



Michelle Williams and Gael García Bernal star in Lukas Moodysson's *Mammoth*.

FILM:

Swedish film in focus

Swedish film is best known for its intensely personal meditation on the human condition, but the challenge has always been how to take art house mainstream. Now a new generation of directors is making its mark, from feature-length productions to documentaries and animation.

Much has changed since **Ingmar Bergman** first captured human angst on celluloid. A number of ambitious Swedish filmmakers have appeared on the scene keen to experiment with new film techniques – and reach as wide an audience as possible.

Lukas Moodysson is one of the most challenging and prominent voices in Swedish cinema, making films that both engage and enrage audiences. His breakthrough came in 1998 with *Show Me Love* (Fucking Åmål) about a lesbian affair between two girls. In *Lilya 4-Ever* (2002), Moodysson portrayed the tragic life of a Russian girl abandoned by her mother and coerced into prostitution in Sweden. It is still used by police, authorities and human rights organizations as a cautionary tale in the fight against human trafficking.

Josef Fares is one of the hottest and wide-ranging properties in Swedish cinema. In the semiautobiographical *Zozo* (2005) an orphan finds refuge from the Lebanese civil war in Sweden. His most recent release, *Leo* (2008), is a drama about street violence and its aftermath. He made his breakthrough in 2000 with *Jalla! Jalla!*, a comedy about love bridging the cultural divide. The farcical police comedy, *Kopps*, followed in 2003.

Maria Blom combines a deep understanding of the desires, dreams and needs that drive people with wry humor. In 2004, she filmed her play, *Dalecarlians* (Masjävlar), which explored the town-country divide and family life. Her second film, *Nina Frisk* (2007), centered on an air hostess' search for happiness and peace of mind. The summer of 2008 saw the arrival of what was actually her first film, *Fishy*.

Roy Andersson announced his arrival with the film *A Swedish Love Story* (En kärlekshistoria, 1969), a tale of teenage romance defying the odds. In 2000, he won the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for *Songs from the Second Floor* (Sånger från andra våningen).

Another tragicomedy about humankind, *You, the Living* (Du levande), won the Nordic Council Film Prize in 2008.

Jan Troell's latest film, *Maria Larsson's Everlasting Moments* (Maria Larssons eviga ögonblick), won Best Film in the 2008 Guldbagge awards, the Swedish equivalent of the Oscars. It was also selected to represent Sweden at the Academy Awards in 2009. Troell made his debut in 1966 with the widely acclaimed *This is Your Life* (Här har du ditt liv). ■

SWEDISH FILM FESTIVALS

There are about a dozen film festivals every year in Sweden. The most keenly anticipated are the Göteborg International Film Festival (February), the Stockholm International Film Festival (November) and the Uppsala International Film Festival (October), which mainly screens short films. Buff, the International Children and Young People's Film Festival, takes place in Malmö in March.



PHOTO: PRESSBILD

The King of Ping Pong.

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

Each year, Swedish films compete at hundreds of film festivals around the world, and they also win prizes. In 2008, they collected no less than 92 awards globally. It was a particularly good year for Swedish cinema in the US. **Jens Jonsson's** *The King of Ping Pong* (Pingpong-kingen) won the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, as well as the World Cinema Cinematography Award. **Tomas Alfredson's** *Let the Right One In* (Låt den rätte komma in) scooped Best Narrative Feature at the Tribeca Film Festival. Four Swedish films were distributed in the US: *Let the Right One In*, **Maria Larsson's** *Everlasting Moments*, **Ella Lemhagen's** *Patrik, Age 1.5* (Patrik 1,5), and **Simon Staho's** *Heaven's Heart* (Himlens hjärta). A record 10 Swedish films competed in the Berlin Film Festival.

GULDBAGGE AWARDS

The Swedish Oscars has taken place annually since 1964. The Guldbagge (Golden Beetles) awards are handed out by the Swedish Film Institute for achievements in Swedish cinema during the previous year. There is even an award for children's cinema. **Georg Riedel**, who composed the music for many of the films based on the stories of Astrid Lindgren, was honored in 2009.



PHOTO: J.A.

In *The Queen and I*, Nahid Persson Savestani meets fellow Iranian Farah Diba.

Gifted documentary makers

Sweden continues to produce award-winning shorts and documentaries.

Mats Olof Olsson won the Deutsche Kinderhilfswerk Special Prize for best short film at the 2008 Berlin Film Festival with *My Uncle Loved the Color Yellow* (Min morbror tyckte mycket om gult).

Johannes Nyholm's *The Tale of Little Puppetboy* (Sagan om den lille Dockpojken) picked up the International Jury Award and the Audience Award at the 2008 Hamburg International Film Festival. The film had its premiere during Directors' Fortnight at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival.

Hanna Heilborn and **David Aronowitsch**, whose film *Slaves* (Slavar) won the Silver Club competition for documentaries up to 30 minutes at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam in 2008.

Nahid Persson Savestani's *The Queen and I* (Drottningen och jag), a film about Farah Diba, widow of the Shah of Iran, competed in the World

Documentary Cinema category at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival. *Prostitution: Behind the Veil* (Prostitution bakom slöjan) won a Guldbagge for Best Documentary in 2005.

Åsa Blanck and **Johan Palmgren** were awarded a Guldbagge for Best Documentary in 2007 for *The Substitute* (Vikarien), which follows a teacher through a crisis-ridden Swedish school system. Their latest film, *The Swindler* (Bedragaren, 2008), is about György Zemplenyi, a Hungarian conman who took the Swedish city of Malmö, and the world, by storm.

Director, screenwriter and sound engineer **Babak Najafi's** *Elixir* (2004) centers on a gang of young immigrants on a Stockholm housing estate who get hold of a drink that turns them into real "Svens" (true Swedes). *Gösta & Lennart* (2001), *Pablo's Birthday* (Pablos födelsedag, 2001) and *Skolan* (2003) have also won critical acclaim. ■

Animated films – not just for children

Sweden has many creative and talented animators working with feature-length and short animated films. In 2006, director **Per Ahlin** won the Swedish Golden Shoot award (Gullspira) for his extraordinary contribution to films for children. Among those working in short animated film production, **Magnus Carlsson** is best known internationally. Director **Tarik Saleh** is also

making a name for himself. His adult-friendly *Metropia*, due to be released in fall 2009, is set to break new ground with a digital technique developed by the Swedish production company Atmo Media Network. **Jonas Odell's** *Lies* (Lögner) won the Silver Hugo prize for Best Animated Short Film at the 2008 Chicago International Film Festival. ■

RECENT SWEDISH BLOCKBUSTERS

MAMMOTH

By Swedish standards, **Lukas Moodysson's** latest film, *Mammoth* (2009), is a huge production. The cast features Gael García Bernal and Michelle Williams, and locations included Sweden, Thailand, the US and the Philippines. It's a family drama exploring parent-child relationships and the contradictions between different societies and people's values.

ARN – THE KNIGHT TEMPLAR

With a budget of SEK 210 million (about EUR 20 million/ USD 27 million), **Peter Flinth's** epic saga about the Swedish crusader Arn Magnusson adds up to the most costly production in Swedish cinema history. Based on the books of Jan Guillou, *Arn the Knight Templar* will be released internationally in 2009.

WALLANDER

The crime film genre has boomed in Sweden in recent years. One policeman to have made the transition from the written page to the silver screen is Kurt Wallander. To date, there have been 22 films, with another 13 in production. The first of these will premiere in 2009. The Wallander films are based on the character created by Swedish author Henning Mankell.

THE MILLENNIUM TRILOGY

The first installment of Stieg Larsson's wildly popular *Millennium Trilogy* – **Niels Arden Oplev's** *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Män som hatar kvinnor) – opened in spring 2009. *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (Flickan som lekte med elden) will be shown on Swedish TV (SVT), and together with *Castles in the Sky* (Luftslottet som sprängdes) distributed on DVD.



PHOTO: ERIK AAVATSMARK

Arn – The Knight Templar is the product of the most expensive production in Swedish film.

Swedish film financing

Swedish film policy aims to support the production, promotion and distribution of quality films, to preserve and promote Sweden's film heritage and to make sure that Swedish films are represented internationally.

Other tasks include supporting regional and local film culture, and improving the conditions under which female filmmakers operate.

Film policy funding and other support measures are distributed

and administered by the Swedish Film Institute, which was founded in 1963.

Under the Film Agreement, which came into force on January 1, 2006, Swedish cinema receives funding from the government, the cinema industry and TV companies. In 2008, contributions totaled about SEK 339 million (about EUR 32 million/USD 42 million). The agreement runs until December 31, 2010. ■

Useful links

- www.sfi.se – Swedish Film Institute
- www.filmfestival.org – Göteborg International Film Festival
- www.stockholmfilmfestival.se – Stockholm International Film Festival
- www.shortfilmfestival.com – Uppsala International Short Film Festival
- www.buff.se – International Children and Young People's Film Festival
- www.ingmarbergman.se – Ingmar Bergman Foundation
- www.svt.se – Swedish Television
- www.filmiskane.se – Film i Skåne
- www.filmivast.se – Film i Väst
- www.fpn.se – FilmPool Nord
- www.sf.se – SF Cinemas
- www.statensbiografbyra.se – National Board of Film Censors
- www.swedishfilmproducers.com – Organisation for Swedish Filmproducers
- www.arnthemovie.com – Arn – The Knight Templar
- www.se2009.eu – Swedish EU Presidency website

CINEMA FACTS

In 2008, Swedish cinemas sold almost 15.2 million tickets, grossing about SEK 1.25 billion (about EUR 116 million/USD 155 million). Swedes prefer to watch American films (68.5%), followed by Swedish (20%) and British (6.4%).

THE MASTER

Ingmar Bergman is one of the film greats. His career as a director and writer spanned almost 60 years, and his work continues to inspire and move audiences and filmmakers alike. In 2002, Bergman donated his archive – 45 cases of manuscripts, notes, sketches, photographs and private films – to the Swedish Film Institute. The material is administered by the Ingmar Bergman Foundation.

CHILDREN'S FILMS

Swedish films for children and young people do not shy away from difficult subjects.

Lisa Siwe's *Glowing Stars* (I taket lyser stjärnorna, 2009), based on Johanna Thydell's award-winning novel, is about a teenager torn between her mother, who has cancer, and her desire for a normal teenage life.

Ylva Gustavsson's and Catti Edfeldt's musical *Kidz in da Hood* (Förortsungar, 2007) is the most successful Swedish children's film to date, with five Guldbagge awards for Best Director, Best Actor, Best Script, Best Film and Best Sound.



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PHOTO: HOYTE VAN HOTTEN/ANDREW METRONOME

Cult vampire film *Let the Right One In* is based on the book by John Ajvide Lindqvist.

Regional filmmaking

Regional filmmaking has boomed over the past decade, with more films being set outside Stockholm than ever before.

Trolleywood

The regional production center Film i Väst in southwest Sweden is better known as Trolleywood (for Trollhättan, the town where it is based). *Glowing Stars* (I taket lyser stjärnorna, 2009), *Mammoth* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* were all filmed here in 2008.

Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* is in the pipeline for 2009.

Filmpool Nord

A growing number of films are either wholly or partly produced in the north of Sweden, among them *Let the Right*

One In, **Leif Lindblom's *Sunstorm*** (Solstorm, 2007), and **Daniel Alfredson's *Wolf*** (Varg, 2007).

Stockholm

Production companies based in Stockholm have **Johan Kling's *Darling*** (2006) and **Daniel Wallentin's *One Eye Red*** (Ett Öga Rött, 2007) to their credit. The romantic comedy *The Midsummer Party* (Midsommarfesten), featuring Luke Perry will be released during 2009. The film, directed by Ian McCruden, revolves around the culture clash between Sweden and America. ■

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