

Persmap



IN A BETTER WORLD

Een film van Susanne Bier

Mikael Persbrandt
Trine Dyrholm
Ulrich Thomsen
Markus Rygaard
William Jøhnk Nielsen

Denemarken · 113 min · 2010 · Drama 35mm · 2,35:1 (cinemascope) · Dolby SR Digital

Na de dood van zijn moeder verhuist Christian met zijn vader van Engeland naar Denemarken en komt daar in een nieuwe klas terecht. Hij wordt naast het gepeste buitenbeentje Elias geplaatst, en de twee jongens raken direct bevriend. Wanneer ze bij een bezoek aan de haven toeschouwer zijn van een aanvaring tussen de vredelievende vader van Elias en een agressieve man, haalt Christian zijn vriend over tot een radicale wraakactie. De gevolgen missen hun uitwerking niet, als een ongeluk de relatie tussen de jongens en hun ouders in een nieuw daglicht stelt. Ook brengt het de vader van Elias tot het inzicht dat hij een brug zal moeten slaan tussen twee werelden. Enerzijds die van het hulpbehoevende Afrika waarin hij als ontwikkelingsarts werkt en anderzijds die van zijn gezin in Denemarken waar zijn liefde en aanwezigheid minstens zo hard nodig blijken te zijn.

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CAST

Mikael Persbrandt	Anton
Trine Dyrholm	Marianne
Ulrich Thomsen	Claus
William Jøhnk Nielsen	Christian
Markus Rygaard	Elias
Wil Johnson	Doctor
Eddy Kimani	Doctor
Emily Mglaya	Nurse
Gabriel Muli	Tolk
June Waweru	Patient
Mary Hounu Moat	Patient
Synah Berchet	Gammel Dame
Elsebeth Steentoft	Signe
Satu Helena Mikkelinen	Hanna
Camilla Gottlieb	Eva

CREW

Director	Susanne Bier
Screenplay	Susanne Bier, Anders Thomas Jensen
Director of photography	Morten Søborg
Editor	Morten Egholm, Pernille Bech Christensen
Sound	Eddie Simonsen, Anne Jensen
Composer	Johan Söderqvist
Production designer	Peter Grant
Producer	Sisse Graum Jørgensen
Production	Zentropa Entertainments



ENGLISH SYNOPSIS

Anton is a doctor who commutes between his home in an idyllic town in Denmark, and his work at an African refugee camp. In these two very different worlds, he and his family are faced with conflicts that lead them to difficult choices between revenge and forgiveness.

Anton and his wife Marianne, who have two young sons, are separated and struggling with the possibility of divorce. Their older, ten-year-old son Elias is being bullied at school, until he is defended by Christian, a new boy who has just moved from London with his father, Claus. Christian's mother recently lost her battle with cancer, and Christian is greatly troubled by her death.

Elias and Christian quickly form a strong bond, but when Christian involves Elias in a dangerous act of revenge with potentially tragic consequences, their friendship is tested and lives are put in danger. Ultimately, it is their parents who are left to help them come to terms with the complexity of human emotions, pain and empathy.



SUSANNE BIER about the film



IN A BETTER WORLD sets out to explore the limitations we encounter in trying to control our society as well as our personal lives. It asks whether our own “advanced” culture is the model for a better world, or whether the same disarray found in lawlessness is lurking beneath surface of our civilization? Are we immune to chaos, or obviously teetering on the verge of disorder?

- Susanne Bier

Filmography Susanne Bier

Freud's Leaving Home (1991)
Family Matters (1994)
Like It Never Was Before (1995)
Credo (1997)
Den eneste ene (1999)
Once in a Lifetime (2000)
Open Hearts (2002)
Brødre (2004)
Efter brylluppet (After the wedding) (2006)
Things We Lost in the Fire (2007)
In a Better World (Hævnen) (2010)

INTERVIEW WITH SUSANNE BIER

By Christian Monggaard, journalist with the newspaper Information

Generally, Susanne Bier prefers not to discuss what the message in her new film, *In a Better World*, is. That's for the audience to work out on their own. Nonetheless, she does have a few things to say about it, when we meet up for a chat about the film, starring Swedish Mikael Persbrandt and Danish actors Trine Dyrholm and Ulrich Thomsen, which has already become a smash hit in Denmark.

»It's [Danish] title is *The Revenge*, but it could easily have been *Forgiveness* instead.«

»So in a way it grapples with those two themes. I'm sure that's not revealing too much. I can also tell you that it's about two families whose paths are crossed in a quite intense way, somewhat against the adults' wishes.«

Ulrich Thomsen plays Claus, who has just lost his wife and moved with his son, Christian (William Jøhnk Juels Nielsen), from England back to the small Danish town he grew up in. Here, Christian forms a friendship with his classmate Elias (Markus Rygaard), son of Marianne (Trine Dyrholm) and Anton (Mikael Persbrandt). They are both doctors, Anton being stationed in a refugee camp in Africa. While a grief-stricken and angry Christian begins teaching the more quiet and cautious Elias how to assert himself, and defend himself from the class bullies, Anton the pacifist is confronted with some of the same moral and ethical dilemmas when he is asked to perform surgery on a seriously injured, murderous warlord.

Violence begets violence

The themes of revenge, forgiveness and violence begetting violence are some of the most important themes in both stories. As the stories begin to mirror each other, the film argues that if a conflict is not resolved, it can lead to another – one far greater and far worse.

»The conflicts on both microscopic and macroscopic levels resemble each other, and actually follow the same pattern. That was our intention with the structure.« says Susanne Bier.

»One is of course tempted to think that the one conflict is more important than the other. But what this film is trying to display is that it's never that simple.«

One of Susanne Bier's earlier films, *Brothers* (2004), was centered on the war in Afghanistan. With that and *In a Better World* in mind, one can't help wonder whether the director has any political intentions with her films.

»I don't think my films are political«

»My films are about morality, and concern ethical problems, which, I suppose, might carry with them certain political implications. But I personally find it easier to identify with my ethical standpoint than my political standpoint. Which is why I don't wish to make a political film – I wouldn't feel certain enough about what I was doing. Of course, there are certain political issues which clear cut. You're against murderous regimes, or regimes sponsoring acts of murder. But then that's more a of a fundamental, humane position than a political one.

So your interest lies in the bigger moral and ethical questions?

»I don't know if they're bigger, but, yes, they interest me.«

Consistent examination

It has been said of Susanne Bier that she makes 'psychological melodramas', and indeed, her Dogma-95 film *Open Hearts* (2002) did mark a shift in her choice of subjects and methods of storytelling.

Prior efforts had moved between different genres, e.g. the comedy *The One and Only* (1999) and the thriller *Credo* (1997). However, with *Open Hearts*, *Brothers*, the Oscar-nominated *After the Wedding* (2006), the English-language *Things We Lost in the Fire* (2007) and *In a Better World*, Bier has shown a penchant for those big emotions usually belonging to the melodrama.

It is, however, not a label she enjoys, and, as she says, there big emotions in an 'ordinary' drama.

»Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but to me 'melodrama' implies something fake, something sensational, and of course, I think my films are sincere and genuine. I appreciate all the other terms people use about my films, but I mean, melodrama... I do accept it. You can't insist on controlling everything – even if you are a director.

Susanne Bier does concede that her films deal with some of the same subjects and issues concerning the human condition.

»I don't mean to call myself an artist, but there's nothing wrong with artists repeating themselves,« she says.

»It allows a certain insisting and consistent examination. If you look at visual artists, there are some who've made the same painting over and over, yet it still fascinates. It's the result of a very distinct form of curiosity.«

Plenty of films ahead

That is not to say, Bier emphasizes, that she believes she has found an effective and surefire formula, which she just needs to follow whenever she embarks on a new project.

»Every time I make a film, I wonder how to approach the subject, how to find the film's substance. And I get quite nervous,« she says.

»I have great respect for the process. I don't feel that anything just comes naturally to me, and I would be afraid if I did. That would mean I had lost my grip on filmmaking, because you begin to work superficially and mechanically, which just makes for dull films.«

And the director still has several genres she'd like to try her hand at.

»I think to myself, "when am I going to make that great historical drama? When am I going to make my next comedy?" I'd love to make a thriller. People are what really interest me. It's the only thing that interests me. And I'd like to exercise that interest in some other ways at some point. I feel I'm going to make lots and lots of movies to come.«

Natural dialogue

Susanne Bier wrote *In a Better World* with Anders Thomas Jensen, a film director in his own right (*The Green Butchers*, *Adam's Apples*). This marks the pair's fourth produced screenplay – following

Open Hearts, Brothers and After the Wedding – But they've actually written five films together, Bier explains.

»We wrote a script for a Dogma 95 film, based on A Doll's House. It was a modernization of Ibsen's play, which we decided to drop. It was exciting, but it became a bit gemacht, a bit contrived.« One can sense how much Bier values Anders Thomas Jensen as a collaborator, not least for his technical skills, enabling him to solve many problems a director may face.

»He has an acutely natural sense of dialogue, which even many American screenwriters lack.« she says of her creative sparring partner.

»And he always manages to infuse some humourous energy into his writing, even in the most serious material. He can be a bit reluctant with the more emotional stuff. It's a part of knowing him. I'll suggest something and he'll almost vomit at the very idea.«

Differences create surprises

But differences and contrasts are only helpful, according to Bier. They help create dynamics and surprises, e.g. casting an actor entirely different to the role he or she will be playing.

»Mikael Persbrandt's character, Anton, is a very idealistic doctor, working in a refugee camp, who's attitude to life is very consciously pacifistic.« she says.

»We could have picked an actor more naturally akin to the character, someone with milder disposition. When you pick Mikael Persbrandt, who's got the names of all his ex-girlfriends tattooed all over his body, and whose known for his ability to throw a punch and drink till oblivion, you're very much avoiding the archetype that intuitively fits the role. Now, that's a very conscious decision on my part. For one, it's not very sexy, having your pacifist look like an actual pacifist; but when it's Mikael Persbrandt it makes the whole thing a lot more sexy. More importantly though, it's exciting to have your assumptions and expectations challenged in that way – which I think, in many ways reflects real life. Our lives are full of unknowns, and I like to explore that.«

LANDMARK LETTER by Susanne Bier

"For me, just getting to attend the Oscars made me feel like a princess for a night. I don't think you realize how big it is for a small country like Denmark to be nominated for an Oscar. It's really, really big. So you feel there really is a pretty big responsibility on you, which I think is different from being nominated in the other categories, which don't have the national pride aspect attached to them. It's a kind of redemption that we can tell stories that really matter to the world. Now having won the Oscar means a lot for the film. It means a stamp of quality for a movie which is a Danish film, which is almost unknown and now has suddenly become known in a different way.

IN A BETTER WORLD is the fifth film I have worked on with my screenwriter, Anders Thomas Jensen, and despite the serious subject matter of our films, our collaborations are always very playful. It is just the chemistry you find with some people and some directors. It's funny — when we originally met we set out to do a [comedy](#), and we have been trying to do a comedy for 10 years. We always start out 'Let's do a comedy,' but it tends to go into more serious twists and turns.

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world, or whether the same disarray found in lawlessness is lurking beneath the culture of our civilization. Are we immune to chaos, or obviously teetering on the verge of disorder? This is not a political film: it's about morals, basic human values. I wanted to explore the relationships between parents and children and fragility of the idyllic Danish society. It's so easy for things to spin out of control, for violence to suddenly erupt, and it's so hard for people to act like decent human beings sometimes. I wanted to explore all those dark themes. Because one of the themes of the movie has to do with the fragility of an idealistic society, it was extremely important for me that all of the locations look very beautiful. My particular world is not just Copenhagen. It had to be broader than this. My world is larger than it used to be. We wanted to tell a story that really mattered to the world, even if we only have five million people speaking our language here in Denmark. Because I do think the movie has real substance, and I do think that this movie is relevant and worthwhile thinking about, and deals with important issues.

I think if you want to speak to an audience and you feel that you have an important topic, like we did with *IN A BETTER WORLD*, you cannot make them suffocated when they leave the cinema, you have to do it in a way where you address the real important topics, but you also have to infuse your audience with hope. I do believe that there is hope and if you do the right thing then the world is going to be better. The big thing is to do it in the right way; sometimes you have happy endings but you feel that the ending isn't appropriate, but I think that our ending to this film is very real. I do think my movie has real substance, I think its relevant and worthwhile and deals with important issues. I hope it inspires and enlightens you, as it did me."

Susanne Bier, 2011

PRODUCER Sisse Graum Jørgensen

Sisse Graum Jørgensen is currently one of Danish film's most productive producers, including her long term collaboration with Susanne Bier. In addition to "In A Better World" she has produced films for widely acclaimed directors as: Susanne Bier: "Brothers" (2004) and the Academy Award nominated "After the Wedding" (2006), Thomas Vinterberg "Dear Wendy" (2005), Dogme brother Kristian Levring's "Fear Me Not" (2008), selected for Toronto, and Lone Scherfig's highly acclaimed "Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself" (2002) and "Just Like Home" (2007). In addition, Sisse Graum Jørgensen is the executive producer of Scottish Andrea Anorid's feature film "Red Road"(2006), winner of the Jury's Special Prize in Cannes 2006. Recently Sisse Graum Jørgensen has produced Pernille Fischer Christensen's "A Family" (2010), in competition and recipient of the FIPRESCI prize at Berlin Film Festival, and winner of the narrative award at L.A. Film Festival. European Film Promotion selected Sisse Graum Jørgensen for the acclaimed title: "Producer on the Move" in 2003 and in 2004 Sisse participated in Variety's tribute in Cannes: "10 Producers to Watch".