

THE DISTANT BARKING OF DOGS

A film by Simon Lereng Wilmont



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TAGLINE

A childhood in the shadow of war

LOGLINE

The Distant Barking of Dogs follows the 10-year-old Ukrainian boy Oleg, whose life was turned upside down by the on-going war in Eastern Ukraine.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Ten-year-old Oleg lives in the eastern part of Ukraine – a warzone that often echoes with anti-aircraft fire and missile strikes. Sometimes these sounds are in the distance, while other times they're frighteningly close. While many have already left this dangerous area, Oleg remains with his grandmother, who has taken care of him since the death of his mother. They have nowhere else to go. While waiting for the war to end, Oleg enjoys hanging out with his younger cousin Yarik and the older boy Kostia. Together they go on adventures, talk about what makes a real man, test each other's boundaries – but sometimes they go too far.

This observational film follows a year in the life of Oleg, and emphasises the warm bond he has with his grandmother. By sticking close to Oleg, *The Distant Barking of Dogs* shows the effect of conflict on children.



SYNOPSIS

THE DISTANT BARKING OF DOGS is set in Eastern Ukraine on the frontline of the war. The film follows the life of 10-year-old Ukrainian boy Oleg throughout a year, witnessing the gradual erosion of his innocence beneath the pressures of war.

Oleg lives with his beloved grandmother, Alexandra, in the small village of Hnutove. Having no other place to go, Oleg and Alexandra stay and watch as others leave the village. Life becomes increasingly difficult with each passing day, and the war offers no end in sight. In this now half-deserted village where Oleg and Alexandra are the only true constants in each other's lives, the film shows just how fragile, but crucial, close relationships are for survival.

Through Oleg's perspective, the film examines what it means to grow up in a warzone. It portrays how a child's universal struggle to discover what the world is about grows interlaced with all the dangers and challenges the war presents.

THE DISTANT BARKING OF DOGS unveils the consequences of war bearing down on the children in Eastern Ukraine, and by natural extension, the scars and self-taught life lessons this generation will carry with them into the future.



DIRECTOR'S INTENTIONS - SIMON LERENG WILMONT

In my two previous films, I followed children who lived in very safe worlds. Their lives get knocked out of balance temporarily, and we follow them in their individual struggle to back on their feet again, growing wiser from the experience. That made me think about what it would be like if the situation was completely turned upside down: how does a child find safety and security in a chaotic world?

In *THE DISTANT BARKING OF DOGS*, I follow 10-year-old Oleg, who lives with his grandma in a warzone in the eastern part of Ukraine, under a mile from the frontline. I spent time in the area researching, and I remember the first time I met him. He immediately stood out. I asked if he could describe how it felt to be scared. He looked at me and without hesitation and said, 'If you can imagine a hand reaching in and grabbing your heart. When the first explosions sound, after the cannons have fired, the hand starts squeezing your heart. Then it gets all cold, too.'" It was then I knew I had found my main character.

Shortly after, I met his grandmother, Alexandra, an amazing, loving and strong woman. It was obvious to see how close and special the bond between the two of them was. Their house still showed signs of shelling and desperately needed repairs, but it was filled with warmth and laughter. Most of the village had been forcibly displaced, often including close friends and relatives, leaving behind a vacuum of activity where time did not exist. But there was always a warm meal ready and a good story waiting to be shared in their house. Life was calm and beautiful, as it should be. For a second, you almost forgot about the war. Staying there long enough, though, I soon realized that this bubble of safety was just an illusion. A brittle illusion that could shatter violently and often unexpectedly, to reveal the very real and dangerous world that Oleg and Alexandra really live in.

The film is about how people deal with the cracks in that illusion and about the human drive we have to survive no matter what. How, even amidst the most impossible circumstances, we build illusionary worlds for ourselves in which we can find comfort and warmth, because we can't exist for long in chaos. Even if the illusion is demolished over and over again, we still keep building it back up again. That kind of tenacity is incredibly beautiful to me.

I am also reminded of the importance of the people who surround us by the mutual dependency that Oleg and his grandmother have developed. They share a love for each other. Without one, the other would collapse. They live in two different worlds.

His world is immediate: he reacts to what happens and quickly suppresses the bad things. She, on the other hand, knows that the things yet to come can have terrible consequences for them. In the film, Alexandra keeps the big, bad world away from Oleg as long as she can. That's what makes it possible for him to be a child long enough to give her the joy and hope that she need to survive and keep up the illusion.



BACKGROUND - THE SITUATION

Precipitated by the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, a string of rising tensions in Eastern Ukraine erupted in armed conflict in 2014 between pro-Russian separatist forces and the Ukrainian government. The armed conflict quickly grew into an international feud, as the separatists continue to receive Russian support and the Ukrainian government the backing of NATO countries, leading many to label it a proxy war between East and West. Today, the fighting is concentrated along a 400-km line of contact, where night-time shelling is the leading cause of civilian casualties. Now in its fourth year, the conflict has claimed the lives of over 10,000 people, with at least 2,500 of them civilians. Towns near the frontline, like the village of Hnutove in the film, have been particularly affected by a rapidly dwindling population and loss of access to basic needs such as gas or electricity. Nearly 3 million people have been forced to leave their homes.

Across both sides, a plurality of Ukrainians would prefer to negotiate a settlement with the Pro-Russia separatists to end the conflict. Yet, the last ceasefire agreement - which

followed over 10 failed ceasefire attempts - collapsed immediately, offering no clear end in sight.

TEAM

Simon Lereng Wilmont - Director & Cinematographer

The Distant Barking of Dogs is Simon Lereng Wilmont's fourth film at Final Cut for Real. Simon graduated as a Documentary Film Director from The National Danish Film School in 2009. His film *Dormitory Master* (2009) won a Gold Panda Award at Sichuan International TV & Film Festival and *Above Ground, Beneath the Sky* (2008) won Best Short Film at Vision Du Reel and Best International Documentary at Vienna Film Academy International Film Festival. His previous films *The Fencing Champion* (2014) and *Chikara - The Sumo Wrestler's Son* (2013) both premiered at IDFA, won the Jury Award for Medium length Documentary and Best Short Children Documentary Award at Al Jazeera Film Festival 2015, and they have since been screened at a number of international film festivals and sold to tv-stations around the world.



Monica Hellström - Producer

Monica Hellström has been a producer at Final Cut for Real since 2010. She previously worked at Upfront Films and The Danish Film Institute's Film Workshop. She graduated from EAVE Producer Workshop in 2010, holds an MA in film from the University of Copenhagen (DK) and a BA in film from the University of Bedfordshire (UK). She co-produced (selected): *The Nile Hilton Incident* by Tarik Salah (won Gran Jury prize: World Cinema Dramatic at Sundance Film Festival 2017), *Concerning Violence* by Göran Olson (Nominated at Sundance Film Festival, Won the Cinema Fairbindet Prize at Berlinale 2014), *Varicella* by Victor Kossakovsky (2015). Produced: *The Dvor Massacre* (2015), *The Fencing Champion* (2014) and *Chikara - The Sumo Wrestler's Son* (2013) by Simon Lereng Wilmont, (both premiered at IDFA, won the Jury Award for Medium length



Documentary and Best Short Children Documentary Award at Al Jazeera Film Festival) and *MoonRider* (2012) by Daniel Dencik (Premiered at Karlovy Vary).



Michael Aaglund - Editor

Michael Aaglund is a freelance editor. He graduated from London's National Film and Television School in 2010. He edited the short film *A Drowning Man* (2017), which was an official selection at Cannes. Other works include Netflix documentary *Kingdom of Us* (2017), *Concerning Violence* (2014), *For Those in Peril* (2013), and *A World Not Ours* (2012). He previously worked with Final Cut for Real on Simon Lereng's short film *The Fencing Champion* (2014) and *Chikara - The Sumo Wrestler's Son* (2013), both premiering at IDFA.

Sami Jahnukainen - Co-Producer

Producer / scriptwriter (born 1979, Finland)
Sami has produced documentary- and short films since 2005. He is the co-founder of Mouka Filmi and Donkey Hotel production companies, and an active member of the international documentary film community.



Tobias Janson - Co-Producer

Tobias Janson is a producer at the Swedish production company Story, based in Stockholm. His first documentary was *Nebulosan* (2000, for SVT with Eric M Nilsson), and he has since then been working mostly as editor, producer and film teacher. Before coming to Story, he worked at the Documentary Film School at Biskops-Arnö and with the production company Skogen Produktion. He has also been involved in Independent Film Producers Association (OFF),



Tempo Documentary Festival and The School of Film Directing (Filmhögskolan), Göteborg University. CEO and producer at Story since January 2009.

Philippa Kowarsky - Executive Producer & world sales

Philippa Kowarsky has co-produced many films, including 2014 Academy Award nominee, Dror Moreh's, "The Gatekeepers", Dror Shaul's "Sweet Mud", which won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and the Crystal Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, "Defamation" by Yoav Shamir, "Watermarks" by Yaron Zilberman and the award-winning "Trembling Before G-d" by Sandi DuBowski. Philippa graduated with an M.A. in Communication Policy Studies, at City University of London.



Pietu Korhonen - Sound Designer

Pietu Korhonen has worked as a foley editor and a supervising sound editor at H5 Film Sound since 2012. As supervising sound designer Pietu has worked with Cannes awarded director Juho Kuosmanens first feature. Pietu studied at Aalto University department of Film, Television and Scenography.



Heikki Kossi - Sound Designer

Heikki Kossi the company H5 Film Sound in 2000 and later on. Heikki has worked as a foley artist since year 2001 in feature films, shorts, TV-drama, documentaries and animation films. As sound designer Heikki has been involved in feature length documentaries and animation.



Peter Albrechtsen - Sound Designer

Peter Albrechtsen is a Danish sound designer and music supervisor based in Copenhagen and working on both feature films and documentaries. Among Peter Albrechtsen's recent fiction credits are the Danish thriller smash hit *Darkland*, Finnish Cannes winner *The Happiest Day in the Life of Olli Mäki*, and sound effects recording for Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*. His recent doc credits include the festival favorites *Bill Nye: Science Guy*, *Land of the Free* and *True Conviction*. This year, Peter was invited to become a member of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Along with his sound work, Peter Albrechtsen has worked as a music supervisor and has collaborated closely with globally acclaimed musicians such as Antony and the Johnsons, Jóhann Jóhannsson and Efterklang.



Uno Helmersson - Composer

Uno is a composer educated at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. Uno got his own international breakthrough with his music for the Danish documentary *Armadillo* in 2010. Since then he has been frequently engaged to compose music for TV and cinema all around the world. Two of the most recent projects is the heralded Norwegian documentary film *Magnus* (2016), portraying the chess world champion, and the documentary *Bobbi Jene* (2017) about the acclaimed dancer.



Erik Enocksson - Composer

Erik Enocksson is a Stockholm-based composer. He is known for *Falkenberg Farewell* (2006), *Man tænker sit* (2009), *For Those in Peril* (2013) and *Moon Rider* (2012).



MAIN CREDITS & FACTS

Final Cut for Real

Presents

In co-production with

Mouka Filmi, STORY

&

Bayerischer Rundfunk and Arte

2017 - Denmark - 90 minutes - sound Dolby 5.1 - ratio 1.78 - Ukrainian Language

A special thank you to the participants

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YAROSLAV BENDES

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OLENA BENDES

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A **FINAL CUT FOR REAL** Production

In Co-Production with
MOUKA FILMI
STORY
BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK AND ARTE

The film was pitched at
GÖTEBORG FILM FESTIVAL
NORDISK PANORAMA
IDFA FORUM

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ULLA HÆSTRUP

The Swedish Film Institute
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Finnish Film Foundation
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SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS and JUSTFILMS | FORD FOUNDATION

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YLE - ERKKO LYYTINEN

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THE DISTANT BARKING OF DOGS is a co-production between

FINAL CUT FOR REAL, MOUKA FILMI, STORY

www.finalcutforreal.dk/the-distant-barking-of-dogs

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