



Denmark Christian Monggaard

It's difficult not feeling a bit like Alice travelling through Wonderland when you look at Danish cinema over the course of the last year – it is nothing if not paradoxical.

Apparently, everything is going very well. Early in 2011, Susanne Bier won an Oscar for *In a Better World*, Lars von Trier created headlines at his press conference in Cannes, while Kirsten Dunst won an award for her performance in the Danish director's apocalyptic **Melancholia**. Also in Cannes, Trier's younger colleague, Nicolas Winding Refn, won the director award for his first American production, *Drive*. And then, in December, the Danes scooped up no fewer than five awards at the European Film Awards in Berlin. Susanne Bier won for directing, *Melancholia* won three prizes, including Best European Film, and the Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen was presented with an award for European Achievement in World Cinema.



Lars von Trier's **Melancholia**

There are Danish directors travelling abroad – to Britain and America – to direct films, and Danish actors acting in everything, from David Fincher's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* to Steven Spielberg's *War Horse*. And if that

wasn't enough, in December the Danish Film Institute released numbers showing that Danish films had sold more than 3.4 million tickets in Denmark in 2011, which raised the domestic market share to 28 per cent, the third best year in the last decade and the best since the record set in 2008. Why are we still complaining then?



Birgitte Stærmose's **Room 304**

Danish production companies are still struggling. Just five of the 24 feature films produced last year account for 60 per cent of all the tickets sold. The remaining 19 films more or less under-performed, with five titles (**Beast**, **Room 304**, **Skyscraper**, **Miss Julie**, **Love is in the Air**) selling less than 3,000 tickets each, while a sixth (**ID:A**) just managed to scrape past 10,000 tickets.

Although all but one of the Danish films released were produced with substantial government support, those numbers tell the story of an industry fighting to stay alive. Companies are scaling back and laying-off staff. Even Zentropa, Lars von Trier and Peter Aalbæk Jensen's maverick company, at the forefront of Danish cinema for the last twenty years, is now having serious financial problems.

On top of all this comes uncertainty of what the future might have in store for the film industry in terms of distribution and sales. The internet has changed everything and the film industry, particularly the exhibition sector, is desperately trying to find a model that will still make money as more films are released simultaneously in cinemas and on VoD and DVD/Blu-ray platforms.

That day is not far off and the film industry's different players are arguing over how to test the different possibilities, including shortening or even dispensing with the hold back-period between the cinema and VoD/DVD releases. Everybody is nervous and nobody wants to take too much of a chance.

2011 has also been a lacklustre year artistically. Although a few high points have reaffirmed one's belief in Danish cinema, most of these films come from one specific sphere – the family drama.

Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* is a fascinating and beautiful drama about two sisters, depression and the end of the world. Again, Trier defies our expectations and begins the film with the very destruction of Earth. He then backs up, detailing the events at a large family gathering, in the days leading up to the apocalypse. The Prelude of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* underscores the drama of two very different sisters, played by Dunst and Charlotte Gainsbourg, who gradually realise their fate. The film only sold 60,000 tickets in Denmark, but performed well internationally.



Pernille Fischer Christensen's *A Family*



Martin Zandvliet's *A Funny Man*

A Funny Man (*Dirch*), Martin Zandvliet's follow up to his critically acclaimed debut *Applause* from 2009, was the bestselling Danish film of the year, with 483,000 tickets sold. It told the entertaining yet tragic story of one of Denmark's most beloved comedians and actors, Dirch Passer. Dirch was indeed a funny man, but he also wanted to be taken seriously as an actor, which audiences wouldn't, or couldn't, tolerate, which caused him great pain and eventually broke him. Nikolaj Lie Kaas delivers a strong performance as Dirch, who has worked closely with the actor's father, the comedian and actor Preben Kaas.



Esben Toft Jacobsen's *The Great Bear*

Other highlights of 2011 include Esben Toft Jacobsen's **The Great Bear** (*Den kæmpestore bjørn*), a beautiful animated fairy-tale about two quarrelling siblings and a gigantic, but very sweet bear. Pernille Fischer Christensen's **A Family** (*En familie*) is a harrowing drama about a dying father (Jesper Christensen) and his beloved daughter (Lene Maria Christensen). Lotte Svendsen's entertaining



Lotte Svendsen's *Max Embarrassing 2*

Max Embarrassing 2 (*Max Pinlig 2*) about teenager Max (Samuel Heller Seiffert) and his mother (Mette Horn), who is, frankly, rather embarrassing. Heidi Maria Faisst's brilliant **Rebounce** (*Frit fald*) tells the tale of a confused teenage girl (Frederikke Dahl Hansen) and her relationship with her irresponsible mother (Anne Sofie Espersen), who doesn't know how to be a mother. Finally, Kresten Vestbjerg Andersen, Thorbjørn Christoffersen and Philip Einstein Lipski's funny and foulmouthed animated feature **Ronal the Barbarian** (*Ronal Barbaren*), is an irreverent riff on both *The Lord of the Rings* and *Conan the Barbarian*.



Vestbjerg Andersen, Christoffersen and Einstein Lipski's *Ronal the Barbarian*

The year's remaining commercial hits were mostly broad comedies, including Rasmus Heide's **All for One** (*Alle for én*), Ole Christian Madsen's **SuperClásico**, Niels Nørlov's **The Reunion** (*Klassefesten*), or so-called family films, such as Peter Dodd's animated **Freddy Frogface** (*Orla Frøsnæpe*) and Claus Bjerre's **Father of Four – Back to Nature** (*Far til fire – tilbage til naturen*). *SuperClásico* was the best of the bunch, selling 185,000 tickets and telling the rambunctious story of a boring Danish man

(Anders W. Berthelsen), who visits a colourful and vibrant Buenos Aires to win back his wife (Paprika Steen) who is living with an Argentine footballer.



Ole Christian Madsen's *SuperClásico*

The big disappointment of 2011 was the failure of the youth-oriented film, with Simon Staho's musical *Love is in the Air* (*Magi i luften*), Hans Fabian Wullenweber's **Bora Bora** and Rune Schjøtt's **Skyscraper** (*Skyskraber*) all falling short artistically. It also caused quite a stir that Staho's film received nine million Danish kroner (€1.2million) in government support while selling a paltry 2,983 tickets, but still managed to secure state funding for his next feature.

Christoffer Boe tried to shake things up with the Cronenberg- and Żulawski-inspired relationship-drama **Beast**, which deservedly didn't find an audience, while Christian E. Christansen failed to marry a character-based drama with *Bourne*-style action in the overwrought thriller *ID:A*.



Christian E. Christansen's *ID:A*



Eva Mulvad's **The Good Life**

Few Danish documentaries made an impact at the local cinemas, although a few good films were made. Eva Mulvad's **The Good Life** (*Det gode liv*) echoed the Maysles Brothers' classic *Grey Gardens* in its touching story of a mother and daughter who have fallen on very bad times. Anne Regitze Wivel's **Svend** portrayed the director's late husband, the idealistic Danish politician and former minister Svend Auken. And in Mads Brüggers' **The Ambassador** (*Ambassadøren*), the director buys himself diplomatic status and travels to central Africa to become rich and expose the corruption and depravation of the region. It's certainly not a dull film and, as always with Mads Brügger, his methods were hotly debated at screenings and in the media.



Mads Brüggers' **The Ambassador**

CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD is the film editor and film critic at the daily Danish newspaper *Information*. He has written/contributed to several books on films, freelances for different magazines and regularly serves on FIPRESCI juries at film festivals around the world.

The year's best films

- A Funny Man** (Martin Zandvliet)
Rebounce (Heidi Maria Faisst)
A Family (Pernille Fischer Christensen)
Melancholia (Lars von Trier)
The Good Life (Eva Mulvad)



Heidi Maria Faisst's **Rebounce**

Directory

All Tel/Fax numbers begin (+45)

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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.

Danish Film Studios, Blomstervænget 52, DK-2800 Lyngby. Tel: 4587 2700. Fax: 4587 2705. ddf@filmstudie.dk. www.filmstudie.dk.

Danish Producers' Association, Bernhard Bangs Allé 25, DK-2000 Frederiksberg. Tel: 3386 2880. Fax: 3386 2888. info@pro-f.dk. www.producentforeningen.dk.

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