AUDIENCE WITH THE QUEEN

Nahid Persson Sarvestani faces Farah Diba

NECROBUSINESS

YOUNG FREUD IN GAZA

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Stories on a silver platter

YES, I KNOW. Boasts about the scope of Swedish documentaries are starting to get tedious. Yet you can’t help but notice it when you look at this year’s crop of films in the genre: we have investigative journalism, animated documentary, cinema vérité, art films and classic character studies. To name but a few.

A common denominator for many of the Swedish entries to IDFA (International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam) this year is that they’re all made by experienced filmmakers. 2008 is a comeback year for many of our leading exponents of the art. Nahid Persson Sarvestani, who won so many plaudits a few years ago with Prostitution Behind the Veil (Prostitution bakom skärmen), is back with two films at IDFA. In The Queen and I (Drottningen och jag) she meets the legendary Parid Diba, Iran’s former queen, actively opposed by Nahid Persson Sarvestani herself in the revolution of 1979 which toppled the Iranian monarchy. Birdcage (Rådjuren) is another of Nahid Persson Sarvestani’s films shot in Iran. In it we encounter Haibsh, who tells of a life in which his every step is watched over by the militia and used as slave labour. And just like the earlier film, it’s an animated documentary.

YOU’LL NOTICE THAT a number of this year’s Swedish films at IDFA have been shot in the Middle East, but in this magazine you can also read about a project somewhat closer to home. People depicted (Folk i bild 2008) is a suite of documentaries comprising fourteen intimate character portraits of people in Sweden, each with their own story to tell. Altogether they provide a telling snapshot of our country today. Instigated both by newcomers and some of Sweden’s leading filmmakers, the project is the kind of success that demonstrates once again that the recipe for a successful documentary doesn’t need to be more than people who have a story to tell. What’s difficult is actually finding them. Be our guest – you’ll find all the stories served up for you here on a silver platter!

VETERANS PEA HOLMQUIST and Suzanne Khardalian are also back, this time with their much-acclaimed Young Freud in Gaza (Unge Freud i Gaza), a fascinating glimpse of an isolated world. We follow Ayed, the only psychologist working in northern Gaza, as he visits his patients. Ayed, the only psychologist working in northern Gaza, as he visits his patients.

Cissi Elwin serves up a feast of documentaries.

The eagerly-awaited follow up to Unge Freud i Gaza, Young Freud in Gaza (www.sfi.se) ISSN 1654-0050

The directors behind the earlier film, Svein and Eldin Skriver, together with Mats Hjelm, who directed the earlier film, are back with a film about a man who was the closest thing to a real-life hero in Detroit. Artist Mats Hjelm on the lookout for Detroit’s real life heroes. The Swedish Film Institute’s aims include the promotion, support and development of Swedish films, the allocation of grants, and the promotion of Swedish cinema internationally. (www.sfi.se) ISSN 1654-0050

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The directors behind Necrobusiness and The Skanderberg share their experiences.
MIEL CEE KARLSSON GREETINGS FROM THE WOODS (FULL LENGTH)

Mixing it up

Director Mikel Cee Karlsson’s Greetings from the Woods (Hälsningar från skog) is the first documentary from the Göteborg-based Plattform Produktion. Well, sort of.

Rumour had it that the man going around taking pictures of people in filmmaker Mikel Cee Karlsson’s home village didn’t have any film in his camera. So Karlsson just went up the photographer’s house and knocked on the door.

“The film gives a very clear answer as to whether the camera was loaded or not,” says Karlsson, “and rumour had it that it wasn’t”.

Previously you directed your own documentaries. Aren’t you tempted back?

“Well, I do actually have a film four years ago when working on his degree course at the Göteborg School of Film Directing. I think it’s interesting to look at very ordinary everyday situations from different angles. In advance screenings quite a few people have said that the film has a fairy-tale quality,” he says.

The documentary has been produced by Plattform Produktion in Göteborg, the company behind Ruben Östlund’s Involuntary (De ovoljiva).

“Within Plattform we don’t talk about fictional films or documentaries; the genres run together. My next project will be fiction, but based on a documentary. Blending the forms is what interests me,” Karlsson says.

Having previously made music videos and shorts, Greetings from the Woods is Karlsson’s first feature film.

“I wanted to make a personal, very visual documentary. It feels as if I’ve succeeded.”

ANDERS DAHLBOM

STINA GARDELL

The producer

Stina Gardell, producer of documentaries including the Prix Italia winner The Nun (Nunnan) 2007, what are you working on right now?

“I have 8–10 documentary features in the pipeline, including Linda Thøgersen’s Love and War (Krig och kärlek), in which the director herself is the main character. It’s an amazingly hard-hitting film about the consequences of living and having a child with a man by whom you’ve been subjected to physical and mental abuse. I’m also producing Åsa Ekmark’s The comeback, a film about Rosie, Sweden’s first drag racing star. 30 years ago she gave up her career to take care of her brain-damaged child, but now she’s ready for a comeback.”

Previously you directed your own documentaries. Aren’t you tempted back?

“Well, I do actually have a film under wraps that’s currently in the process of editing. But if you want to be a good producer, then your main focus has to be on production.”

HEINRICH EMILSON

LINDA VÄSTRIK INKULAL (FULL LENGTH)

Going native

Linda Västrik first burst onto the scene eight years ago with her sensitive study of a difficult parental relationship, Dad and Me (Pappa och jag), 2000). In the meantime she has given us the animated Four Days Overdue (Fjärde dagen över tid, 2007), and is currently pitching her upcoming film Inkulal, about a tribal group in the Congo under threat from a forestry corporation.

Why did you want to make this film?

“I wanted to tell the story of a life about which we have plenty of notions but little real knowledge. I lived in the village for a year, and was acutely aware of how different it was from our own way of living.

In what ways?

“As I see it they live in greater equality, with no group constantly dominant, and where even the children are allowed to dictate things for certain periods. And it’s very important to show how their lives will change once the deforestation starts.”

MAUD NYCANDER

LARS ARRHENIUS • JOHANNES MÜNTZING THE BIG STORE (SHORT)

Traumatic rays

With their short film The Big Store (En dag på varuhuset) screening as part of ParaDocs at IDFA, Lars Arrhenius and Johannes Münzting raise a number of important issues for our time. The film centres on the murder (in 2002) of Sweden’s Foreign Minister, Anna Lindh.

The murder of Anna Lindh, like the 1996 murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme, was a traumatic experience for the people of Sweden. The Big Store recreates the minutes prior to the crime at the upmarket NK department store in central Stockholm. The events are visualised in animated sequences which have an x-ray like quality.

“When the shoppers and people in the otherwise empty store appear as skeletons on an x-ray plate, it brings their behaviour into sharp relief. The diagnostic aspect demands your extra attention,” Lars Arrhenius explains.

Why have you made the film?

“Naturally, both of us were very affected by the murder of Anna Lindh. But it’s not a film about the murder itself, more about a narcissistic society where everything’s for sake. The media focused entirely on the perpetrator and his victim, but any discussion about a society in which two leading politicians have been murdered in recent years was almost entirely ignored. Can an international audience identify with an event that took place in Sweden?

“There are similarly traumatic events all over the world. With the film screening in Amsterdam, I think the Dutch audience will see parallels with the murders of Theo Van Gogh, who I met on a number of occasions, and Pim Fortuyn,” says Arrhenius.

ELIN LARSSON
NEWS

NINA HEDENIUS WAY OF NATURE (FULL LENGTH)

Nature calling

Her film The Old Man in the Cottage (Gubben / Stugan, 1996) was the most highly requested repeat when it was shown again on Sveriges Television (SVT) four years ago. Now documentary filmmaker Nina Hedenius returns with Way of Nature (Natursens gång), screening as part of the Reflecting Images: Masters section of IDFA, a film that raises important questions without a single word being spoken.

The film is set on a farm in the Swedish county of Dalarna where the farmer, Karl Gustav Hedling, is working to preserve and ensure the genetic survival of certain native breed animals.

“Man is the only animal on earth that leaves refuse and waste behind. And we freeze the sperm of a few super-bulls to supply all of Europe’s cows with offspring for maximum returns. These are some of the thoughts that have prompted me to look at something that might not be around much longer, but something I want to see preserved,” says Nina Hedenius.

What makes you so interested in nature?

“Is it based on my feel for the natural world and all living creatures, the world we live in. Which raises questions like: Why do we treat nature the way we do? Why do we live so inconsiderately? And if we value money and possessions so highly, why don’t they seem to make us happy?”

PAOLA LANGDAL

DAVID ARONOWITSCH HANNA HEILBORN SLAVES (SHORT)

Animated captivity

Six years after the multi-award-winning Hidden (Gömd, 2003), the duo Hanna Heilborn and David Aronowitsch are back in the spotlight with (Slaver), which has been selected for the IDFA festival.

At a children’s rights awards ceremony in Sweden in 2003, Heilborn and Aronowitsch met two boys, Abuk and Machiek, from Sudan. The upshot of that meeting was Slaves, a film based on the boy’s own stories of how they were imprisoned by the state and exploited as slaves.

“Unfortunately these boys’ stories aren’t unique. In the course of the 20-year civil war in southern Sudan some two million people have died. And it’s a conflict that barely has been noticed by the media,” says Hanna Heilborn in response to a question as to why they chose to make the film.

As with Hidden, the two directors sought help from Mats Johansson in designing the film and shaping the characters.

“By combining documentary sound with animation we hope to get the audience listening in the way. The children are talking about something that really happened, and this technique is a powerful way of getting the message across,” says Heilborn. “Many people who have seen the film feel that the animation has brought them closer to the children.”

PAOLA LANGDAL

FREDRIK GERTTEN BANANAS (FULL LENGTH)

The healthier snack?

For the first time in history, the Dole Food Company and Dow Chemical have been brought before the courts in the USA. In Bananas, documentary filmmaker Fredrik Gertten follows this historic case between two giant corporations and 12,000 Nicaraguan banana plantation workers. Bananas are one of nature’s most enduringly popular fruits in the western world, not least among families with small children, for whom they are often the first solids a child is fed on. But the banana’s image would certainly be tarnished for many if they realised that one third of the price we pay goes towards pesticides. So strong are these chemicals that they have caused serious health problems for plantation workers, even resulting in some cases in their deaths.

American attorney Juan Dominguez, representing the plantation workers, has succeeded where all others have failed: he has managed to bring the Dole Food Company and Dow Chemical before a US court.

“For us this is a David and Goliath struggle where the little guy has a chance to fight back against years of wrongdoing on the part of the banana companies,” says Fredrik Gertten, currently in the process of editing his film.

Pithed successfully at the Forum in Amsterdam 2007 and due to premiere in spring 2009, Bananas is in many ways a unique Swedish documentary. Its main backers, including the Sundance Documentary Film Fund, come from outside the Nordic region, and the film is guaranteed to receive national television broadcasting in the US via ITVS.

“Another unique aspect of the story is that we’re actually in a US court. One of the witnesses to take the stand is the vice president of Dole, and it’s extremely unusual for top managers of such faceless organisations to be subjected to tough questioning about their own moral responsibilities.”

HENDRIK EMLISON

NEWS

ERIK GANDINI ITALY YEAR ZERO (FULL LENGTH)

Giro d’Italia

Erik Gandini, who premiered his award-winning Glimo at IDFA 2005, is currently editing the highly personal Italy Year Zero (Italian ar.noli), which has been brought before the courts in Italy. Taking part in a festival you wish for. But I think it’s good that several festivals have recently opened categories for documentaries. Is it a trend?

“Yes, it’s something that has coincided with documentaries moving away from the purely objective into a more subjective, creative and personal art form. Directors are now less simply impartial observers: the genre has much more of an auteur flavour to it. That’s why I think documentaries can no longer be held separate from other types of film.”

HENRIK EMLISON

TORA MÅRTENS BYE BYE, C’EST FINI (SHORT)

Addicted to love

In February Tommy, Tora Mårtens’ short film debut about a ballet dancer from Havana, was in competition in Berlinale Shorts. Having graduated from the University College of Film, she’s now working on her second film, Bye Bye, C’Est Fini.

When a lover fails to satisfy ‘73-year-old Lina, she bids him a curt “Bye bye, C’est fini” before casually moving on to the next man. Documentary filmmaker Tora Mårtens became so fascinated by the love life of Brazilian Lina Mercies, that together with the reporter Idji Maciel, she decided to shadow her for a few hectic days in Rio.

Bye Bye, C’est Fini is a film that gets up close and personal with the sexuality of an older woman, something that arouses both admiration and a degree of embarrassment.

“To me, Lina’s love life is very passionate. She can come home with a smile at ten o’clock in the morning clutching a rose in her hand, yet there’s a sorrow somewhere deep inside. It’s the contradiction that’s so human and so fascinating.”

Tora Mårtens is confident that there’s a secure market for Swedish documentaries.

“Etalks Bio (the Swedish distributor) will be showing a collection of short films this autumn in which Bye Bye, C’Est Fini will be premiered. It’s also due to be broadcast on national Swedish television (SVT), so I’m more than happy.”

What sort of reaction are you hoping for?

“I’m hoping that Lina’s radiant beauty will be an inspiration to women and men alike. And if they’re a little embarrassed, well that’s not a bad thing, either…”

PAOLA LANGDAL
I
n the late 1990s things were looking bleak. Documen-
tary film producers Antonio Russo Merenda
and Malla Grapengiesser had been running their
company Hysteria Film since 1994, but were still
waiting for their big break.

Today they’re glad they stuck it out. Hysteria
Film is now one of the leading production compa-
nies in Sweden for documentaries, with a sound in-
ternational reputation based on a string of notable
films.

These include Paradiset (2007) about
two pensioners in northern Sweden about to re-
wallpaper a room (nominated for a Swedish Film
Award in 2007 for best documentary and winner of
Mid-Length Documentary Runners-Up at Hot Docs
in Canada 2008), Forgotten (2005) about
two young women struggling to lead a normal life in
chaotic Poland (Best Documentary at Nordisk Pan-
orama in Århus, Denmark, 2006 and Alpe Adria Cin-
ema Prize for best documentary at the Trieste Film
Festival in Italy 2007).

A TURNING POINT came for Hysteria Film in spring
2001 when they teamed up with the highly-experi-
enced documentary filmmaker Jerzy Sladkowski.

“Jerzy has taught us loads. His international rep-
utation has opened so many doors,” says Malla
Grapengiesser.

Another explanation for their success is that the
times have caught up with their way of doing things.
When Russo Merenda and Grapengiesser started
out, people didn’t quite get where they were com-
ing from as documentary filmmakers.

“In the Swedish documentary film world there
was a tradition of the lone wolf, one person who
was often a combination of director, producer and
editor all rolled into one. That’s changed now, mak-
it easier for us to contact directors with ideas.
And more people are coming to us with their ideas,
too,” says Russo Merenda.

A DOCUMENTARY WITH the working title The Only
One Who Didn’t Know, directed by Malik Bendjel-
loul, is an ongoing project they are particularly ex-
cited by. It’s about the 1970s American singer Rodri-
guez, who was predicted to have a bright future
ahead of him in the charts. But his record bombed
and he gave up his career.

Meanwhile, unbeknown to him, in South Africa
it became an underground cult hit, especially
among soldiers, who were copying the song from
cassette tape to cassette tape. 25 years later a South
African journalist started digging into the story,
turning up Rodriguez in his current life as a con-
struction worker in Detroit.

The film is due to be pitched at Forum/IDFA in
Amsterdam, the second year running that Hysteria
Film has been granted this honour.

“Rodriguez is 66 years old now. Earlier this year
he came to Stockholm to meet us. And he gave a
spontaneous concert that went down a storm,” says
Malla Grapengiesser.

The current global economic downturn is not
really something that bothers them. As Antonio
Russo Merenda jokes:

“If anyone’s an expert on hard times then it has to
be the people involved in documentaries. Times are
always hard for us.”

Mass hysteria

They started out on the back foot without much capital or a background in the industry.
Yet today Antonio Russo Merenda and Malla Grapengiesser are two of Sweden’s foremost
documentary film producers, about to pitch a film at Forum/IDFA for the second year running.

IN THE SWEDISH
DOCUMENTARY FILM WORLD
THERE WAS A TRADITION
OF THE LONE WOLF. THAT’S
CHANGED NOW”
I’ll let other people make films about the war situation in Gaza. Nowadays I’d rather dig deeper to find the untold stories,” says PeÅ Holmquist, who together with his wife and colleague Suzanne Khardalian, has made yet another film about the Middle East.

With more than 20 films about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict behind them, Holmquist and Khardalian wanted to get deep below the surface. This time round they followed the 27-year-old field psychologist Ayed, born and raised in what has become known as the world’s biggest outdoor prison.

Since the turn of the millennium it has been more or less impossible for the majority of Gaza’s citizens to leave their tiny, overpopulated strip of land next to the Mediterranean. Only a few gravely ill people have been let out. And now, since Hamas won the elections there in 2006, the embargo imposed by the outside world has taken an ever-increasing toll. In the midst of this situation we find Ayed, who often has to seek out his clients in their refugee camp homes. Shame and guilt over psychological problems still prevail in Gaza, as they do in most Arab societies. For many in the Middle East, putting on a successful or happy face is more important than talking about inner problems. Getting truly close to people, therefore, requires a deep relationship. Friends are sometimes confided in on subjects never discussed in the family.

“As a westerner, one is quite unthreatening,” says Holmquist.

In Young Freud in Gaza he builds on the long relationship he has enjoyed with Ayed’s family which began in the early 1980s, when he followed them extensively for his highly-regarded documentary Gaza Ghetto. Ayed was then just three years old, the family sweetheart. Today he’s a university educated psychologist, and Holmquist counts Ayed’s parents among his closest friends.

Without Gaza Ghetto we wouldn’t have been able to make this film. We’d gained the confidence of many people in Gaza and we were basically able to film what we wanted. So if the film’s no good, it’s entirely down to us,” quips PeÅ Holmquist.

Among the most interesting characters in the film are the Hamas activists in therapy with Ayed. He himself is neither a member of Hamas or Fatah, but is much in demand from Hamas to provide some discreet assistance to a number of former activists. In their conflict with Israel they have lost limbs, falling from the elevated position of heroes to wheel-chair-bound burdens on their families. The confessions in therapy of Abed, a failed suicide bomber

In treatment

Documentary filmmaker duo PeÅ Holmquist and Suzanne Khardalian’s new film Young Freud in Gaza (Unge Freud i Gaza), screening in the Reflecting Images: Masters at IDFA, takes us into seldom-seen situations.
and former car thief, bear witness to a seldom mentioned taboo. He feels that his family would have fared better if he had died as a martyr. Now he’s left to confront his feelings of failure.

It’s easy to understand why many people on both sides of the conflict are in need of therapy: in Israel attitudes are hard, militarism is deeply ingrained and people are in denial that their country has occupied Palestinian areas since 1967. In 
Young Freud in Gaza, Ayed declares that “You’d need a million psychologists in Gaza”.

The two sides may appear to have many differences, but their inner needs and problems are similar. The teenager Inas is modestly dressed in hijab, but just as much a slave to beauty and fashion as her counterparts in the west. She is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder manifesting itself as anorexia. Inas doesn’t care to admit that she’s suffering from psychological problems: she doesn’t want to be labelled “mad”.

“That part was particularly hard to film, because Inas thought her anorexia would go away by itself. Her family didn’t want to recognise it either, but it can be a fatal condition,” says Suzanne Khardalian. “Inas lives in a society where one’s appearance isn’t supposed to matter, but her family talk about her having plastic surgery. There are so many contradictions in attitudes.”

IT WAS A desire to explain and understand human similarities that prompted PeÅ Holmquist to start documenting the conflict in the Middle East. Having begun his career in Vietnam in the 70s, where he was impressed by the bravado of the American journalists, he was surprised by their ignorance when he encountered them a few years later in the Middle East. At that time Gaza was a virtually forgotten area, even among the Palestinian leadership itself.

“When I met Arafat in 1985 he barely knew how things were in Gaza,” says Holmquist.

Although Holmquist and Khardalian were allowed to film everything they wanted, the project wasn’t without its problems. During their work – from January 2006 to January 2008 – several decisive events took place. Suzanne was unable to travel there for some of the period. In total they spent around a year in Gaza, but as the security situation grew gradually worse, the crew was forced to employ bodyguards.

MOST TOUCHING OF all are the children in group therapy sessions with Ayed. No adults seem to ask them how they really feel having lost brothers or sisters, or having seen their parents killed or maimed. They seem to think that denial will help the children forget. “I think about my dead brother every day, but Dad has hidden the photos of him. He doesn’t want us to remember,” says one boy pitifully.

In their drawings the children depict the reality of their everyday, war-torn lives: armoured vehicles, automatic rifles, bombs exploding and children who are exposed, abandoned.

Yet still, it is in the children that Holmquist and Khardalian see hope for the future. “In spite of everything, they’re the ones who cope best with the situation, that’s their strength. As we see things, they’re the ones who suffer most, but they still manage to maintain a glint in their eyes. That’s the strength and hope for life to go on,” says Suzanne Khardalian.

“When I met Arafat in 1985 he barely knew how things were in Gaza,” says Holmquist.

Photo: Karis Panh
Mats Hjelm has worked on Black Nation for four years, but the seeds for the film were actually sown back in the 1960s when his documentary filmmaker father followed Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael through Europe and the USA. His father’s pictures form part of the archive material in Hjelm’s film, and his contacts, in addition to Hjelm’s own links with Detroit, gave Hjelm unique inroads to a world that few white people ever experience. In 1989 he made his first trip to the home of Motown, and he has been back there virtually every year since.

The upshot is a collage of black voices each offering their own disturbing views of contemporary society’s silent annihilation of young black men. We meet hustlers who are drawn to the church, a highly engaged bishop, and mothers who have lost their sons in shooting incidents. At the heart of the film lie the ghostlike city of Detroit and the Shrine of the Black Madonna itself.

“People don’t talk about Detroit any more, just South East Michigan. Yet this was once America’s richest city, with a history that encapsulates the whole nation: the car industry, Motown, the collapse of industrialism. Now the churches and liquor stores are all that remains.”

IN ONE OF the many powerful scenes from the film, the Shrine’s bishop thunders out some alarming statistics to his congregation. Civil Rights organisation the National Urban League reports that one fifth of all young black men drop out of high school. An equal number are deprived of their right to vote because of their criminal records. “We are sleeping our way through the black holocaust,” preaches the bishop with emotion. “Their role models used to be Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey. Now they’re pimps, hustlers and gangster rappers.”

“The culture that these young men live in is so destructive for the whole of black society that it’s an absolute disaster,” Mats Hjelm observes. “All of them bear the collective and subconscious trauma of slavery. Being sold and branded like cattle, separated from their loved ones, always called boy or uncle, never man. That’s how the ‘nigger’ was created, predestined to self contempt. Those wounds have to heal before a renaissance can take place.”

A healing in which the Shrine plays an active and constructive part.

“They’re reconstructing black men’s self-confidence in a very loving, intelligent way, with a religion that’s more about living together in the here and now than praising God. It was a very powerful experience for me. I haven’t tried to maintain a critical distance. This is no typical documentary à la Michael Moore where I try to get the bad guys to look really bad. I get the heroes to look good, instead. What they’re doing isn’t simply worthy. It’s unparalleled.”

To many people you’re best known as an artist. How do you regard your various creative roles?

“For a video artist I’m a pretty good filmmaker. I don’t have that artistic attitude that does away with focus or records deliberately bad sound. Strangely enough the critics seem to love sloppily made films that are impossible to watch. Is it art if you get a headache?”

Hjelm’s own vision of what constitutes art is to aim for clarity without simplification.

“I think it will surprise many people that I’ve made such a traditional film. But for me it’s the people in the film who are doing something artistic. They’re the ones who are the true artists.”

FACTS AND FIGURES
MATS HJELM

Born: 1959 in Stockholm, where he still lives and works.

Background: Mats Hjelm trained as a sculptor at Stockholm’s University of Arts, Crafts and Design and the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan. His work has featured in a host of Swedish and international exhibitions. Black Nation is his first full-length film.

“THIS IS NO TYPICAL DOCUMENTARY À LA MICHAEL MOORE WHERE I TRY TO GET THE BAD GUYS TO LOOK REALLY BAD”
In recent years, documentary as a genre has attained greater international prominence and reached a larger audience. As filmmakers, have you noticed a greater interest?

FREDRIK VON KRUSENSTJERNA: I think it’s in the USA that the interest is greater.

ÅSA BLANCK: Well, I think there’s a gulf between documentaries themselves and the way they’re marketed, which doesn’t always do them justice. As a viewer I’m not sufficiently tempted. It’s a bit contradictory: there’s a commitment to production funding, but the power to reach out with the finished product is wanting.

Are the conditions for making documentaries better than they were ten years ago?

JOHAN PALMGREN: Financially there’s no big difference.
Who made the strongest impression on you when you were making the film, and why?

Åsa Blanck: The same thing that drew those people into the conman’s net. It was all so fascinating, glitteringly appealing.

Fredrik: It’s a bit worse, if anything. Everyone thinks that because video cameras are cheap, it’s easier to make films. But that doesn’t do the job for you, and the job takes time.

Would your films have been better if you’d had unlimited financial resources?

Åsa: I’m not sure about that.

Fredrik: You shouldn’t say that!

Åsa: OK, sorry! No, but it takes such an effort to scrape together a budget. It tends to start off OK, then grind to a halt. If it had just been easier and faster to get the final key amounts of money you need, there would definitely have been more films, maybe better films, too.

Fredrik: I completely agree.

Åsa: People complain a lot about money in the industry, but my point is that it’s often quicker to get a decision from the bigger organisations. The problem is that the amounts are not enough.

Fredrik: It’s a bit worse, if anything. Everyone thinks that because video cameras are cheap, it’s easier to make films. But that doesn’t do the job for you, and the job takes time.

If you were to probe their personalities, what would you find?

Fredrik: I don’t think so.

Åsa: Some who knows these things points out just how many different films are made in Sweden. There’s a real spread, and that’s good.

Fredrik: I’ve read that Necrobusiness won’t be distributed in Poland. Is that right?

Åsa Blanck: Yes, that was one condition on which some of the people agreed to take part. So it can’t be shown in Poland, and that’s probably good.

Fredrik: The Swindler is shortly to be screened in Hungary, so it’ll be quite exciting to see what happens there. Our films have mainly had a Swedish focus. Your films verge on docudrama. Do you hold with the traditional view of the documentary as an image of the truth?

Fredrik: I don’t think so. I’ve read that Necrobusiness won’t be distributed in Poland. Is that right?

Fredrik: Yes, that was one condition on which some of the people agreed to take part. So it can’t be shown in Poland, and that’s probably good.

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Fredrik: I don’t think so.

Åsa: Someone who knows these things points out just how many different films are made in Sweden. There’s a real spread, and that’s good.

Fredrik: I’ve read that Necrobusiness won’t be distributed in Poland. Is that right?

Fredrik: Yes, that was one condition on which
Johan: How else could you make a documentary? You’d need hidden cameras, and people who didn’t have a clue they were being filmed.

What do you make of people’s reactions that the whole film seems stage-managed, a fake?

Åsa: The events took place in more than ten countries, as any simple internet search will reveal, so we were quite amused when some people actually believed that we’d made the whole thing up.

Johan and Åsa, you’ve said that you don’t have any political messages in your films.

Åsa: That’s not exactly true, there’s always something you want to say. The situation in The Suburbute (Vilarien, 2008) was definitely politically loaded.

There was a debate in schools afterwards that I think was quite beneficial. People were shocked by what the film showed. And amazing though that may have been, it wasn’t our aim from the beginning. Just to show what the film showed. And amazing though that was, I think it’s important to know when you start filming quite where your story will end up.

How do you see the future as a documentary filmmaker? Will the genre be influenced by cheaper cameras and cheaper technology?

Fredrik: I think it’ll get tougher. Lots of films need to be made if we’re to have lots of good films.

Fredrik: There’s plenty of people could make good documentaries, but they think they can’t afford to. But just because cameras are cheaper, it doesn’t make the job easier. Writing the script and editing are what’s difficult.

Åsa: At the end of the day, I don’t think more films will get made as a result of cheaper technology.

Johan: The trend in television has been that cheaper cameras and cheaper technology enhance their incomes by making sure that patients died instead of saving them.

What was that drew you to the story?

Fredrik: I fall asleep when I see films with messages that are too overt. I don’t want people telling me how it is, I want to be able to think for myself.

Fredrik von Krusenstjerna has worked with his own film projects since 1987. Previous films include Tong Tana (1989), Betrayal (1994) and Lost Sons (2000).

Von Krusenstjerna’s latest effort Necrobusiness, a competition at IDFA, was made together with Richard Solarz and the journalist Monika Sieradzka. The film, which earned rave reviews from the Swedish critics, is a documentary about a widespread corruption scandal in the healthcare system and among funeral directors in the Polish city of Lodz.

Unscrupulous funeral directors started paying ambulance staff for information about where people had died, only to rush to the scene and get the bereaved family members to sign a contract in which the small print stipulated that the entire state grant, normally due to the deceased’s family, went to the funeral directors themselves. Some ambulance staff quickly realised that they could enhance their incomes by making sure that patients died instead of saving them.

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What was that drew you to the story?
Nahid Persson Sarvestani is struggling with some elaborate computer equipment, trying to show me an edit of her latest documentary, the Queen and I. The equipment clearly isn’t playing ball.

“If I believed in God I’d ask him how to do it,” jokes the woman who fled from Iran in 1982 after the regime of the Mullahs executed her brother. She looks at her watch and counts backwards.

“It’s not even six in the morning yet in LA, so I can’t call my editor for help. You’ll have to watch it on my laptop.”

It’s barely noticeable, but Persson Sarvestani is jetlagged, having landed just last night from Los Angeles where she’s been editing her film for the past three weeks.

She got the idea two years ago when she was in Iran filming her previous documentary feature, Four Wives – One Man (Fyra fruar och en man, 2007). On that visit she was taken in for questioning by the security services as soon as she landed. Her earlier films such as Prostitution Behind the Veil (Prostituation bakom slöjan, 2004), and prior to that, short film Birdcage (Fågelburen, 2006), which like The Queen and I (screening at IDFA), have made her something of a thorn in the side of the Iranian regime.

“During the questioning they asked me if I was a communist or a mujahedin. When I denied it they accused me of being a supporter of the Shah,” says Persson Sarvestani.

An absurd accusation indeed: as an 18-year-old she was one of the revolutionaries yelling “Death to the Shah” on the streets of Teheran.

As the film starts to roll I’m drawn into this story.
of the Shah’s widow – Iran’s former queen Farah Diba, who now lives in Paris. It’s also a film about Persson Sarvestani herself, who shares Diba’s experience of living in exile. On the surface, the two women live completely different lives, but as the film goes on, there develops what appears to be a warm friendship between them.

MAKING AN UP-CLOSE documentary about a former queen is no easy task – Farah Diba has a public image that she has to maintain for all those who hope that the 2,500 year-old Persian monarchy will one day be restored. When she finds out about the filmmaker’s revolutionary past, she gets cold feet. Nahid Persson Sarvestani films herself discussing the issue with her family in the airy, charming house in which we find ourselves. Feelings come to a head in the very room where we’re watching the film.

Back with the subject, I find myself once again in the luxury environments of Paris, Washington and Cairo where Farah Diba lives and operates. She exudes such charm that it’s hard for Nahid Persson Sarvestani to pin her down on the torture and repression that took place in Iran under the Shah.

“She’s basically a kind person: even though she’s unsure where the film will lead, she doesn’t want a fellow Iranian who comes to make a film about her to fail. I’m sure that many of her supporters told her not to take part, to be on her guard where I was concerned because I might make a film that would harm her,” says Persson Sarvestani.

Farah Diba has indeed seen the film – like me, here in Nahid Persson Sarvestani’s house.

“She was here in August and saw a preliminary, two-hour version.”

What did she say?

“I had warned her that it wasn’t all going to be positive, but she was prepared for much worse than it actually was.”

And the filmmaker herself is nervous about the reception her film might receive.

“When I show the film to my old communist friends they form their opinion. On the other hand, I’ve shown the film to Farah’s supporters who’ve fallen in love with the film. That wasn’t exactly the reaction I’d expected.”

What do your old communist friends say?

“I haven’t really dared show it to so many of them. Those who have seen it have actually changed their opinion of her. My editor, for example. She was totally opposed to the Shah and the monarchy. Now she’s gone and fallen in love with Farah!”

How do you feel about it all?

“Sometimes I say to myself: ‘what have you done?’ It’s a tremendous responsibility. I’m still wondering whether what I’ve done is right. But I can’t change it. I’ve filmed what I’ve seen and I’ve said what I feel. I can do no more than that. I can’t please everyone.”

FACTS AND FIGURES

NAHID PERSSON SARVESTANI

Born: 1960 in a village outside Shiraz, Iran.

Background: Fled from Iran 20 years ago. Previous films include My Mother – A Persian Princess (Min mamma – en persisk prinsessa, 2000), Last Days of Life (I livets slutskede, 2002), Prostitution Behind the Veil (Prostitution bakom slöjan, 2004), Four Wives – One Man (Fyra fruar och en man, 2007).

FACTS AND FIGURES

FARAH DIBA

Born: 1938

Background: Farah Diba was married to the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, from 1959 until his death in 1980. During the time of the Shah’s rule she maintained an active interest in Persian art and culture, opening several museums and cultural centres. In 1979, the year of the Islamic revolution, she and her husband were forced to flee the country. Since then she has lived in exile in France and the USA.
Live forever

In IDFA-competing Last Supper (Sista måltiden, 2005) Bigert & Bergström looked at capital punishment through the eyes of a prison chef. Now the two artists are back with Life Extended – a documentary about life, death and the quest to live forever.

“If you had the chance to live forever, would you take it? Most of us wouldn’t hesitate. Nonetheless, the question is slightly ridiculous, a sort of late night thing you’d rather forget the next morning. Largely, perhaps, because the question is purely hypothetical.

But a look at the latest research shows that the question isn’t as pointless as it may appear. Even if we cannot live forever, scientists have shown that we should be able to extend our lives dramatically.”

“Twenty years ago everyone agreed that the aging process wasn’t something you could change,” says the artist Mats Bigert. “Now we know you can, but it’s very complicated. It’s not just a single gene that controls the process. Many scientists believe that if you can develop medicines against Alzheimer’s and cancer, then you’ll also produce medicines that can prolong life extensively. Looking back, the average life span has doubled in a hundred years. But it’s hard for scientists to get funding for research into ageing.”

IN THE DOCUMENTARY Life Extended, Mats Bigert and his colleague Lars Bergström have interviewed scientists and writers about their theories of life, death and growing old. All of them are allowed to speak on their own terms: Bigert & Bergström don’t have an obvious agenda in the film.

“No, it doesn’t seem so creative to have a rigid agenda. We don’t proffer answers; we just ask lots of questions so that the audience can draw their own conclusions.”

UNLIKE MOST DOCUMENTARIES, Life Extended has a marked, almost clinical aesthetic style with graphic inserts. It features small tableaux, still lifes which illustrate the discussions. These include a decaying pump on a pair of household scales and an incubator filled with bingo balls.

“In the context of documentaries it’s not considered the done thing to talk about form,” says Bigert, “it’s the story that counts. In a regular documentary around 20 per cent of the material seems to be filmed through a car windscreen, regardless of whether it’s about an artist or an environmental issue. As artists we want to deal with documented material in a more form-conscious way, to try to make form and content go hand in hand.”

Alongside Last Supper and Life Extended, Bigert & Bergström have also made a film about underground train drivers in Stockholm. Do they intend to carry on making documentaries?

“Absolutely, as long as the right stories present themselves, we’ll carry on. Our working method suits all kinds of subjects, with new thoughts constantly being spawned in the process. Right now, Lars Bergström is in Shanghai interviewing Chinese meteorologists for a documentary about man’s attempts to influence the weather. The film world seems more open than the art world: you get a quick response to your ideas and various institutions can work together on the finance. Nowadays, more and more artists are working with documentaries. There seems to be an appetite for more real people once again.”

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Director Måns Månsson has revived the spirit of cinéma vérité. His latest effort Mr Governor (Hr Landshövding) is due to compete at this year’s Stockholm International Film Festival, the first documentary ever to do so.

In an age when documentary filmmakers increasingly stand in front of the camera and play the leading role themselves, Måns Månsson has chosen the exact opposite. A devotee of classic cinéma vérité – seen by many as getting closest to objective reality – he allowed his camera to observe and document a Swedish politician, Anders Björck, Governor of the county of Uppsala, just north of Stockholm. There are no cuts, no retakes, not even any direction as such.

“For me it’s very exciting to work in this classic observational way, both in terms of filming but also editing and sound techniques. I like playing with the format, pushing it to the limits. Yet even though I’m behind the camera, I don’t profess to be some...”

FACTS AND FIGURES

MÅNS MÅNSSON

Born: 1982

Background: Trained at film school in New York, presently studying at the Royal University College of Fine Arts in Stockholm.

Current film: Mr Governor (Hr Landshövding) – Director’s Choice at the Nordic Panorama 5 Cities Film Festival in Malmö 2008.
FILMOGRAPHY

Clyde (2001)
Månsson’s debut film centres on a homeless man in New York with many stories to tell.

Not the Swedish capital, but a street in Bushwick, Brooklyn. Screenings included the Stockholm International Film Festival.

Kinchen (2005)
Månsson’s homage to the Swedish sports commentator Lasse “Kinchen” Kinch. Filmed during the 2004 Ice Hockey World Championship. Nominated for a Swedish Film Award.

“I DON’T PROFESS TO BE SOME SORT OF TRUTH DEMI-GOD. I’M AS SUBJECTIVE AS ANY OTHER DIRECTOR”

Månsson describes the working method as extremely tricky and complex. It requires long preparation coupled with endless patience and resolve.

“It can seem an extremely frustrating form of filmmaking, since you don’t know where you’ll eventually end up. There again, it can be one of the most satisfying when it turns out right and you get the results you hope for.”

Shooting the film, the crew consisted of Månsson as cameraman, a sound technician and an assistant cameraman who was often in another room. And during the whole year with Anders Björck, they only used up 30 hours of the 16 mm black and white film they were working with.

“Had we been using video we might have got through 400 hours. What’s so satisfying about making this kind of documentary on conventional film is that concentration levels are so high when the camera’s rolling.”

NO DOUBT MANY people are curious about the choice of subject matter for Mr Governor. But just as in Månsson’s previous films, personal feelings and reflections are what counts. He grew up partly in New York, where he first studied film. This has clearly left its mark. But why especially Anders Björck and the TV ice hockey commentator Lars Kinch?

“Growing up in the 80s these two people were constantly on the television. Kinch was the commentator on every Swedish international hockey match, and Anders Björck was always in the political limelight. Both of them lodged in my psyche in a way that I wanted to work through in the films. Basically, they’re a childhood memory.”

While Måns Månsson is happy to keep pushing the limits of documentaries, he’s also keen to make a feature.

“Although before I started shooting this film I used to curse all the documentary filmmakers who jumped ship, guys like Angelopoulos, Antonioni and Kubrick. I’ve always wondered how it would have been if they’d stuck to documentaries. Where would documentaries have been today, would they have looked different?”

“I DON’T PROFESS TO BE SOME SORT OF TRUTH DEMI-GOD. I’M AS SUBJECTIVE AS ANY OTHER DIRECTOR”
In a TV report shown in the film Long Distance Love, it’s claimed that 45 percent of all able-bodied men aged between 20 and 40 have left Kyrgyzstan to work abroad. And that in Russia there are some 15 million guest workers, mostly from Central Asia. In the film we meet Alisher, a young, newly-married man who has to travel to work in Moscow in order to support his parents and his pregnant wife, Dildora. He ends up in a flat with an other guest workers, where he’s told to keep quiet and not venture out too often so that they don’t all end up deported. Back home, Dildora gives birth to their son.

One of the film’s directors, Elin Jönsson, has worked as a journalist in Russia and Central Asia since the 1990s. According to Jönsson, men like Alisher are everywhere in Moscow, selling fruit, working on building sites, often living in terrible conditions.

“They’re regarded as little more than animals. And the names they’re called on building sites are racist and offensive in the extreme,” she says.

Having seen whole villages in Kyrgyzstan where

“CONVERSELY, WE DIDN’T KNOW WHAT MATERIAL WE HAD BEFORE IT WAS TRANSLATED FOR US LATER”
only children and old ladies are left, Jönsson has a long interest in migration issues. Those villages survive on what the guest workers in Russia can send home. MOST OF ELIN Jönsson’s career has been as a radio reporter, but her work in Central Asia spurred her on to use film as an additional means of expression.

“In Central Asia I’ve often felt that words aren’t sufficient. It’s so different there that you have to show what it looks like to paint the whole picture.”

So when the well-established documentary filmmaker Magnus Gertten got in touch with her suggesting they might work together in the area, she jumped at the chance.

Many of Magnus Gertten’s previous films have had strong links with his native city, Malmö. His most successful to date, Rolling Like a Stone (2005), stems from a tour date by the Rolling Stones to the city in 1965. “Films such as Rolling Like a Stone are more than local,” says Gertten. “I like to draw the universal from the local. I’ve made plenty of films about Sweden, but my contact with Elin took me in a new direction.”

For him, it began with a Swedish newspaper article about the volume of money sent home by economic immigrants. “It’s more than all the foreign aid paid out by the rich countries. It’s good to bear that figure in mind when they start boasting over how much they contribute.”

THE FILM THAT resulted from three years of shooting and numerous trips to Russia and central Asia certainly maintains a “universal in the local” flavour.

The two filmmakers firmly shared a principle that Long Distance Love shouldn’t be one of those documentaries that only reflect social and political issues.

“Magnus and I both believe that it’s more engaging to focus on individuals in describing a political situation,” Elin Jönsson explains. “So, for a truly personal touch, we chose a love story: the man goes away, the woman’s left behind, the family is split up. It’s something that most people, regardless of nationality, can readily identify with.”

“Actually, we couldn’t make a situation sufficiently living, we simply skipped it.”

To find the right people they ran a television ad in the city of Osh, described by Jönsson as typically Central Asian (the film introduces us to the city with shots of rubbish heaps and rusty cranes). “You could have chosen any of the cities there,” she says. “We got more than sixty responses and filmed six people. In the end, we went for Alisher. He has an open, easy-to-read face, like a young Al Pacino.”

THE FILMMAKERS WERE keen to remain focused on the main characters. As Jönsson points out, there’s plenty of racism and violence that lightens the lives of guest workers, but since it isn’t part of Alisher and Dildora’s everyday situation, it’s not touched on in the film.

And the closest they got to a narrator’s voice is the television report on the number of guest workers, but since it isn’t part of Alisher and Dildora’s everyday situation, it’s not touched on in the film.

“We didn’t want narrators,” says Jönsson. “If we couldn’t make a situation sufficiently living, we simply skipped it.”

Not only is there no narrator, there are no direct interviews, either. The directors use a technique, used previously by Gertten, of getting conversations started by posing an open question.

“With my ial was to leave, for example, we asked them to talk about it. Then you can only hope that the conversation has something to offer. And because we didn’t understand what they were saying, they felt less constrained. Conversely, we didn’t know what material we had before it was translated for us later,” Gertten observes.

“Very often, these conversations drive the action on. The conversation at home in the kitchen between Alisher and his parents about the old Soviet Union compared to life today. Or the conversation between the guest workers on the train to Moscow (a scene for which the filmmakers had to bribe security officials, since filming on trains is illegal).”

ALTHOUGH A NUMBER of local film crews were also involved, there’s a distinct unity in the finished product. This is thanks, largely, to the local producer who fell in completely with their way of working, and to their Danish editor, Jesper Osmund, described by Jönsson and Gertten as a “genius”.

“He has a musical sensibility in the way he can tell a story, an excellent quality in an editor,” says Gertten, who has worked with Osmund on several previous occasions.

The film captures several intimate and emotional moments, like the one where Alisher, so far away from home, looks at a photograph of his son. Suddenly, one family’s situation encapsulates that of millions of economic migrants the world over. Elin Jönsson describes it as “missing out on life itself in the quest for a better life.”

“We Swedes are in a minority: this is the reality for much of the world’s population. Yet everybody dreams of a better life, even if they’re sitting in a fancy office.”

FACTS AND FIGURES

MAGNUS GERTTEN

Born: 1953
Background: Moved to Russia in 1987, where he lived in Moscow from 1991, where she lived

ELIN JÖNSSON

F ACTS AND FIGURES

ELIN JÖNSSON

Born: 1973
Background: Was part of the first group of Swedish school students to go on an exchange to the Soviet Union in 1987, where she lived with a KGB family as the empire was collapsing. Has worked as a freelance radio journalist in Moscow, in addition to writing for several Russian newspapers. Currently works as a radio producer in Malmö, Sweden. In 2008 she published a book, Konsten att döja en massaker – en resa bakom sidenridån, about the demonstrations in Uzbekisti-

WE BOTH BELIEVE THAT IT’S MORE ENGAGING TO FOCUS ON INDIVIDUALS IN DESCRIBING A POLITICAL SITUATION”
Local heroes

SVT and the Swedish Film Institute’s idea for a short-format documentary series resulted in the People depicted 2008 (Folk i bild 2008) project, a group of films on subjects ranging from hockey-playing models to cowboy hairdressers.

Words: Anders Litterström Photography: Johan Bergmark

“This autumn 14 short documentaries, each 14 minutes long, have been broadcast by SVT (Sveriges Television) under the banner of “Folk i bild 2008”.

The films have been financed by the Swedish Film Institute and SVT working in partnership. Ingemar Persson, head of documentary programming at SVT, and Tove Torbiörnsson, documentary film commissioner at the Swedish Film Institute, gave their selected filmmakers what amounted to a free hand.

“We wanted to take the pulse of Sweden 2008 through a series of portraits. We were looking for people round about us who rarely get noticed. Many Swedish documentary filmmakers look beyond Sweden for their subjects, but we thought it would be important to show what’s happening here,” says Tove Torbiörnsson.

Interest in the project was much higher than she and Ingemar Persson had expected. “I predicted maybe a hundred proposals, but ended up with three times that amount. Going through them, it was fascinating to see such a wide range of subjects,” says Persson.

SOME OF SWEDEN’S best-known filmmakers have taken part in the project, including Josef Fares, the director of the highly-acclaimed features Jalla! Jalla!, Kops (Kopps), Zozo and Leo.

Fares’ documentary Hockeymodell shows us Linn, torn between her modelling agency that wants her to lose weight, and the ice hockey team she plays for that wants her to build up her muscles.

Far from any hockey rink, Kåge Jonsson and Håkan Pieniowski’s film Avdragsgilla Karin presents a woman who cleans crystal chandeliers in Stockholm. Most of her clients are from Östermalm or Djursholm, two high-income bracket parts of the city.

Andreas Linderqvist, Christian Hallman and Mats Larsson have made a film entitled Jann of Sweden, about the Swede Jan Eldnor who moved to the US in 1969 where he works as a hairdresser. In his spare time he supplements his income as a cowboy, often taking part in parades. Claude Rochelle, his horse, and his wife Lisbeth are the women in his life.

“It’s been cool testing out a new format for Swedish documentaries with quality filmmakers. Shorts are often associated with beginners. For us it was interesting to see what some well-established directors would make of this opportunity,” says Persson.

Ingemar Persson hopes too that the project will attract new viewers who don’t normally watch Swedish documentaries: “There aren’t so many people who are prepared to invest an hour of their time watching a documentary on television. We’ve been able to offer these people quality films on a shorter timescale,” observes Persson.

“The films are audacious and brave, made with compassion by the filmmakers. It was a stimulating process to be part of, rewarding for those of us who took the initiative, for the filmmakers themselves and last but not least for the audience. Some of the films have already become timeless masterpieces and we hope that this is just the beginning. I’m not sure that we always fully appreciate the importance documentaries have for all of us and our understanding of our times. To me it seems that a culture and its democratic values very much depend on the survival of authentic stories,” concludes Torbiörnsson.
As an internationally recognized visual artist, Mats Hjelm has developed aesthetically and technically advanced video installations around the world, always with a political context. After studies at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, he has made several video installations with themes from Detroit. Black Nation is his first feature documentary.

"THIS TIME I’VE GONE IN BIG TIME FOR BRUCE WEBER’S FILM ABOUT CHET BAKER, LET’S GET LOST. IT’S A STUDY OF WHITE JAZZ, THE 50S AND HEROIN, BUT I’VE SWAPPED THOSE THEMES FOR THE 70S, SEGREGATION AND SOUL" GÖRAN OLSSON, DIRECTOR OF AM I BLACK ENOUGH FOR YOU, SWEDISH FILM #2/2008.

We’re proud of Swedish films. Especially proud to be presenting eight documentaries at this year’s IDFA. The following 15 new feature documentaries are all ready to hit international festivals and markets. Please keep in mind that this is just a selection of new Swedish documentaries – you will always find updated information on all new films (including shorts and features) handled for festivals by the Swedish Film Institute on www.swedishfilm.org.
Greetings from the Woods

Over a period of three years, the music video director and former professional skateboarder Mikel Cee Karlsson has documented life in his home village deep in the Swedish forest. With a mixture of playful precision, humour and skateboarding Mikel Cee Karlsson has documented life in his home village.

Greetings from the Woods


Swedish rural life stripped bare.


Greetings from the Woods

PRODUCED BY Plattform Produktion in co-production with SVT (Sveriges Television) / Vera Bonnier with support from the Swedish Film Institute / Tove Torbinsson and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee

ELIN JÖNSSON, DIRECTOR OF "THE MAN GOES AWAY, THE WOMAN’S LEFT BEHIND, THE FAMILY IS SPLIT UP. IT’S SOMETHING THAT MOST PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF NATIONALITY, CAN READILY IDENTIFY WITH" ELIN JONSSON, DIRECTOR OF LONG DISTANCE LOVE, PAGE 34.

Bombs and Shells, Knives and Forks

“There’s no other way than Mozart!” When your childhood has mostly been about diagnosis with fancy names and medication, art and the passion for the music can become a refuge of freedom. The young artist Karl Persson lets us into his world with all its humour, fantastic theories, happiness and sorrows.

Bombs and Shells, Knives and Forks


Greetings from the Woods

PRODUCED BY Plattform Produktion in co-production with SVT (Sveriges Television) / Vera Bonnier with support from the Swedish Film Institute / Tove Torbinsson and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee

ELIN JÖNSSON, DIRECTOR OF "THE MAN GOES AWAY, THE WOMAN’S LEFT BEHIND, THE FAMILY IS SPLIT UP. IT’S SOMETHING THAT MOST PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF NATIONALITY, CAN READILY IDENTIFY WITH" ELIN JONSSON, DIRECTOR OF LONG DISTANCE LOVE, PAGE 34.

Long Distance Love

Long Distance Love is a love story, but also a film about the gigantic migration waves into Russia. Alisher, from the city of Osh in Kyrgyzstan, is a young man looking for love in his life, but who also longs to survive in a country where people are living under severe pressure ever since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Alisher marries Dildora on a sweltering summer’s day, but soon – as almost every other young man in this region – he has to go to Russia and try to find a job. The distance between Osh and Moscow is 3,500 kilometers. A film about migration, poverty, love and hope.


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Life Extended

Life Extended continues Bigert & Bergström’s exploration of man’s endeavour to control life and death. In this film, the people we meet include a gerontologist who believes we will be immortal in the not-too-distant future, architects who want to control life and death. In this film, the people we meet include a gerontologist who believes we will be immortal in the not-too-distant future, architects who want to control life and death.

Life Extended

Original Title: Life Extended. Directors: Bigert & Bergström. Producers: Bigert & Bergström. Produced by: Bigert & Bergström and Eight Milestones / Anna Källgården in co-production with SVT (Sveriges Television) / Vera Bonnier with support from DFF, NRK, YLE, NHK, Nordisk Film & TV Fond, the Swedish Film Institute / Toé Tolbomon and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee Screening Details: Digital, 37 min. To be released 2008 Sales: TBA

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Maggie in Wonderland

Maggie in Wonderland is a tender portrait of Maggie, which takes us on a journey of humour and sadness through Swedish everyday life. Maggie always co-ordinates high heels with a beret, and she loves gold. She lives on the 15th floor in one of Malmö’s suburbs. Her balcony is littered with reminders of her previous life. Under a golf bag, next to a racing ticket from 1999, are the remains of a pigeon that she killed when she couldn’t sleep.

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Mio

As a child, Mio was sent from Thailand to Sweden in order to make enough money to pay for his sister’s education back home. As a 17-year-old he lives in a suburb of Stockholm, in an isolated block of flats, removed from the world. He dreams of a safe, loving relationship and of being able to send money to his family. With a criminal record, relationship problems, violence and drugs he struggles to get through the days.

Mio


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Mr Governor

A free-form observational film without narration or interviews, which despite its character-driven storyline, is not a personal portrait in the conventional sense, but a universal film about loneliness, ageing, democracy and national pride. It was shot on 16mm black & white reversal film with a 12mm wide-angle lens. Jean Rouach once described the 12mm lens as a 16mm camera as the closest equivalent of the human eye in cinema. Whereas colour often simply represents “documentary” reality, black and white film has an indescribable ability to communicate subjective moods and atmospheres.

Necrobusiness

A documentary set in Lodz, Poland in the late 1990s, where paramedics and undertakers worked together to get hold of the government subsidies that relatives of the deceased were intended to get for funerals. Something that started out as a scam ended up in murder.

The Queen and I

Director Nahid Persson Sarvestani is a filmmaker and former revolutionary who helped to overthrow the monarchy in Iran’s 1979 revolution. Having made two documentaries with anti-Islamist messages, she decided to make a film about the former queen, her old adversary. Both are women living in exile. Over a two-year period, the two confront each other about their past, question their former beliefs, and share their grievances. Their relationship grows as they realize they have much in common as two strong women who have risen above hardships to continue evolving towards a positive future.

The Swindler

As the Vatican’s special envoy, Father Mac came to Malmö – a Catholic bishop with a cloak and a stick. In a short time he conquered the city, entertained generously and made many friends. In one year, Father Mac won the confidence of everyone; he conducted weddings and started to invest his newfound friends’ money. But just when the people of Malmö were supposed to get their loans back with a handsome return, his apartment was found abandoned.

The Substitute

A documentary about young Ayed who is the only field psychologist in Aida. The film crew made up of three untrained Palestinians return to the area where they grew up in order to build a tree house high up in a pine tree. Gradually, they realize that many people share their love of trees and forests and that its roots go deeper into the Swedish psyche than they first imagined.

Young Freund in Gaza

A documentary about young Ayed who is the only field psychologist in northern Gaza. Every day with his medical bag in his hand, he goes on home visits in Jabalia refugee camp. We follow Ayed and listen to his patients: children, young men and women with suicide thoughts, former soldiers. Outside, there is chaos, war and turmoil. A tragic and comic film from the secret rooms of Gaza. Filmed during two years 2006-2008, when Gaza was isolated from the world.

The Tree Lover

Strange things occur in the woods of northern Sweden. A film crew made up of three untrained filmmakers return to the area where they grew up in order to build a tree house high up in a pine tree. Gradually, they realize that many people share their love of trees and forests and that its roots go deeper into the Swedish psyche than they first imagined.

Nahid Persson Sarvestani is his first feature documentary.
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