



Conversation with

Siv Rajendram Eliassen and Anna Bache-Wiig

about

ACQUITTED

Can you tell me about your series *Acquitted*, what is about?

Acquitted is the story about a man and his struggle to be cleared of accusations from his past. At only eighteen years old he was convicted for the murder of his girlfriend, but acquitted after the appeal. 20 years later he comes back to his small hometown to find out that nothing is forgotten, and that the people who used to know him still thinks he is a murderer.

***Acquitted* is more a drama than a crime, what is the moral theme underneath it?**

There are several themes.

Acquitted about crime and punishment, and our deeply human need for justice and reconciliation. *Acquitted* is also story about doubt, as doubt is the engine in almost every character. We explore their need for answers, to find the truth and deal with it.

But in it's core, acquitted is about our search for a true identity. A personality is not constant, we tend to become the person we are in the eyes of the people we relate to. This is a theme we explore even deeper in the second season.

How was the project funded and where you involved in this phase of production?

The project had different funders. Our producer, Misofilm, their owner, Freemantle, tv2 and the Norwegian film institute. We were involved early on in the process in the communication with TV2.

Did you have to make any changes in the writing due to financial issues?

Yes, a few adjustments were made, as always. Among other things we had to move a location from Hong Kong to Malaysia. And shooting on the Norwegian west coast, turned out to be more expensive than we thought, so we had to reduce the shooting there. But over all we felt that our vision was taken care of.

How many episodes are the series and what is its structure?

First season consists of ten episodes of 45 minutes, plotted in to a strict four act structure. The second season will be eight episodes. The over all structure of the two seasons is also a four act structure.

What was your role (creator, show runner) and how did you manage the writing (there was a writers' room) ?

We are only two main writers, but work closely with our producers in running the show, and have our say in all big, artistic decisions, like choosing director or cast. It's like a shared showrunner-responsibility.

What is the audience target of *Acquitted* and where did it aired in Norway?

Audience target is broad family, as reflected in the slot; Sunday 20.00 . It aired on TV2 , the biggest commercial broadcaster in Norway.

Can you give us a picture of TV market in your country? How many public networks, how many free and how many pay channels, and what kind of series productions do they have?

NRK is the only public network in Norway. Then there is TV2 the big, free commercial channel. We have about three or four pay-channels, like tv3, TvNorway and tv4.

Did *Acquitted* was a success? How are the audience numbers for Norway? I noticed it aired in France as well, was it meant to be appealing for an international audience?

No, but of course international appeal is a bonus! *Acquitted* got really good numbers in both Norway and Sweden. We had about one million TSR per episode, which is great for TV 2 Norway. Remember we are a country of only five millions.

In the last years many Nordic series have gathered a large international attention, with remakes both in the US and in Europe. What originates this success? What are the strengths of the Nordic storytelling and production?

We wish we knew! Maybe some of it has to do with our culture for silence. In southern Europe people seem to talk more, they scream and cry and get their feelings out. We are raised to keep emotions inside- we are more reserved. And therefor good at keeping secrets. That may influence on our way of telling stories as well. We need the stories as a place to get the feeling out. The Scandinavian countries also have a good tradition for state funding, which allows us a certain amount of freedom.

In your work what are your inspirations and models? Did you choose a certain genre and mood in storytelling?

We decided very early on that *Acquitted* was going to be a drama, not a regular crime story. We call it mystery drama. We have tried to be true to our own story, and not look to others, but all high quality-dramas inspire us. Like, Twin Peaks, Bloodline, Homeland and more.

Do you think there's a specific European sensibility that is different from American perspective?

Definitely. We come from very different cultures and story telling traditions.

What is for you the key element of screenwriting: characters, action, conflict, structure, genre or... ?

Characters, characters, characters! They create everything else.

From a Guild point of view how is the role of scriptwriter in Norway? Are they well considered and involved in the production decision-making?

There is a change going on right now, especially in tv drama. The writers are gaining more and more respect as the understanding of the importance of story and the writers' role in the production of a long running series is understood.

You are a female writing team and also our other guest from Denmark is a woman. Is that normal? How is the position of women in the movie business in your country? In Italy unfortunately only one third of writers are female.

We are getting there, Norway is a very gender equal country, but women's position in the film business is much weaker than elsewhere in society. We still try to figure out why. But the business of storytelling has evolved around men for hundreds of years, so it takes time.

Can you give as a brief spoiler free preview on the master-class you will give in Roma about Drama Structure?

We are both structure nerds and we cant wait to share our great love for structure with you! We will talk about how we structured *Acquitted*, and about how structure promotes creativity.

Interview by Fosca Gallesio

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