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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
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JÄTTEN

THE GIANT

A FILM BY JOHANNES NYHOLM

SCREENINGS

DISCOVERY SELECTION

FRI. 9, 11:15 AM @ SCOTIABANK 8 (P&I 1)
FRI. 9, 7:00 PM @ SCOTIABANK 14 (PUBLIC 1)
SUN. 11, 2:00 PM @ JACKMAN HALL (PUBLIC 2)
THU. 15, 6:30 PM @ SCOTIABANK 14 (P&I 2)
SUN. 18, 1:15 PM @ SCOTIABANK 4 (PUBLIC 3)

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JÄTTEN

THE GIANT

A FILM BY JOHANNES NYHOLM

Sweden, Denmark - 2016 - Color - 90 minutes - 1 : 85 - Dolby

Swedish release date : October 14, 2016





Synopsis

Rikard is an autistic and severely deformed man who was separated from his mother at birth. Thirty years later he is convinced that he will get her back if only he wins the Scandinavian Championship of pétanque (bocce). He tries to do the impossible. His fragile physique and a harsh judging environment are not going to stop him. Plus there is a 200 foot high giant on his side...

Johannes Nyholm

About The Giant

When I was 4 years old and had a fever a very uncomfortable feeling often arose. In its most extreme form it was almost metaphysical. As I was lying in bed looking at my body it felt as if it was disconnected from myself. The hands and arms were thick lumps of meat lying where my arms and hands should be. When I moved I could see these parts moving too. But it was not my body. If this body that I moved wasn't my own, then where was I, and who was I? This was an existential dilemma for me during those early years.

In this condition it was difficult to communicate with the outside world; hard to reach it, hard to be reached by it. I looked at it from a distance, as if through binoculars facing the wrong direction. Far away in the distance were people who spoke a language I did not understand, about things I could not relate to.

This feeling is what has formed the basis for The Giant, the story of the autistic petanque player Rikard. His body is like a thick tumor surrounding him. It clogs one of his eyes and both ears. The mouth is very small. This body hampers his contact with the outside world and at the same time facilitates his absorption into his own dream world. It becomes a manifestation of his social disorder, his autism if you will.

The Giant is about alienation, and the methods used to cope with it. My point is that unhappiness and misery has a place in all of us, in different doses and in different ways, and that it can be reflected and better understood when we relate it to something else, to someone who has it worse.

Rikard here represents the one in the uttermost worst condition. But we have chosen not to dwell on his misery. Instead we have always chosen the light perspective - focused on the hope and the magical inner force within him. What is interesting is not his suffering, but the way he deals with it, overcomes it. We choose humour instead of darkness, fantasy and imagination instead of depression.

I have created a documentary foundation for the story. It's shot in existing environments with authentic people. It's important that you believe in Rikard, think of him as a real human, despite his extreme demeanor. During the progress of the film his world slowly transforms from the ordinary to the fantastical. From kitchen sink realism we travel into an absurd reality where everything is possible - even a 200 foot high giant.

A central dialogue in the film is inspired by a saying my grandmother used to state: «if you can't solve it otherwise, do it crazy-wise". The core of the story is about Rikard's ability to achieve the impossible. Regardless of how tough the situation is there is always a way out, however strange the solution might seem.



Meet up with the Puppet Master

He is one of Sweden's most celebrated and most spectacular short film directors. Now Johannes Nyholm is up for his feature film debut, The Giant

At the start of *The Giant* (Jätten), the camera glides over a magnificent mountain landscape of postcardlike beauty. The evening sky glows with rosy clouds and mist gently rolls in the valleys. But wait: what's this? There on the ground are two huge silver coloured boules close to a red wooden ball.

There's only one thing that isn't surprising about this unusual combination of the mountains and boules. And that's the fact that Johannes Nyholm is the man behind it.

Throughout his entire career as an artist, animator and film and music video director, Nyholm has been surprising his audiences with his original images and stories, from a Clay-mation about a small boy who's nervous ahead of a date to his film *Las Palmas* (2011), in which a one-year-old girl plays a dissipated tourist breaking social taboos.

The trailer for *Las Palmas* has notched up more than 19 million hits on YouTube, and Nyholm's short films have been screened at art museums and film festivals the world over, including Cannes.

The Giant is his first feature length film. "I want to mix kitchen sink realism with fantasy in order to create two worlds that collide," he explains.

The boules are part of everyday reality for the film's main character, Rikard. Passionately interested in playing boules (a.k.a. pétanque), he is disabled and lives in a care home, although he has no defined diagnosis.

The friction between Rikard and those around him is shown in dramatic relief when he gets hit on the head by a metal boule. Out of natural concern, the Boules Society committee rules that it is too risky for Rikard to take part in the Nordic Championships.

With few allies, Rikard struggles to take control over his life, just as he might in a fantasy story. One of Nyholm's acknowledged sources of inspiration is Astrid Lindgren's timeless novel *The Brothers Lionheart* (Bröderna Lejonhjärta, 1973), in which the fantasy land of Nangijala becomes a place of escape for an ill-fated boy who's confined to bed.

In *The Giant*, the mountain landscape represents Rikard's inner world, one in which he's a giant with the power to put everything right. The mountains are presented in a glowing palette of colours bordering on the kitsch.

Johannes Nyholm jumps up from the chair in the kitchen

of the premises in Göteborg that he shares with various other filmmakers and goes to fetch a mass-produced poster. It shows a man and woman embracing in dark silhouette against a colourful sunset.

"If you've never seen an image like this before you'd probably think it's powerful. But the problem with kitsch is that it has been reproduced so many times that it becomes banal. I want to create images that are powerful yet can be taken seriously at the same time. That's the challenge."

Christian Andrén, who plays the lead in the film, is present in virtually every scene wearing a mask of a grossly deformed face over his own. It took three and a half hours every day to apply and made heavy demands on Christian as an actor.

"I've worn a mask before when we made Puppetboy (Dockpojken, 2008)," says Nyholm, "so I know how it is when the people around you see something different when they look at you. You have to be secure enough in yourself to handle being invisible. When Christian got out of the mask he just couldn't stop talking. He made a thank you speech at the wrap party that's gone down in history," the director quips.

Nyholm chose the rather unusual settings for the film based on places he knew, and some scenes were also shot in real boules clubs and care homes in and around Göteborg.

"It's easiest to tell stories about people you're familiar with. Myself, I've played a lot of boules and I've also worked in care homes, where you'll find a collection of people who are very different from each other. It's a fascinating and dynamic milieu in which anything can happen."

In the portrayal of people's diminishing goodwill towards Rikard, or at worst their open contempt, there is a strong case for inferring social criticism. Does Johannes Nyholm regard himself as a political filmmaker?

"Everything's political. But The Giant is basically more of a film about an individual trying to survive in his environment. I want to present a reality in which people recognise themselves, and also to provide hope that there's something beyond it all. No matter how terrible things are there's always a chink of light from another world."

Article by Marit Kapla, previously published in Swedish Film 2/2016

Johannes Nyholm

Writer/Director Johannes Nyholm is an artist and film director with an international outreach. He has had three short films selected for the Quinzaine at Cannes Film Festival ("Las Palmas", "Puppet Boy" and "Dreams from the Woods") and "Las Palmas" in addition was selected for Sundance Film Festival 2012.

For his shorts Nyholm has been awarded a number of prizes at film festivals around the world, and he has also gained a remarkable number of followers on online platforms.

Filmography

2011 **Las Palmas** (Las Palmas), fiction, 13 mins.

2009 **Dreams from the Woods** (Drömmar från skogen), shadow puppet play, 9 mins.

2008 **Puppetboy** (Dockpojken), fiction/documentary, 27 mins.

2008 **The Tale of Little Puppetboy** (Sagan om den lilla Dockpojken) - fiction/puppet animation, 19 mins







Cast

Rikard	Christian Andrén
Roland	Johan Kylén
Elisabeth	Anna Bjelkerud
Lina	Linda Faith



Crew

Director	Johannes Nyholm
Screenplay	Johannes Nyholm
Editing	Morten Højbjerg Johannes Nyholm
DOP	Johan Lundborg
Costumes & Make up	Pia Aleborg
SFX Make Up	Love Larson Eva von Bahr
Producers	Maria Dahlin - Garagefilm International Morten Kjems Hytten Juhl - Beofilm
Co-producers	Rebecka Lafrenz - Garagefilm International Mimmi Spång - Garagefilm International Peter Hyldahl - Beofilm
Swedish distributor	TriArt
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