



Interview with Helena, Alexandra and Olle

Bioklubben interviewed Helena af Sandeberg, Alexandra Dahlström and Olle Sarri, all of which appear in the film *Blondie*.

Today, it's finally time for the premiere of Jesper Ganslandt's long awaited film *Blondie*. A film about three sisters Katarina, Elin and Lova who reunite in their childhood home to celebrate their mother Sigrid's 70th birthday. Broken promises, frustration and longing are at the heart of this beautiful, sentimental and dreamy drama starring Helena af Sandeberg, Carolina Gynning and Alexandra Dahlström.

Bioklubben had the pleasure of meeting three of the actors from the *Blondie* cast earlier this week. It was a committed, cohesive and amazing team consisting of Helena af Sandeberg, Alexandra Dahlström and Olle Sarri, who we met on a sunny morning. The energy flowed and there were many laughs as the actors shared their thoughts and experiences from filming. The results can be read below, enjoy! But first, we begin as usual with a short presentation of the actors.

Alexandra Dahlström debuted in *Truth or Dare*, but broke through with the role of Elin in *Show Me Love* in 1998. Next, we've been able to see her in *In Bed with Santa*, *Miss Sweden*, *Mañana* and numerous short films. In recent years, however, Alexandra has spent time writing scripts, directing and helping with casting. In *Blondie*, we see her as the lost little sister Lova.

Helena af Sandeberg was educated at Södra Latin Theater and the Actor's Studio in New York. This year, she has appeared in no less than four feature

films. *I Am Handyman, Not Even the Past, The Hypnotist* and now *Blondie*. Previously, we have seen her in *Cornelis, Iskariot, Hombres, Kim Novak Never Swam in Genesaret's Lake* and *Zingo*. She was also in *In Bed with Santa* and *Mañana* with Alexandra Dahlström. In *Blondie*, she plays the overachieving and outwardly successful big sister Katarina.

Olle Sarri debuted as a six year old in the TV series *Olles Mammors Morbror*. He studied at the Södra Latin Theater and a few years later got his breakthrough as a sketch actor in the television programs *Knesset, Bullen, Pentagon* and *Late Night with Luuk*. Through the years, we have been able to see Olle in movies like *Välkommen till festen, Together, If Not, Kidz in da Hood, A Midsummer Comedy* and *Flicker* which premiered in September of this year. In 2009 he took part in Jesper Ganslandt's last film *The Ape*, for which he became Guldbagge nominated for Best Male Lead. In *Blondie*, he plays Katarina's constantly questioning and distrusting husband Janne.

Blondie takes place in an incredibly beautiful setting! Where did filming take place?

Helena: In a mansion that was just outside Trollhättan.

Just how early did you start the project?

Helena: I got the part about a year before we started filming. A little over six months before filming, I started working on long improvisations with Carolina and Alexandra as these three sisters. We also hung out very, very privately to find the dynamic between the three sisters that Jesper was looking for. Though we didn't get the script until a couple months before, we received many catchphrases for our characters, how they would be and such.

What did it say as your motto, Helena?

Helena: Annoying, haha! There was a lot about how she was controlling and a "good girl." That she had an interior that may not be consistent with the surface. A high-achiever with an inferiority complex and chaotic soul.

Alexandra, what did you learn about your character Lova?

Alexandra: I was told that she does now know what she wants in life. That she never really manages to express herself and articulate what it is she wants to say. I think it's a very big frustration and sadness for her.

Olle, at what stage did you get into the *Blondie* production?

Olle: I came in much later; I never had any improvisation catchphrases. Oh yes, what the hell! I had a little note! One of those little Post-It notes, but I cannot remember what it said on it. But I remember that there was a lot of physical work that we discussed and tested.

Alexandra: World of Warcraft?

Olle: Exactly! Though it was a little more homework since I had to teach myself to play it.

How was *Blondie* presented to you?

Helena: I barely remember, but it's all about three sisters and a very domineering mother. I filmed the screen test and realized that I'd play the oldest; I was happy and a little bitter. For me, the big thing was that Jesper called me! I really liked what he had done in the past, so I just wanted to be a part of it. I said "yes" before I had read the script and everything because I really wanted to work with him!

Alexandra: I met Jesper for the first time a long time ago. Later I emailed him because we have mutual colleagues. Five minutes later he responded with his phone number, which led to a meet and greet session. It was 2008, and Jesper told me about a film idea he had, which was about a young mother shoplifting at a large shopping mall. I was told the basics of this movie and really longed for it. So I'm very happy that I got to be a part of it, because I had a good gut feeling at the time when we first met.

Helena: What's funny is that me and Alexandra have known each other since ***In Bed With Santa***.

Alexandra: 1999!

Yes, I read that you have some type of sisterly relationship in private. And you were both involved in the film *Mañana* too.

Alexandra: Yes, you're in the know!

Helena: Alexandra is the one I have filmed with the most and we have a sisterly relationship in private, which is very fun. When we tested for ***Blondie***, Jesper felt that there was something there.

Alexandra: The reason I get involved with acting, for me, is because it is often exposed and it can be very hard, I'm always chasing after this electricity that occurs in an art exchange. It was very strong when we both screen tested, like a tingle, and is very much like a love affair. It was powerful! It seemed logical and comfortable playing sisters with you, so I'm very pleased.

Helena: I felt it too! Then it was funny, because we were stained a little bit by our characters in the movie, so when filming was over, Alexandra was so happy that she exclaimed, "Oh finally you can start to be normal and like me again! And not just be annoyed with me, preachy and boring!"

Where did the inspiration for your characters come from?

Alexandra: Lykke Li.

Lova has some similarities to Hedvig in *The Wild Duck*.

Alexandra: Oh, it's funny you say that! I have some Chekhov-longing. The grass is always greener on the other side and you want it so very much, but it is difficult to find tools to meet what you long for in life. It is difficult to stand in the shadow of two very successful big sisters and a very eccentric, colorful and demanding mother. I think Janne and Lova have a kinship in that they are both a bit off. They are so calm and dry and don't fight for attention.

Helena: I took a lot from myself. There are many "good girls" who are trying to cope with everything. Then I looked a bit to Annette Bening in ***The Kids Are Alright***. Plus all the women I know who are overachievers, but it is just one big mourning on the inside, which comes out in the end. I have also tried to be a "good girl" and get everything together, but not always. When it begins to collapse it becomes chaos.

Alexandra: This is where it gets interesting!

We do, unfortunately, not know much about Lova in the film, but what did you know about her, Alexandra?

Alexandra: I know she has applied to the art college Central Saint Martin's in London which is very difficult. But she rips the announcement because she can't cope with it. I think it's very hard for her to decide what to do in life. She is 25 years old and that's when you should do some kind of summary of progress you've made so far. But I don't think many do it nowadays, because you have so much to choose from. This teen and adolescent, when one is in two minds, has become a lengthy process. I think Lova yearns for something but she doesn't know what it is and it's very painful. Though everything is inside. Lova is not as extroverted as Katarina and Elin are, but it explodes inward instead. And I actually think she is their half-sister.

Helena: It is not said in the movie, but we all know it.

Alexandra: Marie Göranzon always says "Sigrid had an affair with a fantastic artist and Lova is their love child." Very romantic.

Alexandra, you went from helping with the casting to getting one of the lead roles in the movie? How?

Alexandra: I know, how funny! I did not even know that I did a screen test! Here's how it happened; I read the script and said "Jesper, this blonde little sister who cries a lot and is very thoughtful, sentimental and dreamy. How did you do with the casting?" He just said "Yeah, well, you should do a screen test." And then I waited ages for an audition that never came. But it all happened when I got to act as co-star at Helena's audition.

What did you learn about the sisters' father?

Alexandra: Marie Göranzon is the best at that.

Helena: Marie has an eye on it.

Alexandra: He had a lot of money and then Sigrid got it. His portrait hangs in the salon.

Helena: I think Jesper was most interested in the relationship between the mother and her daughters and what it provides. And one should always remember that Jesper recognizes himself in all these sisters. When I asked who I was and if I was the big sister, he replied "You are all I have!" It's important to remember, because it's so easy to call *Blondie* a women's film. Had the film been about three guys, it would have felt much more about universal human order, how society looks today. But I wanted to point out that the film is not necessarily depicting just women, but a family.

What was the hardest part during filming?

Alexandra: To take up as little space. Though that may be a strange answer? Haha!

Haha! I understand how you think!

Alexandra: The hardest thing was to find the context and do very difficult things. Lova is very much connected with drama, life and death, great thoughts about life and those things that are difficult. It's very difficult to act depressed in denial, ironic or a little bantering. It's impossible. And then to do the role as depressed but with humor, it was difficult. Lova babbling and babbling, making a fool of herself. And she is doing the right things but making a fool of herself at the same time which takes a little sting out of it. Though I think that's nice. It was a little difficult but fun.

Olle: For me there were three things that were difficult. One was a physical thing, to gain weight and keep the weight on for the entire filming period. I ate a great deal and gained over 11 pounds in a few weeks.

Was it on your own initiative?

Olle: No, it definitely was not! This was Jesper Ganslandt. I'm quite fit in normal cases, which would be unsuitable for this role. So he felt it was necessary, which of course I agreed, although it was difficult. The other thing that was difficult was to go to bed at night in order to be alert the next day, because we all lived together.

Helena: Olle and I lived opposite each other.

Olle: Yes, and we were often hanging out in my room. It was often that many people were there. But I liked you so... otherwise I would have locked the door. The third thing that was difficult was to play a character who was bullied by four strong people, even though I thoroughly enjoyed it. I liked to play that role and being in the middle of all that.

What was it like to act with Marie Göranson?

Olle: Very good.

Helena: Fun! Wonderful! She is awesome!

Alexandra: Inspiring and very enjoyable because she is so experienced and fantastic fun. She is also very generous in sharing her experiences.

Was it not a little scary? She looks a little stern.

Helena: No, she is so warm. She is incredibly warm and loving. Acting with her was a blessing. In the industry, she is almost famous for taking care of young actresses, advising us and helping us. She is celebrated for helping a whole bunch of actresses now that she's turned 70. She's like that. And is completely unique I would say.

How is Jesper Ganslandt as a director?

Alexandra: He's very determined and I think that's a good thing.

Helena: He knows what he wants. He knows exactly what he wants, but gives a very wide margin to get there myself.

Alexandra: He's quite paternal.

Helena: I think that's fun. He is younger than me, but he still feels like a dad to me. He has some kind of authority. When I tried to get into the role of Katarina, he had a vast plan of how she would be, but let me get there myself.

Alexandra: I think it's very interesting to have male directors for films that portray young women. It requires some sort of cross-border deal, which takes both. That he's not frozen to his identity as a man. Jesper knows what one's own character is about and is not a man who will interpret a woman. I appreciate it very much, because it's easier to understand and express yourself when you know that he is with you.

Olle: He has, as I see it, a very good track of what he's up to. Everything is very well thought and worked out, I experienced it. He is a foundation of security and, as I see it, is always welcome to surprise. Trying to do things that I absolutely cannot imagine. And I fell as I often do with great directors, that they are also good actors. He walks carefully through all the characters inside and out. It is acting to Jesper, I experience it. Then he can shoot and handle a lot of stuff at once.

Helena: Yes, he feels very solid. He has an incredible ability to inspire people, to get them to perform at their best and get his vision made.

Alexandra: I want Jesper to be in a movie for real. I want someone to cast him.

Olle, you were in Jesper Ganslandt's previous film *The Ape*. How did the work for *The Ape* compare to *Blondie*? I read that you never got to read the script for *The Ape* and got instructions via an earpiece in your ear.

Olle: That thing with the earpiece is not entirely true. However, we tried it when we did the pilot for *The Ape*, for practical reasons, in connection with some scenes where I would be far away. While the earpiece was a simple solution, it was impossible to use it during some shots, and then we went to the microphone. Though it was an interesting experiment with the earpiece, we tried, but it did not work. But it was a journalist who snatched that up there. Though I usually do not deny things, whether they are true or not.

We did not call the shot that we had break systems sometimes so Jesper could talk to me. But I never replied, I just quietly listened and went on. In *The Ape*, it was also a standing desire from Jesper, "Surprise me!" I think that infuses him.

Unlike the starring role in *The Ape*, I play a supporting role in *Blondie*. Certainly a very good and well written one, but *Blondie's* an ensemble film. There's a very big difference between *The Ape* and *Blondie*, which I think is very cool. Cool is perhaps a trite word? But I like it! Before the filming of *Blondie*, I, unlike *The Ape*, read the script, which meant I could prepare myself in a completely different way.

What is your first or strongest movie memory?

Olle: Agaton Sax or any Chaplin film.

Helena: Fox & the Hound.

Alexandra: E.T! But that's impossible because I was not born then! I'm lying because I don't remember! But it must have been in Kista, because I lived there then. May I say one thing about the movies and childhood?

Sure, go ahead!

Alexandra: I'm very happy that my mom had a lot of Russian children's movies on VHS because they are so different.

How are they different?

Alexandra: They are fun! There are bears, princesses and epic adventures. Very theatrical. Russian animation is great fun! There is a really nice Snow White and a Russian Tom & Jerry called "Watch It!" It's about a bunny that always runs away from a wolf, which in turn is always hurt. It is a kind of love story that goes bad all the time.

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