

INTERVIEW

Karel Šindelář on *Why So Sirius?*

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We met Czech filmmaker Karel Šindelář at goEast in Wiesbaden, where he presented his short film "Why So Sirius?". Šindelář speaks about what inspires him, and discusses his approach to filmmaking and plans for the future.

You are a student at the FAMO film school in Písek, Czech Republic. Can you tell us about it?

It is very good, I guess filmmaking schools are more about the community than about what you learn in class. You have to learn yourself, always. Písek is a small town, most of the students come from Prague and live in student accommodation so we all know each other. We have a lot of free time where we learn from one another.

What got you into filmmaking?

I am influenced a lot by Prague, where I first moved five years ago. That town shaped my artistic vision more than school or anything like that. You meet very smart and intellectual people and join forces with them. You get more creative than you would in a small town.

Are there any people who have influenced you?

Yes, my wife, who I moved to Prague with. She studies acting and plays one of the main roles in my film. She prefers theater to film but I use her a lot for my movies.

What do you like about short films?

I like it and then I don't. If you're going to do a short film, the shorter the better. I don't like movies over twenty minutes that are not feature-length films. I like feature-length films because you can really get into the story, while short films are good when they're short and hilarious.

Has the short format ever seriously constrained you?

Not this time. I used to want to make long movies because the longer the better. But nowadays my maximum is fifteen minutes.

When did you start making films?

I was not so young, I was nineteen. I always wanted to be a writer but there is no school for that. So, I decided to tell stories in another way, through films.

Do you still want to be a writer?

One day, when I have more time, yes.

***Why So Sirius?* is a tragicomedy, what is your relationship to the genre?**

This is my third movie in this genre. I really love it. I think that life is often like a tragicomedy. We don't laugh at it while it's happening very often, but if somebody showed us some hidden camera footage, I think it would be funny.

Any favorite tragicomedies?

I really love *In Bruges*. And I really like *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* by Roy Andersson. His style is amazing, for me it's a tragicomedy. I don't know why and the genre is hard to specify but for me it's a tragicomedy. Every moment is incredible. He doesn't use a lot of shots compared to other filmmakers.

Going back to *Why So Sirius?*, how did you come to create two female leads? Was it a conscious decision?

Actually it happened naturally. I don't think this situation would have been funny with men. I can't picture it. Maybe if I thought for a long time it could be good, but women

are just funnier.

How so? What does femininity bring to the story?

Women are more complicated. They don't often charge straight forward. If it was men maybe they would fight. Women make it more interesting to follow.

Did you find it easy to write female characters?

Yes actually, I didn't think about it so much. My wife did help me a lot.

Where did you come up with the idea for the film?

It was one of those films that comes straight to your mind. Very often when I'm bored, I think about awkward and weird situations and how I would react in those situations. It's often really hilarious even if it's tragic or bad. I thought about what would happen if there was a car accident and I killed someone's loved one, with no way to call an ambulance and anyway you know that they are dead. What do you say to the person left alive? Would we be communicating at all? Would we sit and look at each other? Would we run away? I started to think about it, wrote it and boom, there was a tragicomedy!

Do you have a notebook to capture these spontaneous fantasies?

No. I forget a lot of them but then there are some that stick with me.

What is your favorite Czech film?

Robert Sedláček, one of my favorite Czech directors, is here at goEast with *Jan Palach*. His film *Long Live the Family!* is very real. Our film culture in the Czech Republic tends to hide away from reality but Robert Sedláček tells it like it is.

What would Czech cinematography look like with Communism as inspiration?

If you think about it, Communism inspired some of the most famous Czechoslovak films in the Czech New Wave. The Communists didn't like it and sometimes banned or destroyed films. Now we have freedom and filmmaking has diminished here in the

Czech Republic. Maybe people need problems to create.

Do you?

In life you develop more because of the hard times than the good times. The harder times make you stronger and then you can enjoy the good times. But they keep coming back, so it's an up and down.

What about the international scene?

At the moment I often seek out European movies. I don't know why and it's not for lack of trying, but I don't like American films, not even independent ones. European movies fit me much better.

What are your plans for the future?

I don't know that my future lies in filmmaking. It's really, really time-consuming. I am trying to find a way that I can live happily with my family and also be a filmmaker. It is quite hard but I guess it's possible. I still have to finish school though so I have another project coming. After that, freedom is what you make of it!

Thank you for the interview.