



Norway Trond Olav Svendsen

In 2011 the Norwegian film industry celebrated its first century of narrative cinema. One hundred years ago, the cinema owner Halfdan Nobel Roede produced the first batch of Norwegian melodramas. Since then there has been a steady output, with the first half-century reaching a pinnacle in the 1950s, which saw the production of ten films per year. A volume published to coincide with the anniversary contains some revealing statistics. The total number of Norwegian films produced is nearing 900, with the last 15 years accounting for a third of these. No period can compare to the present and, with perfect timing, last year saw the industry hit an all-time high of thirty releases. Along with this exceptional production rate came the highest domestic grosses and one of the biggest market shares ever.



Morten Tyldum's **Head Hunters**

This large batch was, of course, a mixed bag. It ran the gamut of realism, melodrama, children's film, action, crime, horror and documentary. As usual, crime was the box-office winner. Norwegians love crime fiction and some of the country's best writers have now developed a considerable following abroad. The market, whether for books or films, shows no sign of diminishing. After seven films adapted from Bergen-based



Magnus Martens' **Jackpot**

Gunnar Staalesen stories, the crime wave is now being led by Jo Nesbø. Even Martin Scorsese has reportedly expressed an interest in his novels. Meanwhile, Morten Tyldum's **Head Hunters** (*Hodejegerne*), starring Aksel Hennie and Danish actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, became a huge domestic hit. It is an effectively told tale of greed and art, which develops into something labyrinthine and increasingly sinister. Magnus Martens followed suit in late Autumn with another Nesbø-written story, the bloody and macabre action comedy **Jackpot** (*Arme riddere*). This time round audiences were less convinced.

Between those releases, Pål Sletaune continued his exploration of anxiety and paranoia with the sharp psychological thriller **Babycall**, based on his own script and featuring the Swedish actress Noomi Rapace (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*). It deals with a single mother hiding from a violent husband and trying to protect her young son from unknown forces. The film was made with a sure hand, but ultimately it proved to be more clever than profound.

A handful of films generated a great deal of interest both at home and abroad. Arild Andresen's **The Liverpool Goalie** (*Keeper'n*

Arild Andresen's **The Liverpool Goalie**

til Liverpool) was voted best children's film at the Berlin Festival. Sundance gave Anne Sewitsky's **Happy, Happy** (*Sykt lykkelig*) a rousing reception. While Joachim Trier's second feature **Oslo, August 31st** (*Oslo, 31. August*) was very well received in Cannes.

Happy, Happy is Sewitsky's directorial debut. She graduated from the Norwegian film school in 2006 and has an award-winning short and television work to her credit. Written by Ragnhild Tronvoll, the film tells the story of two couples in a small community in rural Norway, one living there permanently and the other moving temporarily from the big city in order to repair their marriage. But soon adultery and betrayal is afoot. The characters are all convincing, with Agnes Kittelsen outstanding as Kaja. Joachim Rafaelsen is impressive, but his character, particularly the suggestion of latent homosexuality, could have been developed more. Interestingly, considering the cruelty of the characters, the film never fails to keep its positive view of the world or the subtle use of comedy. Sewitsky went on to make a fine film for children, **Totally True Love**

Anne Sewitsky's **Totally True Love**

(*Jørgen + Anne = sant*), which received its world premiere at Berlin.

For many, *Oslo August 31st* was the film of the year. It received a strong festival run, at Cannes and Haugesund, before its Norwegian premiere. It is a remarkably strong follow-up to Trier's 2006 feature debut, *Reprise*. The film opens with Anders on day release from a clinic where he has been treated for heroin addiction. Anders Danielsen Lie is excellent in the lead role, his performance perfectly balanced between intelligence and vulnerability. However, the most striking aspect of the film is the assurance with which Trier tells his story. As we witness Anders reuniting with friends, Trier offers up a subtle portrait of a generation, one that seems slightly lost in the world. His mis-en-scene employs Oslo as a character. The Norwegian capital, full of parks and situated immediately on brink of the wilderness, forms a perfect backdrop upon which we witness Anders' predicament unfold.

Joachim Trier's **Oslo, August 31st**

Jens Lien's **Sons of Norway** (*Sønner av Norge*) was, in some ways, the most lively and entertaining film of the year. It is a comedy set in the late 1970s about the kind of super-tolerant parenting that presumably was a general feature of the period, and about the advent of punk music. Based on an autobiographical novel by Nikolaj Frobenius, it deals with the life of a 14-year-old boy in an Oslo suburb after his mother suddenly dies. Young Åsmund Høeg is compelling and believable in the lead role, as is Sven Nordin as his tolerant and somewhat unorthodox father. Lien explores the contrast between the



Jens Lien's *Sons of Norway*

warmth of the characters and the alienating qualities of the advancing modern age, but perhaps too preoccupied with the details of period. However, he remains a sharp observer and possesses a grasp of cinematic language that permeates even the smallest details. He also has an ace up his sleeve: John Lydon (Johnny Rotten of Sex Pistols fame) makes a short cameo appearance.

Some will say that Per-Olav Sørensen's debut **People in the Sun** (*Mennesker i solen*) displays more ambition than quality. However, it did offer a markedly different kind of story and style. Based on a play by Swedish comedian Jonas Gardell and with Dane Ghita Nørby in one of the leading roles, it is a comedy aimed squarely at a local market. Told in the form of a fable, portraying a group of people vacationing somewhere in Sweden as signs of doomsday appear. They are superficial and unsympathetic in their daily life, and their reactions when the world starts to fall apart are predictable: the party must go on. Gradually, however, their plight worsens. Sørensen finds it hard to sustain his concept to the end, but succeeds in creating a rather lively satire with some funny moments.

The large production slate in Norway is supported by a number of different initiatives implemented by the government. It has been created for use by commercial and more artistic fare. Following a record year like 2011 will always be difficult and the production rate will likely not repeat itself, perhaps reducing to 25 films. However, with so many filmmakers

appearing on the scene over the last 15 years, the conditions are there for them to continue to inspire and entertain.

The year's best films

Oslo, August 31st (Joachim Trier)

Happy, Happy (Anne Sewitsky)

Head Hunters (Morten Tyldum)



Anne Sewitsky's *Happy, Happy*

Directory

All Tel/Fax numbers begin (+47)

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Norwegian Film Institute, PO Box 482 Sentrum, 0105 Oslo. Tel: 2247 4500. Fax: 2247 4599. post@nfi.no. www.nfi.no. Contact: Lise Gustavson.

Norwegian Film Development, Dronningens gt. 16, 0152 Oslo. Tel: 2282 2400. Fax: 2282 2422. mail@nfu.no. Contact: Kirsten Bryhni.

Norwegian Film and TV Producers Association, Dronningens gt. 16, 0152 Oslo, Tel: 2311 9311. Fax: 2311 9316. leif@produsentforeningen.no. Contact: Leif Holst Jensen.

Norwegian Film Workers Association, Dronningens gt. 16, 0152 Oslo. Tel: 2247 4640. Fax: 2247 4689. post@filmforbundet.no. Contact: Sverre Pedersen.

Norwegian Media Authority, Nygata 4, 1607 Fredrikstad. Tel: 6930 1200. Fax: 6930 1201. post@medietilsynet.no. Contact: Tom Thoresen.

TROND OLAV SVENDSEN is a historian from the University of Oslo. He has worked as a newspaper film critic and an editor in the Oslo publishing house of Kunnskapsforlaget. Among his publications is a Theatre and Film encyclopedia.
