

# **INTERVIEW »WELTSCHMERZ«**

From December 1-12, the film WELTSCHMERZ by Danish film director Jesper Dalgaard can be seen in the online program of the Nordwind Festival on the Kampnagel homepage. We talked with the director and with the film's leading actress, Anna Sophie Lübeck about their joint work.

**Jesper and Anna Sophie, could you briefly introduce yourselves?**

Jesper: My name is Jesper Dalgaard, 32 years old. I grew up on the west coast of Denmark. Four years ago I graduated from the National Danish Film School. I work interdisciplinary at the intersection of theater, documentary and fiction.

Anna Sophie: My name is Anna Sophie Thalbitzer Lübeck and I am 35 years old. I have been working as a professionally trained actress at Glad Teater since 2011. The world of music and poetry are my life; they have filled my life from the beginning. I was born blind into a very big and caring family.

**What kind of theater is the Glad Teater, how do you work there?**

Anna Sophie: Glad Teater is an ensemble theater with actors with disabilities. We produce performances and tour both nationally and internationally. Currently we have 18 actors\* in our ensemble. We perform our plays in various venues around the country. At Glad Teater, we aim to provide audiences with an unusual and original experience. Our performances are not necessarily aimed at disabled audiences, but are all suitable for mixed audiences and have a particular strength in physical and visual expression.

**Could you describe your artistic practice?**

Anna Sophie: Actually, I don't work that much individually because I am part of an ensemble, but I have a monologue, "Your Eyes My Sight", for which the playwrights wrote the lyrics based on my life story. My individual artistic process was learning the texts, especially the intentions behind them and how to deal with the settings. I guess my individual practice is working with feelings and intentions.

**Did you already work with Jesper before making the movie WELTSCHMERZ?**

Anna Sophie: No, unfortunately not. Jesper and I haven't worked together before, but it would have been wonderful! I first met Jesper when he came to Glad Teater to find the actors for his film.

**How did the casting for the film come about?**

Anna Sophie: We had two different castings, and I was lucky enough to be one of the four actors selected.

Jesper: The casting was organized and done in collaboration with Glad Teater. The whole ensemble of Glad Teater participated in the casting. We did a lot of classical theater work with everyone and after a while we saw four people who started to work together and accompanied each other perfectly. A wonderful group of people who are each very different, but have a strong, touching and caring connection to each other.

### **Can you share something about your collaboration during the shooting of the film?**

Anna Sophie: Jesper spent a lot of time observing our work and asking us a lot of questions. He was truly interested in getting to know us, our desires, fears and who we really are as people and artists. Then he created a framework for us to follow. He threw us into many different experiments. I found the process very exciting because we didn't know what was happening from scene to scene. For us actors it seemed to be improvised most of the time, but Jesper created a safe framework because he always had very clear ideas of what he wanted us to do, and because of that we felt very free in the process – even if it was a bit confusing sometimes.

Jesper: Haha, I'm glad Anna Sophie thinks I had a clear picture. I didn't have that at all. I had a concept based on the interviews and research I had done with the actors in pre-production. The concept was basically just the artistic process and contained many individual fragments that had to do with love and heartbreak.

### **Did you decide together what you wanted to show and tell in the film?**

Anna Sophie: Jesper made all the final decisions, but I shared my thoughts and ideas with him and let him use my personal life crisis.

Jesper: Yes, I had the final cut and the final say. I also see that as my responsibility as the director of the film. But of course I listen carefully to what the actors think about it. It's in my interest that they like what they see.

### **How did you experience your (collaborative) work on the film?**

Anna Sophie: I felt that we found each other during the process, and Jesper understood my position in the world – both mine and the other actors'.

Jesper: For me personally, it was one of the best processes I have ever experienced. The synergy between making the film and working in the theater was magical for me. On many levels there was a close artistic collaboration between me and Anna Sophie.

### **How did you make decisions?**

Jesper: Anna Sophie was involved in deciding what material to work on in the theater, but as the director of the film I decided which scenes would be in the final film.

### **Can you tell us something about the title WELTSCHMERZ and what it means to you?**

Anna Sophie: For me, it's about how you deal with a life crisis, and then how you relate to the people around you.

Jesper: "Weltschmerz" says something about your state of mind. How you feel and what your attitude towards the world is. But it's also about something much bigger – the mindset of humanity.

**The movie shows rehearsals for a play. Anna Sophie, how did you experience the different media of *film* and *theater* during the process?**

Anna Sophie: Artistically, both can go very well together, but I personally like the medium of film better because you can reach more people, and if you make mistakes, you can correct them again and try a scene again.

**Jesper, WELTSCHMERZ is your graduation film. Can you tell us about your (first) concept for the film, the starting point of your work?**

Jesper: During my time at film school I spent a lot of time both defining the thematic field of my work, developing my film language and an understanding of working across genres. I am interested in theatrical staging within documentary and the transition between documentary and fiction. I wanted my final film to reflect my artistic development during film school, and I also wanted to create a framework that would allow me to play with, develop, and combine all the things I've worked on. The dramaturgical concept of making a film about the artistic process of working in a theater resulted in a nice synergy and allowed improvisations between the film and the theater work.

**When and why did you come up with the idea to work with Glad Theater for the film?**

Jesper: I wanted to work with theater actors for the film, and people who can shake up thinking, physicality and the expression of feelings. I contacted Glad Theater and we met. I made it clear from the beginning that I didn't want to make a film about disabilities. I also said that I wanted the actors to define the content and the theme. I didn't know what I wanted the film to be about; I only had the conceptual framework in mind. At the end of the film I ask Jannick, one of the actors, what he thinks the film is about, and he answers from his perspective. I have the impression that it was a relief for the actors that it is not about their disabilities, but about them as people. If they want to talk about their personal disabilities, that should be their business, a personal business. That was never a thematic interest for me.

**Is the collaboration with Glad Theater related/connected to the topic of the film, »Weltschmerz«?**

Jesper: Yes, very much so. The protagonists turn my films into documentaries. It is the personal lives and emotions of the actors that determine what the films are actually about – also in this film. During pre-production I did many interviews with Anne Sophie about what the play and the film should be about. What themes, what material interested her, what she wanted to work with in the theatrical process, and

why we should make the film. I tried to find her very personal motivation. Two or three weeks before the filming, she told me that she had just gone through a breakup. That she wanted to process that artistically. I could understand that because I was going through a breakup myself. Working on the film became personal and therapeutic for me. That's why I kept asking the actors during the shoot what we were doing. What was it actually about? I had no clue myself.

**The film is about religious, iconic figures, among other things. How did this idea come about?**

Jesper: It's been an inspiration for me for many years. WELTSCHMERZ was of course about the theme of love and sacrifice and a theatrical reference to Jesus Christ Superstar.

**Anna Sophie, the film WELTSCHMERZ is about your heartbreak. How did you deal with your personal story in the film?**

My role in the movie was to direct my cast of actors to make them help me in dealing with my heartbreak. In that sense, my personal focus changed, and through that, I was able to get through one of the most difficult times of my life. You could say that making the movie was my therapy.

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**Does Glad Teater often work with freelance directors for external projects? Or is that rather an exception?**

We have done many projects with external directors, both commercials, films and theater performances. The requests are getting more and more and I think that WELTSCHMERZ has made a big contribution in this respect, which is why we are now very well known to the industry.