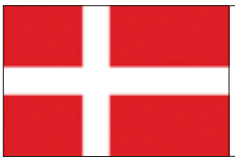

Denmark Christian Monggaard

2007 was a catastrophic year for the Danish film industry. Even though the 26 Danish feature films released sold somewhere in the region of 3.2 million tickets – securing a market share of 26 percent, the second-highest share for local films in Europe after France – spiralling production costs and a greater divide between art-house and mainstream releases made it harder to profit from making films.

At the beginning of 2008, two companies closely associated with the Danish New Wave over the last 10–15 years, Zentropa and Nimbus Films, were in financial trouble. Zentropa had lost money on their last seven films and all four of Nimbus Films' releases, including former golden boy Thomas Vinterberg's return to Danish-language film-making, the comedy *A Man Comes Home*, flopped at the box office.

In May, Zentropa announced that, in order to raise money for new films, the company was selling half of its assets to Nordisk Film, making it the largest film producer, distributor and exhibitor in Denmark. In October, Nimbus Films had to scale down the company's activities, laying off a third of its staff and shutting down its commercial branch.

During the last few years, several other small production companies have closed shop and, in spite of its size, Nordisk Film has continually lost money. The situation is serious and the Danish Film Institute, which supports most films made in Denmark, as well as the organisations representing directors, producers and film workers, has been struggling to find a way out of this mess. The trend appears to be moving towards either cheaply produced features for the domestic market or expensive co-productions for international consumption.

Ole Christian Madsen's **Flame & Citron**

Ironically, 2008 is turning out to be a very successful year for Danish films. By late October, more than 3.5 million tickets had been sold for the 22 domestic feature films released, with Ole Christian Madsen's World War Two drama **Flame & Citron** (*Flammen & Citronen*) the highest-grossing Danish film since Lone Scherfig's *Italian for Beginners*. To date, it has sold almost 700,000 tickets. But the film, which was produced by Nimbus Films on a budget of €6.4 million (more than double the average cost of a feature film in Denmark, with much of the budget coming from Germany), wasn't enough to recover the company's major losses from 2007.

Flame & Citron tells the story of two Danish freedom fighters, codenamed Flame (Thure Lindhardt) and Citron (Mads Mikkelsen), who try to navigate through the muddy waters of idealism and patriotism during the final years of Germany's occupation of Denmark. Beautifully shot and well acted, the film successfully encapsulates the heroic image

Niels Arden Oplevs' **Worlds Apart**

many people have of the Danish resistance movement. It even sparked debate prior to its release.

Niels Arden Oplevs' **Worlds Apart** (*To verdener*) opened the year. An intelligent, family-oriented drama and coming-of-age story, it was not too dissimilar in theme to the director's previous film, 2006's *We Shall Overcome*. *Worlds Apart*, which deals with a young girl's attempt to break free of her strict religious upbringing, proved to be a surprise hit, selling more than 300,000 tickets. Pernille Fischer Christensen, who debuted in 2006 with the compelling, critically acclaimed drama *A Soap*, failed with her second feature, the uneven **Dancers** (*Dansen*), which starred Trine Dyrholm and Anders W. Berthelsen as unlikely lovers. The film was only seen by 10,000 people.

Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's **What No One Knows**

After the 2003 English-language drama, *Skagerrak*, veteran director Søren Kragh-Jacobsen returned with a taut political thriller, **What No One Knows** (*Det som ingen ved*), in which the prolific Anders W. Berthelsen plays an ordinary man who becomes embroiled in the shady world of intelligence and surveillance. Inspired by real events, as well as American conspiracy thrillers of the 1960s and 1970s – favourites of Kragh-Jacobsen's – the film asks important questions about a world in which we give up our basic rights, out of fear of terrorist attack. It sold a solid 186,000 tickets.

Kasper Barfoed's **The Candidate** (*Kandidaten*) was another thriller, in which the impressive Nikolaj Lie Kaas plays a young lawyer investigating his father's death. After two folksy family films, Barfoed aimed his sights at an older audience with a film that looked good, but was both illogical and implausible. Still, by the end of October, the film had seen over 190,000 admissions.

Henrik Ruben Genz's **Terribly Happy**

One of the year's best films, Henrik Ruben Genz's tragicomedy, **Terribly Happy** (*Frygtelig lykkelig*), was based on a book by Erling Jepsen, who also wrote the book behind one of 2007's most memorable films, Peter Schønau Fog's *The Art of Crying*. In it, the excellent Jacob Cedergren plays a cop who is transferred to a remote part of Denmark after pulling a gun on his wife when she announces she is divorcing him. In this little town, where everybody minds their own business and bitterly resents the interference of outsiders, the cop becomes romantically involved with an unstable woman whose husband is violent, and unwittingly learns the ways of the small, closed community. This witty and dramatic

marshland western was awarded the top prize at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival.

New Danish Screen (NDS) is the name of the Danish Film Institute's support scheme for young talent and professional experiments. Through NDS, production companies can apply for subsidies for features and short films, documentaries and computer games. In the spring of 2008, three feature films produced with money from NDS were released to wide acclaim but attracted almost no audiences.

Christian Dyekjær's **Moving Up**

Christian Dyekjær's **Moving Up** (*Spillets regler*) is a sharp and satirical look at unbridled ambition and backstabbing at the psychology faculty of the University of Copenhagen. Niels Gråbøl's **The Gift** (*Gaven*) tells the compelling story of two sons (Jacob Cedergren and Paw Henriksen) and their estranged, mentally ill father (Hening Jensen). And Omar Shargawi's **Go With Peace Jamil** (*Gå med fred Jamil*), the most memorable and audacious of the three films, deals with bloody revenge between Shia and Sunni Muslims in a Copenhagen that more closely resembles Beirut than the capital of Denmark. Visually, Shargawi's debut was very intense, bringing us close to the characters, while asking why so many believers in the Muslim community betray their faith.

Eight films produced outside the government subsidy system were released in 2008, among them **MollyCam**, Aage Rais Nordentoft's ambitious but failed attempt to castigate society through the story of what might have been a group rape. Linda Wendel's predictable **One Shot** was filmed in one long, admittedly impressive take, while Kaywan Mohsen's annoying **Eye for Eye** glorified gang-banger mentality over social consciousness. Christian E. Christiansen's well-acted but slight drama **Crying for Love** (*Dig og mig*), about three young women on a cancer ward, was expanded from his own short. It sold 100,000 tickets. Rasmus Heide's **Take the Trash** (*Blå mænd*) is a broad comedy with Thure Lindhardt, Sidse Babett Knudsen and stand-up comedian Mick Øgendahl, who co-wrote the script. The film has sold more than 400,000 tickets, demonstrating the possibility of producing cheap films (the budget was €1.6 million) without government support.

The rest of the year's feature films were more or less forgettable sequels in popular family franchises: Søren Frellesen's **Anja & Viktor – In Sickness and Health** (*Anja & Viktor – i medgang og modgang*), Claus Bjerre's **Father of Four – Back Home** (*Far til fire – på hjemmebane*) and Giacomo Campeotto's **The Lost Treasure of the Knights Templar III: The Mystery of the Snake Crown** (*Tempelriddernes skat III: Mysteriet om slangekronen*). There were also a couple of 3D animated features: Thomas Borch Nielsen's **Sunshine Barry & the Disco Worms** (*Disco ormene*) and Craig Frank, Thorbjørn Christoffersen and Kresten Vestbjerg Andersen's **Journey to Saturn** (*Rejsen til Saturn*).

3D adventures in **Journey to Saturn**

2008 has not been an exciting year for documentary. Carsten Søsted and Mads Kamp Thulstrup's **Danish Dynamite** (*...Og det var Danmark*), a film about the men's national soccer team and its success in the 1980s,

was born out of the directors' enthusiasm for football and the period, but didn't do as well as expected at the box office, with only 36,000 admissions. However, it was the most popular Danish documentary of the year, with the others, including Ulrik Wivels' stylish **Roskilde**, about the popular music festival in Roskilde, selling less than 5,000 tickets.

Nils Malmros' **Heartaches**

The industry's economic crisis is far from over, but the impressive box office returns have made some cautiously optimistic. Looking at the list of films slated for release in 2009, it is certainly difficult to be pessimistic. Lars von Trier, who didn't exactly score a major hit with his latest, Danish-language film, *The Boss of It All*, is currently shooting another English-language feature, the horror film **Antichrist**, with Willem Dafoe and Charlotte Gainsbourg. Trier's dogme-brother, Kristian Levring, has made the psychological drama **Fear Me Not** (*Den du frygter*) with Paprika Steen and Ulrich Thomsen. Ole Bornedal is returning in 2009 with **Fri os fra det onde**, a drama about xenophobia; Nils Malmros returns to his youth with **Heartaches** (*Kærestesorgen*), a sequel of sorts to his popular *Tree of Knowledge*.

CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD is the film editor at the daily Danish newspaper *Information*. He freelances for various monthly magazines, writes books on films, and in 2007 he authored a book on Nordic films for the San Sebastián Film Festival.

The year's best films

Terribly Happy (Henrik Ruben Genz)
Flame & Citron (Ole Christian Madsen)
Go With Peace Jamil (Omar Shargawi)
What No One Knows (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen)
Moving Up (Christian Dyekjær)

Quote of the year

'While other countries' national identities are closely linked to fiction, America and Great Britain for instance, we don't have the necessary national self-esteem to free ourselves of the myths and make history tangible with the help of fiction.'
OLE CHRISTIAN MADSEN, *director of the Second World War drama* **Flame & Citron.**

Directory

All Tel/Fax numbers begin (+45)

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Danish Actors' Association (DSF), Sankt Knuds Vej 26, DK-1903 Frederiksberg C. Tel: 3324 2200. Fax: 3324 8159. dsf@skuespillerforbundet.dk. www.skuespillerforbundet.dk.

Danish Film Directors (DF), Vermundsgade 19, 2nd Floor, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø. Tel: 3583 8005. Fax: 3583 8006. mail@filmdir.dk. www.filmdir.dk.

Danish Film Distributors' Association (FAFID), Sundkrogsgade 9, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø. Tel: 3363 9684. Fax: 3363 9660. www.fafid.dk.

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