



Founder's Award Winners Director's Interview

Fall 2014 North Carolina Film Award

John Hellberg
Mousse, Director
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NCFA: Are college courses necessary, and if so, where did you go?

John: I completed one and a half years of studies at Stockholm Film Academy. It was mainly a practical education and we shot on 16 mm film. I got in contact with people that I still work with in the industry. I would say that these contacts is the biggest benefit from my film education.

NCFA: What are some qualities in yourself and others that make one suitable for film directing?

John: When it comes to film directing it is all about social skills. You need to learn to communicate the right way and to be a good mediator.

NCFA: Was there a particular event or time that you recognized that filmmaking was not just a hobby, but that it would be your life and your living?

John: The moment I laid my hands on my friends Hi8 video camera when I was around fifteen years old.

NCFA: Is it harder to get started or to keep going? What was the particular thing that you had to conquer to do either?

John: For me it's definitely harder to lose the prestige and get started. To keep going is more of a

must to try to save as much as you can from your dream.

NCFA: What was the most important lesson you had to learn that has had a positive effect on your film? How did that lesson happen?

John: Once again much of the storyline and the phase of the film was constructed in postproduction and editing. I have also learned the lesson about how time consuming the FX and masquerade work is in the post phase.

NCFA: What are personal attributes that make for a good filmmaker, and what do you do to foster them?

John: I have quite good skills when it comes to personal relations and a way of adapting and taking people the right way. I can't say that I do so much to foster those skills, it's just something I got from my parents I guess.

NCFA: When you get angry at a movie, what sets you off? Are there common qualities in cinema today that you dislike? Is there something you try to subvert or avoid or rebel against in your work?

John: I do not like the fast phase in many of today's films. The value of reflection is lost in a too high tempo in the editing and storytelling.

NCFA: We get noticed because of our successes – but we create them on the back of our failures. We learn best from the experiences where it doesn't

work. And yet we still only discuss the success, not the failure. What failures (of your own) have you been able to learn from? How did they change you and your process?

John: The moment I start shooting the failure begins. When you make independent films you have to learn to minimize the catastrophes and try to go along with what goes wrong and what turns out to be better than expected.

NCFA: How did your parents take to your desire to becoming a filmmaker?

John: They have always supported my decision. None of them has any special interest in film.

NCFA: Do you have a day job?

John: I work in the industry. Mainly as a director and editor.

NCFA: What did you learn from this project? Both the positives and negatives. Remember this will be read by a lot of first-time filmmakers, so you can get really detailed if you'd like.

John: I learned that what you lack in preparation in pre-production will eat you up in postproduction. I love to work with amateurs or unestablished actors. In the production with Mousse I was really surprised what was possible in the editing room. Although it took a massive amount of editing time.

NCFA: What limitations does a movie director have, in example can he also work as an editor or cinematographer as well as a director on a film?

John: I am working professionally as an editor alongside writing and directing. For me it is my experience as an editor a real asset both in writing and direction. More generally i think that it can't be a bad thing to have a deeper insight in the different elements in a movie production when you are trying to do your own movie.

NCFA: How does where you live influence how and what you make?

John: Sweden is a harsh place at winter time. I guess the Nordic melancholy has affected my way of looking at life.

NCFA: Is the film business fair? Why or why not? How do you make the apparatus work for you?

John: The business is filled with tricksters. You just have to learn by experience and try to not waste too much time on people that takes too much energy without giving back any.

NCFA: Is it the filmmaker's responsibility to find and develop your audience? Why do you feel that way? How will you collaborate with your audience, and how won't you?

John: I don't really know how to answer that. When I am doing film I have no mind on what an audience might think. When the film is done there is a completely different thing. Screening your film in front of an audience is for me the very climax of moviemaking.

NCFA: What role have film festivals played in your life so far? Why are they necessary? How do you get the most out of them?

John: My film Mousse has reached out to almost 100 festivals earning over 30 international prizes. Getting your film out to the audience and industry is, of course, very important. It can be very closetful to attend festivals with your film, but do you have the chance to meet your audience and industry people at a festival you should really do it. You can learn a lot about yourself as an artist just by listening to your audience's questions.

NCFA: Now that control and scarcity don't define the Entertainment Economy, but superabundance & access do, how does that change things for creators? There are 45,000 films generated globally annually, and the largest consumption market in the world – the US – currently consumes only 1% of the

output. Recognizing that, are you changing the way you work, changing what you create? How? Why? Or why not?

John: My films are not made for a special country. I tend to not think too much about the business as a whole. I don't get any inspiration from the industry to be honest.

NCFA: If there is one or more thing you think would make the film industry better, what would it be?

John: More courage and less bullshit.

NCFA: Do filmmakers have any responsibility to culture? Do you feel that being a creative person requires that you give back or tell a particular story or not do something else? Why or why not?

John: I don't think that you should think in terms of social or cultural responsibility when you are making art.

NCFA: Did you make this film for yourself or for an audience in mind while writing it?

John: For myself and the closest people around me.

NCFA: What makes a film great for you? Are there certain qualities that make a film better for you?

John: A film that crosses different genres. Humor.

NCFA: It is said that there are only six stories. Maybe twelve. It's all been done before. And we have seen it all. What do you do to keep it fresh? Is there anything that you can do to subvert the process to keep it original?

John: I try to pay attention to what is happening in the documentary film genre. I got a lot of inspiration from documentary films. The commercialization of the industry has narrowed some parts of storytelling in mainstream films.

NCFA: Films evolve through the creative process – sometimes most dramatically in the editing process. It's often really hard to reconcile the difference between what we desired and what we achieved. How have you encountered this and how do you move through it?

John: After working over ten years as a professional editor I have learned much about telling stories in pictures. But also what you are able to do in the editing process. The creative process of making a film, especially independent, low budget films, can be really painful the first time you experience the moments when your dreams turns out to be different than expected. After a number of films I have tried to stay calm when these things happen and see things from another perspective. I have learned that things might not be that bad after all. In the editing room you suddenly realized that you have put your focus on the wrong things. And you might even have captured something much better and unexpected.

NCFA: Are you on social media and do you use it in your work? Why or why not?

John: Facebook. Works good for communicating things around a film project. Social media takes a lot of time.

NCFA: When I got started there were two screens: the movie screen and the television screen. Now there are also computers, tablets, and phones. And screens are everywhere: the home, the bus stop, the elevator, the taxi cab. As a creator how does this affect the stories you tell and how you tell them?

John: David Lynch once said; 'If you see a movie on you cell phone you haven't seen it'. I agree. I don't want to adept my story or a framing of a shoot after the size of the screen.

NCFA: Have you done any other films before this? If so, how many others and what format did you shoot it in? If not, how did you convince these guys to go in on this project (esp. if done w/ favors)?

John: I done music videos, commercials, documentaries and short films. I have shoot in different formats.

NCFA: How did you finance your first feature/short film?

John: By my own money.

NCFA: What kind of salary would a director expect to make in the independent scene, or is it completely dependent on the success of the movies?

John: Completely different from project to project. I can't answer that question.

NCFA: Film, perhaps more so than any other popular art form, is the compromise between art and commerce. How has your art been shaped by both the money you have had or not had? Do you create with budget limitations in mind?

John: I may not write with budget limitations in my mind, but maybe I do it unconsciously. After all, the limitations will catch up when you start shooting.