit long, but had it omitted the three middle scenes, leaving only the first and the last, it would have been just PERFECT!

The Animation Talent Award I would have awarded to “Mr. Sand” by Soetkin Verstegen, Denmark, because of the aforementioned reasons.

Listening to the audience reactions, I thought that the Audience Award would have gone to the subdued family drama “Merry Christmas” by Héctor Rull Bel, Spain, or to the poetic childhood drama “The Dress On Her” by Chih Yi Wen, Taiwan.

The OFF Youth Award I thought would have gone to the dystopian short film “Anime” by Arnaud Brisebois, Canada, but the youth jury couldn’t even vote for as it wasn’t included in the youth screenings!

Had there been a documentary category, I would have awarded “After Life” by Prisca Bouchet and Nick Mayow, New Zealand, the best documentary award, as it was a both uplifting and pragmatic insight into the daily routines in a funeral home.

Like last year, I was only able to attend one “OFF Focus” events due to my bad health and I had a hard time choosing just one among the many interesting event. I ended up choosing “The classic featurette” where OFF’s grand old man, film expert Ulrich Breuning, presented six featurettes from 2003 to 2011, which had competed in OFF in previous years. I had seen most of them before, so I came mainly to hear Mr. Breuning, but to see these films again, reminded me of how imaginative and great the films of previous festivals had been compared to the ones this year. Is there any hope for a return to former glory? We’ll see next year at OFF18.

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