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San Sebastian Talent: Simon Jaquemet talks about 'Chrieg,' a buzzed-up debut at the Spanish festival



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Film a picture of a troubled Swiss youth, and family dynamics

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In "[Chrieg](http://variety.com/t/chrieg/) (<http://variety.com/t/chrieg/>)," Swiss [Simon Jaquemet](http://variety.com/t/simon-jaquemet/) (<http://variety.com/t/simon-jaquemet/>)'s feature debut, which world premieres this weekend in San Sebastian's New Directors competition, 16-year-old Matteo begins the films confirming his own sexuality, sporting a tropical fish tank green comb-over, and bringing a prostitute home to his parents' house for

nowhere, he falls in with three other teen outcasts. Their idea of a good night out is to steal a car, rough up its owner and try to set light to a disco floor. Bit with them, Matteo finds a place in the world, respect and love. Sometimes brutal, and a shaded portrait of unruly no-future Swiss youth, and packed with ideas, "Chrieg," plays in San Sebastian's New Directors section, Picture Tree International will be looking to convert buzz into bizz. Variety talked to Jaquemet on the eve of San Sebastian.

There's a line of thought that if parents do not give their children a sense of belonging and respect, the latter will look for it elsewhere. Is that in a way Matteo's story, his discovery of another family, however violent his substitute family may be?

This was definitely an idea that I had during the development process. And I like it if this aspect is seen in the movie. When I started writing I had very clear ideas about right and wrong and who would be the ones responsible for what happens to Matteo and what he does. But as I got more and more immersed in the theme and the story it became more ambiguous and what I saw as black and white dissolved. I wanted the film to reflect this and I think it does. The parents can be seen as horrible people and the main reason why their son turns to violence. But it could also be that he always had this attraction to violence – his parents are not that bad after all – and what happens to him in the mountains just gives him the justification and the means to do what he always wanted to do. All I can say for sure is: Violence exists, the clouds move, the wind blows, the mountains are, the planet rotates and we are stuck on it.

The English title for the film is "At War," and it shows four youths, three at least just teens, all literally outcasts, ganging together to pillage the nearest city. Though it doesn't expand its vision to a larger society – that exercise must be made by an audience – the film insinuates that this is a part of a larger generational problem, of a no-future generation that suffers psychological violence from its elders with physical riposte.

The title of the film is "Chrieg." "At War" is actually more of a tag line or add-on to the title. "Chrieg" is the Swiss-German word for "war" but the meaning is not quite the same. It actually also describes a state of mind and is a common term among the Swiss youth.

possible freedom. We would light the room in a way that we would be able to shoot 360 degrees and allow the actors and the d.p. to move freely. We had very specific ideas about how the actors and the [camera \(http://variety411.com/us/new-york/camera-sound-equipment/\)](http://variety411.com/us/new-york/camera-sound-equipment/) would move in a scene. During rehearsal and shooting sometimes the scenes evolved and we found different approaches and we wanted to not be limited by technical means to explore these possibilities. There were no marks, no special spots where the actors would have to end up. And of course, this lead to them sometimes ending up in positions where from the point of view of the gaffer they were not in the ideal positions. But I always chose performance over light. I also think that the darkness in some scenes helps the realistic feel that I wanted the film to have.

Who are the actors and how did you work with them?

The kids are all non.professional actors. Only three of the adults are professionals: The mother, the farmer and the social worker. We found the kids through street casting and research and they are in reality very close to the characters that they play in the film. Only Ella who plays Ali had a little acting experience and she had to make the biggest change as she is quite different from Ali in real life. We had a three weeks rehearsal period before the shoot in different constellations. We rehearsed some crucial scenes and just spent time together so everyone would gain each other's trust and we get to know each other. All the young actors had very different approaches. Sascha is very good at improvising. He could say anything and it would always sound good and natural. Whereas for Ste it was the best to rehearse the scene and the text precisely. Ella worked a lot with music that she used to put herself in the mood. We also did extensive character rehearsal with her. She trained herself in boxing and we spent a day with her where she stayed in character living as a homeless girl roaming through abandoned buildings and begging people for money. Working with Benji, who plays the main character, was quite easy. He had a mysterious way of completely immersing himself into the reality of the scenes. Up to the point where he would know more about all the psychological things that were going on than what I had imagined myself. It was a blast to work with them. And what I regret a little is that the shooting schedule didn't permit that much of improvisation. In the end, I felt that the kids had real stories, which are as interesting and sometimes more violent and harsh than what I tell in the film. It is in the film as they are real living persons and not impersonators. I hope it can be seen that they are more than just actors.

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What influences, if any, are there on your film from other Swiss or foreign directors?

obvious list: Bruno Dumont, Haneke, Seidl, von Trier, Gaspar Noe ... Of the Swiss I like Lionel Baier, Ursula Meier, Frederic Mermoud...

As a first-time feature director, do you see yourself as part of a new generation of directors, sharing characteristics with other young Swiss filmmakers?

The new generation has to come. I don't have an overview but I think there are a lot of interesting filmmakers around, which just released or will release their first features. Some of them are my friends. We are really blessed in Switzerland and also the funding situation is quite good (though the production costs are very high). For the last years, the film industry was concentrating on making films with mainly commercial goals for the national market and this works quite well. But what is lacking are films that regardless of whether they are set in Switzerland or not are not circling around the nation itself but rather talk about universal themes which are also of interest for the rest of Europe and the world. I certainly want to go in this direction and I feel that there is a strong group of young filmmakers who want the same. Hopefully we will achieve that.

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