

Lauritzen prize

Jesper Langberg

Award speech by theatre critic Lars Wredstrøm,

This year's male winner of JL-Fondet's big acting prize for 2009, Jesper Langberg, is NOT getting the prize for long and faithful service.

This kind of award normally often only comes when you have nothing more to offer and are on the way out. But if there is something that Jesper Langberg IS NOT, it is on the way out of Danish cinema or the stage, or resting on his many artistic laurels.

Today's male prize winner really understands how to always surprise us. In taking the Mickey out of his audience by showing them something that they have not seen before, there Jesper Langberg is probably Danish cinema and stage's answer to a cork.

It is impossible to keep it - and him - down in the turbulent Danish cultural waters and just as you might think you have got it in your grasp, the cork slips away - and Langberg with it - from between your fingers in an endeavor to find new theatrical and interpretational countryside.

Private worries and illness or not, he understands how to constantly deflate his audience. Not in an excessive way but on the other hand by undermining the limits.

He above all understands how to move the sand actually lying under the foundation of the figures he often plays. A foundation that slowly but surely collapses and which is in any event revealed before the eyes of us all.

Not as anything unambiguous but rather as something multi-stringed in which it is where things that are guessed at - but often unspoken - that speak their very own language. In short, Jesper Langberg is a master of innuendo camouflaged as an acting cork holding back the pressure.

In the latest part of his career, what has stuck has been three 'Ks' or 'Cs'. In his interpretation of his role as Kresten Skjern, younger brother to the main character Mads Skjern in the TV series "Matador", Jesper Langberg understood above all precisely how to act with a confidence-instilling openness, veiled by resignation and melancholy that was frankly, astonishingly well done. He gave this an extra twist in his more than 200 radio readings and interpretations of Han Christian Andersen writings and diaries, all often reflecting an undertone of aggression, irony and reservations.

The latest effort was for K or rather C since it was again a role as Christian. Here we are talking about a provincial doctor, Christian Sommer, suffering from Alzheimer's in the TV drama series "Sommer". A role Jesper Langberg played with such deep feeling and so convincingly that not only did the Alzheimer's Society note an increase in donations as a result, but also when he recently went into a travel agency to order a trip, the girl there said it might be better if he asked his son to contact the travel agency and she could then explain things to HIM rather than make Langberg confused.

A statement that I know that you, Jesper, in fact took as a compliment because it proved to you that your interpretation was right and genuinely worked.

One of Jesper Langberg's main attributes is in fact that he understands, not just on film but also on the stage, how to act with humanity that we can empathize with whilst also rejecting it.

Not because the feeling or feelings are not genuine or not well presented but because they perhaps confront us with something within ourselves that is perhaps not always so acceptable or nicely turned. It can be a demolition job, hidden behind a mask of friendliness or half concealed motives of revenge camouflaged behind a gossamer and often ingenuous layer of mildness. Aspects that Jesper Langberg confronted us with in such roles as the father in Thomas Vinterberg's "The Party" at the Mammut Theatre in 2002, more intensely in his infamously good interpretation of the part of the parasite and psychopath Gruesen, in Soya's "The Parasites" at the Royal Theatre in 2003.

The director, Erling Schrøder once said: "Give me Ghita Nørby and I will make something great out of her" - that was at a time when Ghita Nørby only played pretty girls and baronesses with and without a fuel tank. Schrøder did as he promised. He really DID make something great out of Ghita Nørby, something she never fails to acknowledge or emphasise.

In the same statement about Ghita Nørby, Erling Schrøder then continued by saying: "...and when I am finished with Ghita, then give me Jesper Langberg. This man has far greater seriousness and inscrutableness in him than he is aware of, and I will probably make him display it. He just needs first to have a theatrical acid bath to change his niceness into irony and to change his present sense of irony to repressed anger". Erling Schrøder never got to grips with Jesper Langberg as he did with Ghita Nørby - but that does not matter. For Jesper Langberg has long since demonstrated that he can perfectly well manage by himself. That he constantly manages to renew himself, to transform and also give his characters soul so that for better or worse, we can identify with them.

And our thanks go to you for that, Jesper. Your theatrical cork mentality (and no, I am not saying that you have in any way a problem of falseness). But the cork mentality (in which you always bob away from us to constantly confront us with new but always vibrant aspects of your characters, and hence aspects of ourselves) is absolutely admirable.

And for that JL-Fondet would like to thank you. You are one of the Danish cinema and stage's white elephants, a race that one should feel happy to be allowed to see and meet, hence the Lauritzen Prize for 2009.... Congratulations.