

“I’m interested in the false life inside reality”

Nana Neul • Director

by RÜDIGER SUCHSLAND – GERMAN FILMS

18/09/2014 - Nana Neul, the director of *Silent Summer* and *My Friend from Faro* talks about her films and inspirations



“I am a fan of Lubitsch,” **Nana Neul** says, “and I can’t imagine a film of my own with no humour at all. Which doesn’t mean that it needs to be less serious as a result – quite the contrary.” The young director appreciates the art of omission in Lubitsch’s work, and his ability to bring together things that are so very different.

To date, Neul has made only two feature films, but from the very beginning she filled a gap and therefore occupies a very distinct position in the German film world: one of films that are adult and yet make us laugh. It is a well-known fact that Germans don’t always have an easy relationship with humour. But Neul showed us how things might be with her latest film *Silent Summer* [+]¹ - a tragicomedy, which sets the comic scenes of a German marriage in the South of France. Neul persuaded a whole list of highly recognised German actors – **Dagmar Manzel**, **Ernst Stötzner**, **Marie Rosa Tietjen**, **Victoria Trauttmansdorff**, **Hans-Jochen Wagner** – to tell the story of a career-woman who is compelled to take some time off (and to keep quiet) by the loss of her voice. She retreats to her holiday home in France, where she meets her daughter. Soon her husband follows her there, and the round of relationships and emotions escalates in their wide circle of friends.

Neul definitely made use of various real models for this unusual and at the same time pleasantly unpretentious story with its occasionally absurd features, as she admits laughingly: “A holiday home in the South of France, a woman who loses her voice, a psychotherapist who doesn’t want to talk, and a daughter who is left not knowing which part to take between her parents because she feels ignored but wants to act as a mediator – there are parallels there, certainly, even with my own family history.” She has always wanted to recount aspects of her own family life, “because my own family is really crazy you have to deal with this whole madness somehow or other.”

What does a subject require to make it inspire Neul for a film? “There is usually a trigger: a crazy story that I pick up somewhere and never forget,” she tells me. “I am interested in the false life inside reality. I am interested in people that slip into different roles.”

This kind of broken identity and searching for a place to belong were the central themes in Neul’s first feature film *My Friend from Faro* Mel, a girl with no interest in boys, who pretends to those around her that she already has a boyfriend. But then Mel falls in love with a girl, to whom she pretends that she is a boy; and this girl is young and naive enough to believe her. And so the film is all about lies and the truth, and the truth which is concealed in lies.

Here, the Lubitsch fan in Nana Neul, who is fascinated by form, meets the Bergman fan, who is moved by the pathos of truth.

Repeatedly, the pictorial language of Neul’s films is what makes them particularly convincing. In *My Friend from Faro* she worked with colors in an original consistent way. Her staging of rooms and of the protagonist is characterised by immense precision. At the same time, the director aims to reject clichés and over-obvious symbolism. Neul skillfully expands her stories into intelligent meditations about emotions and the dynamics of relationships.

Neul has many plans. There are projects with which she simply earns money, but parallel to those she is working on a total of no less than three new subjects for the cinema. They include the adaptation of a novel, together with **Hans W. Geissendörfer**, about the relationship between an autistic young man and a Jehovah’s witness.

The second subject makes open reference to Buñuel with its title *Le Beau Du Jour*. “This is a story about Germany, about false self-pity, false morals, and’ the difficulty of admitting true feelings,” says Neul.

Neul describes the third treatment as an odyssey through the Carpathian mountains. “It will be tragic and comical again,” says Neul – and there is no reason to doubt her.