

“I Was Totally Blown Away”



Alexandra Dahlström had her breakthrough in the generation of the film “Show Me Love” and is best known as an actress. Now directing her feature debut with “All We Have Is Now,” a documentary about the punk band Vulkano.

Three young girls are sitting in a basement in Stockholm. Something is going to happen here, something special and historic. Their fingers on instruments, improvising music pieces and talking

about possible songs. Behind the camera is a muffled laugh belonging to Alexandra Dahlström. We know her best from movies like “Miss Sweden,” “Blondie,” and especially “Show Me Love”. But now she's in a different place, she's holding the camera and has a story to tell. The story of the punk band Vulkano.

It all began three years ago. Through a friend Alexandra received a tip that some of the members of the band Those Dancing Days had started a new project. “It will obviously be wicked.” Alexandra is curious and heads to the venue in Stockholm.

- I was totally blown away. Both from the music but especially in the dressing room afterwards. It was like finding a new family, a new context, she explains.
- It felt so right. A total surprise. It was a mutual decision that we should do something about it. When I mentioned that I wanted to shoot a documentary, they were overjoyed.
- We relied on each other directly. I explained that I would take care of them, respect their privacy. At the same time, I was clear that it wasn't a commercial for Vulkano. The conflict and the pain has to come forward.

The result, “All We Have Is Now”, Alexandra Dahlström's feature debut as a director. Through the film she sometimes pops up in the background, as a reflection in a mirror or a window.

- When I saw the material, it was clear that I was leaking through a lot. But it worked, it was like a presence to the film's documentary feel, she says.
- Though when I was drawn into the emotions and cried it didn't need to be recorded. I do not want to tell the audience how to feel. Emotions should belong to them, not come from me.

“All We Have Is Now” focuses heavily on the three band members of Vulkano yearning for something bigger, something grander. Rehearsal in Skanstull is mostly a catapult to all the amazing, beyond the familiar. The theme is familiar from Alexandra's previous films.

- I never thought of it, but there it is! It's Chekhov. “The Cherry Orchard,” “The Three Sisters”. I grew up with Russian culture so it might come from there, explains Alexandra.
- Aaah, no. Ouch, poor thing!

A little boy stumbles and falls on the pavement next to the restaurant where we sit. His hands are scraped and he yells out.

- It's over, you'll see. He'll soon get a juice and it'll be okay, says Alexandra comforting. Although she doesn't know the boy.

She reasons why her work often revolves around human longing, whether she stands in front of or behind the camera.

- When we reach for something that is beyond our reach, we also grow as people. Things happen and become a forward motion. It can turn over so you are never satisfied and it goes with anxiety. But there is a curiosity, a hunger that is important, she says.

“All We Have Is Now” took three years to create, from concept to first screening at “Way Out West” this summer. Alexandra thinks it's no coincidence.

- Vulkano played the perfect music for the documentary I wanted to do. Since it feels like I kidnapped the documentary medium to teach me to write the script. It's a perfect way to see how things are

when they are for real, natural and unadorned. Reality is weird that way.

Most people associate you with acting. Why did you choose to direct a film, rather than play a role yourself?

- I do it because it provides the most energy and is most important, that maxes everything somehow. All that I can do if I can do the entire film, from beginning to end. It becomes its own universe that I get to know inside and out. I have been close to the camera since I was 13-14, and I always wanted to know more about the technology behind it.
- I have a friend, Anna Melina, who makes music. And does it by herself, without anyone interfering. That attracts me. I will be so much less dependent on it.
- Since creating is also an anxiety, there is a responsibility in a different way.

A wasp flying around interferes, landing on the edge of Alexandra's plate. She is distracted as the wasp flies away only to return a moment later and circulate around her food. Suddenly, Alexandra snaps her fingers.

- They flip when they think it's a beak!

We give up, the wasp is not going anywhere.

About halfway into the movie Rebekah, one of the members, announces that she intends to leave the band. The words are liberating and they all cry together. It's beautiful that the experiences together are now the story of the two, not three. The event is also one of the film's most important crossroads.

- It was really tough. Both for them but also for the entire film project. We suffered enough of an identity crisis.

Who do you hope will go and see "All We Have Is Now" at the movies?

- Guys! I want them to think, 'How can it be, and there is nothing strange in that.' And really, girls. We must understand that it is not about competing against each other, but about doing things together.

Alexandra's mother is from Russia and she herself speaks Russian fluently. She explains that the language is close to her, it's personal. She regularly goes to Russia, mainly Moscow. As a 17-year-old she travelled with director Lukas Moodysson to be a translator on his film "Lilja 4-ever."

- Because the cast was so young, only 14 and 11, I could maybe help do the safer scenes that otherwise were heavy and uncomfortable.

Up like the sun and down like a pancake. So many say they feel that way after watching "All We Have Is Now". The film's intimacy invites the viewer to Vulkano's innermost dreams and fears.

- When the project was nearing the end, it was a strange feeling. An emptiness and an almost panicky feeling of 'what have we done, what have we made?'

In 1999 "Show Me Love" won the prize for "Best Movie" at the Guldbagge Gala. But the gala was best known for Alexandra, then 15-years-old, when she used the occasion to make a speech against patriarchy and the old man's empire. The incident caused her to become a person that many associate with strong views.

- I'm passionate about things, care about things. Sometimes maybe too much. I'm such a handful to

have in the classroom. Talking all the time.

Is it important to have passion?

- The entire thing with the Guldbagge Gala had such strong symbolism. Through the years I have been very ambivalent to it. But when a young girl came up to me last year and praised me for the speech, I was so damn happy.
- When I see a status on Facebook, when someone complains that the parties are trying to convince her of what she should vote for, that lights it. What is politics if not trying to convince? It's fun if you are passionate about it.

Where did your passion come from?

- I have grown up with a fiery mom who talked a lot about politics and a father who cared about vulnerable people. It has been important to me, establish a self-confidence.

Alexandra tells of a rather special block sale of personal items that she was involved in recently.

- I started to build a nice relationship with the buyer and it almost became like a kinship. He is from the same place as my family. It was quite a complicated business and good when it was finally done. Afterwards, I was almost a little shaky, I felt an empathy and compassion that was pretty special.
- He told me about his daughter and seemed to be a nice person. We talked about everything. Travel, interests, and eventually we came to the election. When it came up that he was a Sweden Democrat I was totally shocked and terribly sad. He felt almost like a grandfather and I was totally unprepared to have a debate with him.
- Had he really been a relative the issue may not have come up. That a person I have established a relationship with, and seemed like a man with a good heart become so brainwashed scared me.

The man developed his view of society and long expositions on racism. Alexandra became quite cold.

- He started with bizarre conspiracies about refugees living in luxury. I tried to counter that human life can never be measured in money. Our society would be nothing without all the people who have come here over the years. I wanted to do everything to convince him not to vote for SD.

We discussed the topic of racism and people who are drawn to its parliamentary branch. Alexandra is clear that it is important to distinguish between humans and opinions.

- I was disappointed, but I understood he was not an evil man. I just hope he came away with something, and wondered why he was going to vote for SD.
- The problem is that even now, as we sit and talk about it, we give racism new strength and energy. We are moving into our safe little bubbles, we never meet these people in everyday life. I think it's time that we stop giving this nutrients and space. We must focus on finding alternative narratives about the kind of society we want to see. The remedy for the Sweden Democrats is not to discuss their policies, it is to discuss what policies we want to see instead.

Alexandra Dahlström

Age: 30 years.

Lives: Stockholm.

Currently: The movie "All We Have Is Now" and reading a screenplay.

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