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PUPPET FICTION

A film by RENÉ MARIK

94 min, Germany, 2014, Colour, HD

SYNOPSIS

What's to do when your life's work at stake? Fighting tooth and nail of course by fair means or foul. For KASPER (the German version of Mr. Punch) only the foul ones will do it. Because his theatre is on the brink of ruin he decides to kidnap the star of the rivalry company – KALLE the cocaine sniffing polar bear – to hold him to ransom. With the help of his ensemble – CROCIDILE, GRANNY, SEPPEL and Gretel - the hijacking succeeds but what comes after is like all hell is breaking loose. KALLE is a rather recalcitrant hostage and KASPER's mates are starting questioning his plan.

The remaining colleagues of KALLE, frog FALKENHORST and the MOLE, while trying to round up the money must realize that their manager RICHY has serious gambling issues heading the company to go bust. As if that weren't enough SPEC a psychopathic mobster is after RICHY because of gambling debts. Trials and tribulations are the entailment - love, death and the chance for a new beginning the ending.

PUPPET FICTION is Germany's first movie showing actors and handpuppets together in a kidnapping story full of violence, drugs, sex and a morbid sense of humor. Knowing the long tradition of German puppet theatre inch-by-inch director René Marik puts this art form up to another level – from booth to real life. Being a successful puppeteer of his own, with his characters the MOLE, KALLE and FALKENHORST he reached an audience of millions – both with his stage appearances and his very own TV show, René was able to engage the best puppeteers and one of Germany's best comedians, Christoph Maria Herbst (star of the German version of THE OFFICE) to join him. The result is a dark comedic crime film succeeding films like Peter Jackson's MEET THE FEEBLES or Trey Parker's TEAM AMERICA.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Being a successful puppeteer it is quite a courageous act leaving the stage behind to direct a film.

That's true, I haven't done that before. It has been a very long process. Lots of new things to learn. At the very beginning my co-director Johan and I were so starry-eyed and we did a lot of mistakes. But making mistakes is important and somehow mandatory.

May you name some milestones?

Sure! The most important one was the idea, of course. Then three years ago we shot a trailer. None of us was sure whether it's possible to shoot a movie with these hand-puppets. The so-called „Kasperpuppen“ have a very long tradition in Germany and really everyone knows them. So you won't mess with them. Furthermore it's not that easy shooting-wise, because they have wooden heads, a very limited manoeuvrability and you always need to hide the puppeteer. But we found ways of doing it without being bound to shoot entirely in a studio. The next milestones were finding the right production company, writing the script and financing the film. Due to my big online fan base we were able to do a successful crowdfunding campaign among others. And finally shooting the film in Budapest. One of my best experiences ever.

In PUPPET FICTION your three famous characters MOLE, KALLE and FALKENHORST meet the traditional „Kasper Company“, kind of the German version of the „Punch and Judy Show“. What was your source of inspiration?

After graduating with my degree in puppeteering I was an actor for a couple of years. Most of the time I was with companies from small metropolitan theaters, like those in Jena or Halle. 80% of my colleagues were non-redeemable, because they have been with their company for 15 or 20 years, always playing the same plays, the same parts. Trying something new on stage was nearly impossible. Like KASPER and SEPPEL in my film they spent most of their time in the cafeteria, drinking and bitching and complaining about everything. I always found these guys amusing, so I started to write down the idea.

What's the biggest difference between playing on stage or on a film set?

When I'm doing my puppet show on stage, I'm playing like 90 minutes straight. And I'm hearing the responses of the audience immediately. While shooting I don't have an audience, so I don't know immediately whether the act worked or not. Furthermore you don't shoot in chronological order. So you may start with filming the ending. But the most difficult part is playing the puppet itself. Due our concept of doing a film with hand-puppets and actors the setting is like in every regular feature film. So we puppeteers have to hide while playing our puppets. And we have some scenes in the movie where up to five puppets are seen in a single shot – meaning: you have to hide five grown-ups under tables, in cars, you name it. But in contrast to actors who play a scene together we puppeteers don't see anything – neither how we are playing our puppet nor what the other puppeteers are doing. But – lucky us -we figured something out. Every puppeteer had a little monitor where he or she could actually see what the puppet was doing.

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Your most popular puppet is the MOLE. What does he mean to you?

Well, I've spent a very long time with him. We've played a lot of shows together. But I don't have a sentimental relationship with him. He is the perfect tool for expressing my kind of humor – that's it.

What do you think makes the MOLE so popular?

Honestly? I have no idea why so many people are crazy about him. What I like about him is his directness. He is lacking reason, thus he is always acting on instinct. There is no pondering, no thinking of „What if...“. That's very appealing and in some situations I wish I could be more like him.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

René Marik was born in Hildesheim/ Germany on the 1st of June 1970. In 1993 after holding his pre-degree in Mathematics he moved from Siegen to Berlin. There, he became rather sooner than later a squatter and joined the punk rock band „Die Fickenden Turnschuhe“, which means more or less „The Screwing Sneakers“. In 1995 he dropped out of mathematics to become a professional puppeteer at the renowned Berlin drama school Ernst Busch. After graduating with a degree in puppeteering he worked mainly as an actor in several theater companies in Jena, Halle and Berlin.

During his time in Jena he created the hand-puppets on which he gained his fame: the blind and speech impaired MOLE, KALLE the polar bear with a sharp Berlin tongue as well as the smugly frog FALKENHORST. The following years he developed more and more little scenes with the three characters and started to perform them in front of an audience. One fan put some clippings of his live show on Youtube, the rest is history. René, the MOLE, KALLE and FALKENHORST became one of Germany's most beloved comedians with an own TV show, sold out tours (AUTSCH'N and KASPERPOP), top selling dvds and several awards.

PUPPET FICTION is René's directing debut.

CREDIT

Directed by René Marik
Written by Thomas Brussig and René Marik
Produced by Dreamer Joint Venture Filmproduction
Executive Producer Antonio Exacoustos
Edited by : Wanda Kiss
Art Director Lorinc Boros
Director of photography: Bernhard Jasper
Music by Ali N. Askin
Sound: Gabor Balazs