



A HOUSE MADE OF SPLINTERS

a film by Simon Lereng Wilmont
Produced by Monica Hellstrom



WINNER: Best Director - World Documentary - Sundance Film Festival

WINNER: Best Nordic Documentary - Gothenburg Film Festival

WINNER: Golden Alexander - Thessaloniki Doc Festival

WINNER: FIPRESCI Prize - Thessaloniki Doc Festival

WINNER: Art Docs Award - Millennium Docs

WINNER: Movies That Matter Award - ZagrebDocs

WINNER: Politiken Dox Award - CPH:DOX

WINNERS CIRCLE: DocNYC

NOMINEE: Best Documentary - IDA Documentary Awards

NOMINEE: Best Cinematography - IDA Documentary Awards

NOMINEE: Best Director - IDA Documentary Awards

NOMINEE: Best Documentary - European Film Awards

NOMINEE: Best Documentary - Indie Spirit Awards

NOMINEE: Best Production - Cinema Eye Awards

NOMINEE: Cinematography - Cinema Eye Awards

**OFFICIAL SELECTION: IDFA*

2022 / Denmark / Ukraine / Finland / Sweden / 86 min

Short Synopsis/logline:

In this poignant and deeply intimate documentary three kids temporarily removed from their parents find friendship and flickers of hope inside the worn walls of a remarkable orphanage in Eastern Ukraine, as a group of dedicated social-workers create moments of joy and respite from childhoods all but lost.

Long Synopsis:

In this war-worn and impoverished corner of Eastern Ukraine where addiction casts a long shadow, there sits a safe haven for children temporarily removed from their parents. *A House Made of Splinters* follows three kids awaiting their fate: will they go back or move on to a new home, while as a group of dedicated social-workers create small moments of joy and respite from childhoods all but lost.

Filmmaker Simon Lereng Wilmont returns with a follow-up to his acclaimed first feature, *The Distant Barking of Dogs*, offering a unique look into how the long-term consequences of war on a society already under strain impacts the most vulnerable. His is a poignant and deeply intimate portrait of a remarkable way station filled with care, support, and trust for a group of kids who are in desperate need of more.

An Interview with director Simon Lereng Wilmont

What led you to this story?

My previous film - *The Distant Barking of Dogs* - followed a young boy and his grandmother living in the same region, right on the front line. The young boy's mother had died, and his father was an alcoholic, but he was blessed to have love and security from his grandmother. During the filming she developed heart problems and I realized how fragile that blessing was. I started to worry about him and wanted to look into what might happen if she wasn't around to look after him anymore.

I discovered that there were many children whose parents had died in the war or overdoses, or who had been removed from their parents because of addiction, alcoholism, poverty. There are these temporary shelters across the region where the children go for up to nine months until the state figures out what to do with them – some go home, some are adopted, and some go to a permanent state-run orphanage. This whole tragic situation gives you a sense of the devastating impact of the long-term consequences of war. It was something I knew I needed to explore more.

How did you decide to film in this shelter specifically?

I was working with the same Line Producer Azad Safarov as with *Distant Barking*, and during our research phase we went to a number of different shelters, many were cold, lonely, and neglected places. It was heartbreaking to see. When we found the shelter where this film takes place, it was completely different. There were drawings on the walls, teddy bears, and toys, and most importantly I could feel the human warmth from the staff. They were incredible.

How were you able to gain the trust of the social workers?

We spent a long time with the staff talking about what we wanted to do, and my previous film really helped them understand our intention. There was full transparency, I told them exactly how and when and why we filmed the scenes we did, and we would never film anything without them agreeing. Ultimately, they also needed somebody to listen to their stories, their hopes and fears. I valued spending time with the staff and being there, and I think it was mutual, I guess that's the simplest answer.

Of course, we also gained permission from the authorities to be there.

You follow three children. I was wondering about the process of identifying them?

To start with the main thing is just spending time with the children and getting to know them, rather than trying to work out what the story would be. It was important to know that they were strong enough to be filmed, that they were resilient.

When I first meet potential subjects, I always film them looking into the camera in order to see how they react - it also reveals a lot of personality when someone stares right into a camera. When I filmed Eva she was smiling and crying at the same time, she was so complex, I knew she was someone I wanted to follow.

At first, I thought this would be a film about one kid spending the nine months at the shelter, but when Eva left, Sasha arrived, and she was completely different. I knew I needed to stay. Unlike a lot of the others Sasha was very calm – he seemed happy in her own cocoon. Next Kolya also came to the shelter. He was split between wanting to be one of the cool guys and acting up, but on the inside, he is a sensitive boy who just wants to take care of his siblings. Each of them had unique personalities, and unique coping strategies. They were each victims of circumstance but they also have a strength and power, a survival instinct.

There are three main subjects, but many other children appear in the film, how important are the friendships that you observed?

Love is a basic human need, and when children are deprived of family love, they turn to

friendships in order to survive. In these shelters, form attachments and friendships as deep and important as family bonds. The children learn from each other, and the younger kids look to the older kids for guidance.

Children are incredibly adaptable, but it is not unique to the children in this film, many people have “chosen family” when they do not have blood relations, or do not get what they need from their “real” family.

What did you do to prepare to film children?

We talked to NGOs, the social workers, the staff and their psychologists to be prepared. This is also my fourth film told from the perspective of children, and I have kids around the same age, so after the many talks with the professional and the close collaboration with the staff I felt prepared.

Then I just follow the kids in their posse, hanging out with them, getting to know them and always being honest. I went along on their terms and had a huge respect for their world, treating them with respect and listening to them. And when I kept coming back, they began to trust me.

The film rarely leaves the shelter. How did you make that decision?

The decision to stay mostly at the shelter came rather late in the editorial process. I had filmed a whole layer showing the reality of life outside the shelter and had followed one of the social workers visiting the homes of other kids. But it somehow didn't feel right, it felt truer to the kids to just experience their life from their perspective. But it was also important for us to show the society and to give an understanding of the situation for some of the families living in the region. We therefore asked Margo, one of the social workers to be the narrator and to in her words tell us the situation of the society and the long-term consequences of the war in this region.

There are small pleasures everywhere inside the shelter—crushes, small gifts and sparklers on Christmas. What is the significance of pleasure in your depiction?

I wanted to show that despite living in the shadow of war, they were also just like any other pre-teens experiencing crushes, learning dances, and being excited for Christmas. Those small moments of pleasure and glimmers of joy blooming in an otherwise bleak part of their lives help you to believe that there's always a hope for a better future. But at the same time, you recognize how heartbreakingly fragile they are – sparklers can be extinguished, crushes rejected - so the most important thing was always those close friendships.

Can you explain your decision to leave depictions of conflict and war in eastern

Ukraine out of the film?

I wanted to draw attention to the less visible, but no less tragic, long-term consequences that war has on the many families living near the frontline. The years of strain have worn the country down, the fabric of society is frayed, and larger endemic social problems – like poverty, alcoholism, addiction, unemployment etc. are out of control. We don't see the fighting, but I hope that by following the kids and experiencing things with them, we can show the costs.

I also wanted to avoid the specifics of the political situation because what is happening to society in Eastern Ukraine is not unique, there are many places in the world suffering the same consequences of armed conflict.

Can you talk a little bit about your decisions for how it was shot?

I do most of my own filming, I love cinematography and I value working in the intimate space that I can create when it is just me with a simple camera set-up rather than a whole crew. In my experience it makes it so much easier to establish that all important trust, and at some point the camera blends into our shared every day. That's when the magic usually starts happening, and I am able to capture the most emotionally raw and honest scenes.

I also need to be physically close to bear witness to the moments of close human connection, to capture them beautifully as possible and underline just how precious hope is in contrast to their stark realities.

Some of the scenes are so incredibly intimate. How were you able to be a bystander during those moments?

The most difficult thing with documentaries is when you become close to your subjects and spend time with them it becomes very tough to film situations that are hard for them. Some of the scenes in this film are the hardest scenes I have ever filmed. Some of the things I witnessed happened so suddenly and they were so heartbreaking, that I just wanted to lay down the camera and try to be a friend. But I realized that I was completely powerless in that moment, and that the best thing I could do for them was to carry their stories out into the world. So, I decided to do my absolute best to capture those moments with as much dignity, grace, and beauty as possible. That way, the scene can at least stand as some kind of testament to their feelings, a recognition of their humanity.

Can you talk about the editing process and how long did the film take to complete?

I went to the shelter around 10 times and each trip was about 7 days – and this was over a year and a half. Once the edit is taken into account the film took around three years to complete.

I worked with the editor Michael Aaglund, who also edited my previous films. It was a really difficult film to edit as we were working with around 250 hours of raw footage and multiple subjects. I felt an enormous sense of responsibility towards each of them and needed to balance each of their stories.

We wanted to show the cycles of the shelter, that the kids were only allowed to stay there for nine-month period, so there is some repetition, with kids arriving and leaving. But there's also a larger cycle – this is a chronic situation, the kids in these shelters grow up to see their *own* kids going into the same shelters. The staff at this particular shelter are working so hard trying to break this pattern, to give the kids the belief in themselves to want more and believe they can do better with their future.

Filming kids between homes must be incredibly difficult. How did the film take an emotional toll on you?

Making this film has been the hardest thing I have ever done, and I see it a huge responsibility to do justice to the children and the social workers. I had a lot of internal back-and-forth about the ethics of making a film like this, whether I should even be allowed to be in that space. I realized that there's actually two options here: Either I wouldn't make the film, and potentially nobody would hear about the kids, the staff, the shelter, or I would commit to them, amplify their voices and help carry their stories into the world.

Leaving the shelter was hard every time, feeling like I was walking away from them. I have two kids around the same age and coming home from the trips I would just hug them continuously, I was acutely aware of how fortunate they are, that I am.

KEY BIOS

SIMON LERENG WILMONT DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Born in Copenhagen, Denmark. Simon graduated as ^[1]_[2] a Documentary Film Director from The National Film School of Denmark in 2009. His first feature documentary film

The Distant Barking of Dogs (2017), premiered at IDFA (2017), and was awarded Best First Appearance. It has since then won 35+ awards worldwide, among these the McBaine Documentary Feature Award at San Francisco's SFFILM Festival, it was nominated for a European Film Award (EFA 2018), an Emmy (2020), and shortlisted for an Oscar (2019). The film also won a Peabody Award (2020).

As a director, his films also include Dormitory Master (2009), Above Ground, Beneath the Sky (2008), Chikara - The Sumo Wrestler's Son (2013) and The Fencing Champion (2014).

MONICA HELLSTRÖM PRODUCER

Monica Hellström is a member of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and was selected for Producer on the Move, Cannes 2020. She 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).

Recent productions include:

FLEE – Jonas Poher Rasmussen (2021) – Lead producer. Winner of Sundance World documentary award 2021, selected for Cannes 2020, winner of Best Nordic Dox at Gothenburg 2021 and the audience award at Vision Du Reel. Winner of The Gra Foundation & The Cristal Prize at Annecy 2021, Grand Prix Millennium Award, Best Film on Psychology & The Lower Silesia Grand Prix at Against Gravity, Poland. Nominated for 3 EFA awards. HE'S MY BROTHER – Cille Hannibal (2021), awarded a special mention at CPH:DOX 2021 and Dox:München 2021. FORGET ME NOT – Sun Hee Engelstoft (2019). THE DISTANT BARKING OF DOGS – Simon Lereng Wilmont (2017), Oscar shortlisted, awarded best doc at first appearance IDFA, Best Nordic Dox at Gothenburg and San Francisco Film Festival. Nominated for best doc at the European Film Academy. Winner of a Peabody award. THE DVOR MASSACRE – Georg Larsen & K. Vedsmand (2016). THE FENCING CHAMPION – Simon Lereng Wilmont (2014). CHIKARA - THE SUMO WRESTLER'S SON – Simon Lereng Wilmont (2013). MOONRIDER – by Daniel Dencik (2012)

Minor Co-Productions (selected)

LITTLE GIRL – Sebastien Lifshitz (AGAT Films, France, 2020). GOOD FAVOUR - Rebecca Daly (Savage Productions, Ireland, 2017). THE NILE HILTON INCIDENT - Tarik Salah (ATMO, Sweden 2017) Winner of best world cinema award at Sundance Film Festival 2017. VARICELLA - Victor Kossakovsky (Sant & Usant, Norway 2015) CONCERNING VIOLENCE - Göran Olson (STORY, Sweden, 2014) selected for Sundance Film festival and Berlin Film Festival.

A special thank you to the participants

Eva
Sasha
Polina
Kolya

Marharyta Burlutska
Olga Tronova
Anjelika Stolyarova

Thank you for sharing your life with us

A heartfelt thank you to the children and staff at The Lysychansk Center
for The Social and Psychological Rehabilitation of Children

Zhenya, Kristina, Yulia, Vitaliy, Vlad, Kyryll, Vlad, Artyom, Viktoriya, Vlad,
Zhenya, Masha, Ksyusha, Sasha, Maksim, Masha, Vanya, Sophiya, Tymur,
Kyryl,
Vika, Kyryl, Yevgeniya, Milana, Nadya, Olga

Nataliia Honcharova, Serafima Filipchenko, Nina Kravchenko, Liliia Konstantinova
Nataliia Kozmenko, Valentyna Bykova, Iryna Boiko, Elina Petukhova, Maryna Vasylieva

Inna Sychevska, Olha Yefimova, Maryna Bondarieva, Nataliia Startseva, Tetiana
Horpichenko
Helena Ivanenko, Helena Odilova, Alina Morhun

Directed by Simon Lereng Wilmont

Produced by Monica Hellström

Editor Michael Aaglund

Director of Photography Simon Lereng Wilmont

Line Producer & Assistant Director Azad Safarov

Co-Producers Sami Jahnukainen, Donkey Hotel
Tobias Janson, STORY
Darya Bassel & Vika Khomenko, Moon Man

MDR, Commissioning Editor Thomas Beyer
ARTE, Commissioning Editor Catherine Le Goff

BBC Storyville/Film Rose Garnett

Sound Designers Heikki Kossi, MPSE
Peter Albrechtsen, MPSE

Composer Uno Helmersson

Graphic Designer Martin Hultman

Executive Producer Signe Byrge Sørensen

Associate Producers Heidi Elise Christensen
Anne Köhncke

Associate Producer, Sweden Melissa Lindgren

Line Producers, Denmark Maria Kristensen
Esther Nissen

Production Coordinator, Ukraine Olena Rozvadovska

Production Manager, Ukraine Oleksandra Kravchenko

Production Assistant, Ukraine Olha Tuharinova

Production Assistants, Denmark Anna Aubin
Etta Andersen
Alberte Nielsen
Agnes Marie Kristensen

Production Assistants, Sweden Hannah Reinikainen
Victoria Machmudov

Post Producer Francesc Sitges-Sardà

Additional Editors Marion Tuor
Simon Lereng Wilmont

Re-recording Mixers Sune Kaarsberg
Peter Albrechtsen, CAS
Heikki Kossi, MPSE

Additional Re-recording Mixer David Barber, CAS

Sound editors Pietu Korhonen
Janne Laine
Mikkel Nielsen

Dialogue Editor Linda Forsén

Foley Artist Heikki Kossi, MPSE

Foley Mixers Kari Vähäkuopus
Lauri Marjamaa

Sound Effects Recordists, Ukraine Roman Homeniuk
Adolfo Avila

Dubbing Mix, Ukraine Mariia Nesterenko

Sound Facilities H5 Film Sound & Offscreen
Mix Facilities Mainstream ApS

Editing Consultants Niels Pagh Andersen
Janus Billeskov Jansen
Joshua Oppenheimer
Sine Skibsholt
Kaspar Aastrup Schrøder

Composer Uno Helmersson
Music recorded in ABHL Studio Stockholm
String Score preparation Adam Dahlström

Choir Score preparation Joaquin Garcia
Choir recorded in Symphonica Studio Prague
Violin Daniel Migdal
Cello Filip Lundberg
Music Production Manager Olavi Linna

Post Production Facility, Online, Mastering and Delivery Kong Gulerod Film
Post Production Supervisor Anders V. Christensen
Colorist Anders V. Christensen
Colorist Assistant Maria Klarlund

Digital mastering, Ukraine George Karamanov

Translators, Ukraine Anastasiia Perun
Iryna Zaitseva

Ukrainian audio description Accessible Cinema Initiative of Fight for Right
NGO

Psychologists Oleksii Geliukh
Nataliya Ursu

Business & Legal Katrine Schlüter Schierbeck, The Law Factory ApS
Justine Jacob, Focus Media Law

Legal, Ukraine Mykhailo Zakharchenko

Accountant, Denmark Gitte Randløv

Production Accountant, Sweden Helene Forssell
Production Audit, Sweden DeltaRev/Miralem Omerovic
Accountant, Ukraine Oleksandra Hlushchenko

World Sales Cinephil
Olivier Tournaud, Shoshi Korman
Noa Levy, Harry Vaughn

Publicists and Marketing Services Ryan Werner, Layla Hancock-Piper,
Cinetic Media

Freddy Neumann

Claudia Tomassini, Pierpaolo Festa, Claudia Tomassini +Associates

Thanks to everyone who helped make this film possible Olena Rozvadovska,
Charitable Foundation "Voices of Children"
Oleksii Reznikov - Deputy Prime Minister - Minister for Reintegration of
the Temporary Occupied Territories of Ukraine (2020-2021)
Oleh Nemchinov, Minister of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine
Rostyslav Zamlynskyi, First Deputy Minister for Reintegration of the
Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine
Gunduz Mamedov, Deputy Prosecutor General of Ukraine (2019-2021)
Yurii Pavlenko, Member of the Parliament of Ukraine
Mykola Kuleba, Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for Children's
Rights (2014-2021)
Serhii Haidai, The head of the Luhansk regional state administration, head
of the regional military-civil administration
Kateryna Bezghynska, Deputy Head of the Luhansk Regional State
Administration
Olga Lishyk, Deputy Head of the Luhansk Regional State Administration

Victor Levchenko, Head of the Patrol Police Department in Luhansk
Oblast
Oleksandr Zaiika, Head of the Lysychansk City Civil-Military Administration

Svitlana Lohvinenko, Department of Children's Service of Lysychansk city
military-civil administration
Oleksii Geliukh, Nataliya Ursu, Taras Bereznyi, Nazar Natalukha, Dmytro
Pavliienko
Dmytro Hordeiev, Oksana Yefremova, Iryna Nikolaienko, Oleksandra
Iziumska
Artem Ilin, Elvina Seitbullaieva, Olga Voitovych
Lise Løwholm, Jenny Örnborn & Boel Jonsson, Jakob Schaumburg
Ene Katrine Rasmussen, Monica Galeriu, Andreas Mølbak Henriksen,
Upright Music
Heidi Kim Andersen, Ane Mandrup, Mira Bach Hansen, Helle Lilienfeldt

Special thanks to Helga Isager
Fabian & Ingrid Isager Wilmont
Dorthe Rytter Feddersen, Randi Sveistrup, Lisbeth Samsø Schmidt
Glenn, Louis & Charlie Joe Weston
Klaus Kjeldsen, Arne Bro, René Lindekronne Christensen, Gregers Holm
Ida Sandvik, Åsa Thoden, Annika Pettersson, Sofia Thoden, Ilmari Kluukeri

Philippa Kowarsky

Music Rights Clearance, Ukraine Wladislaw Mitsowski
Olha Babaieva

Music

"Emotional & Slow" "Grustnyi dens"
from the TV-series 22 July Performed by Artik&Asti feat. Artem Kacher
Music by Uno Helmersson. Written by Dmitrii Loren, Artem Umrikhin
Permission from NRK. (c) & (p) BEST MUSIC LLC (by S.B.A. Music Publishing,
Warner Music Group Corp.)

"Grechka-Martini" "Bayu Bayushki Bayu" (Song Lullaby)
Performed by T-killah Performed by Sofia Baibakova
Written by Tarasov Alexandr Ivanovych Recording - Anton Baibakov
(c) & (p) Klever Group LLC (exclusive license)

"Oskolki" "Shchedryk"
Performed by Maksim (Traditional, Leontovych)
Written by Marina Maksimova and Alsu Ishmetova Performed by National
Chamber Choir „Madrigal-Marin Constantin”
(c) & (p) BEST MUSIC LLC. (by S.B.A. Music Publishing, Warner Music Group Corp.)
© National Chamber Choir „Madrigal-Marin Constantin” 2020

Clips and music screened from "Devil eyes"
Written and performed by Kevin Saurer, Jeffrey Saurer, Hippie Sabotage

Album Providence by iHip hop Distribution & The Orchard

Pegga Pig, Season 4, episode 50 "Grampy Rabbit in Space".
Written by Neville Astley, Mark Baker, Phillip Hall
© Astley Baker Davies Ltd / Entertainment One UK Limited 2019

The film was pitched at Nordic Panorama, Doc Barcelona & IDFA Forum

Produced by Monica Hellström, Final Cut for Real

Produced in Co-Production with Sami Jahnukainen, Donkey Hotel
Tobias Janson, STORY
Darya Bassel and Vika Khomenko, Moon Man

DFI
SFI
SES - Finnish film institue
AVEK
NFTF
USFA - Ukraine
MCIP - Ukraine
Yle
DR
SVT
Cinephil
Creative Europe
Danish Film Directors
MITTELDEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK
ARTE
IMS
VGTV
RTS
VRT
RUV
Against gravity
VPRO, Holland
RTV_slovinia (LOGO MISSING)
ERR
BBC

2022 © Final Cut for Real, Donkey Hotel Oy, Story, Moon Man, MDR, ARTE,
BBC

To take action please visit
<https://www.finalcutforreal.dk/a-house-made-of-splinters>