

***Neander Jin* – A comedic look at where we came from, and where we are headed**

By Cynthia Lechan Goodman

Some images resonate and remain with us. We want to see them over and over again. *Neander Jin*, an award-winning film, has been connecting with people just like that. At its core, connections are a cave man and a self-directed, collegiate young woman of today. The film is mesmerizing, a thoughtful *Beauty and the Beast*, sci-fi, comedy of manners, political and social satire, that sticks with viewers young and old, leaving them talking, challenged, and laughing about *Neander Jin*. And that is because relationships and connection is only part of this unusual, multilevel, but balanced exploration of people, notoriety, seriousness, humor and passions.



To Florian Steinbiss, the psychology major turned filmmaker who wrote and produced this German/American joint adventure film with the venerable Jeff Hixon, the co-writer and executive producer of the film, the audience reactions are "so enthusiastic that it even scares me. They want to see the film more than once, and in some cases again and again and they can't stop talking about it. They always discover something new. Some people already called it a cult movie." But Steinbiss, with total humility and incredulousness at this outcome, is still only experiencing the long creative path of the 15 years it took to make this film, and the elements of the 50 some years of life that brought him to this place of recognition with his first feature film.

How did this particular confluence of elements in *Neander Jin* come about? Probably it's due to some predestination, the particular gifts and fascinations of Steinbiss, and both good fortune and good decision making in his procedures.

Why Neander?

We have all been curious kids who roleplay wanting to be a Dora, Hannah Montana, astronaut or famous baseball player, just being someone else. From childhood, Florian Steinbiss wondered about the Neanderthal Man whose original cranium remains in the city actually named Neanderthal close to his birthplace in Bonn, Germany. The city and the bones tugged at his fancy, drew him there again and again throughout his childhood and school days to sit and spend time with "him". He recalls always questioning, "Where are we coming from? How was life in the early days? Who existed before us?" And he considered what might be a "common memory".

People may view primitive humans as the tabular Rasa, needing to evolve into all that we modern society have become. But looking at the Neanderthal and the amazing strengths and power that moved him through life, is a fascinating consideration as presented in *Neander Jin*, in which there is a look at those primitive urges that may rule our lives, even to the point of bringing truth and honesty to our lives.

Explained Steinbiss, "If we would not have tried to perceive truth and truthfulness at least at some point in the movie, we would have missed a unique opportunity and had done a lousy job. It would have been a misuse of great resources."

Germans Do Have a Sense of Humor

Never totally serious, Steinbiss features humor, and a unique comedy of the German people as he reveals, "My fellow countrymen and women are full of humor, which often is not a common perception abroad." And so *Neander Jin* has a raucous and riotous cast of characters including: precocious female college students, straight forward maintenance workers, patriot chiefs, two

questionable professors, crazy doctors, hired guns, anthropologists, tabloid personnel, sensational TV, and the gamut of spoofs on satire, social criticism, silent movies, experimental film, the surreal and the absurd!

Humorous, entertaining, exhilarating, this film is filled with those magic moments, and more as each individual brings his or her own perspectives on humor to the film. Says Steinbiss, "Humor is either a point of view or a healthy reaction to the absurdity, hardships, and fun of life." His exploration of the relationships are both serious and comedic. Is the Neanderthal man the ideal woman's sweet sensitive man? Was he driven away by circumstances or social context? What was the real love and what is love and what exploitation? What is the purity and honesty of one's life and servicing of one's needs about? "Jeff Hixon and I had a good time writing the script and acting out all the different roles," comments Steinbiss.

Steinbess wrote his first newspaper article at age 10 and it was satire. Satire and comedy is the way "to bear myself and continue living with myself with critical solidarity". And indeed, one might be reminded of the wonderful satires such as Jack Arnold's *The Mouse That Roared* or Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove*. Steinbess however, keeps himself always busy following his own inclinations, only looking at several films for reference point styles. Favorites include *Police Academy*, *Hanabi* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest*.

Rules of Attraction

Not to be satisfied with social commentary and humor, *Neander Jin* toys with the surreal with the return of the Neanderthal man, much like the return of dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*, in amusing and serious ways. As Steinbiss explains, "What is the mutual attraction between the Neanderthal man and the modern female student? How does everybody in the film use and misuse each other? How do different people react, the media, the general public? And what do their reactions reveal about them and society, and then, what's the reaction to *their* reaction?" Additionally, "Who is the real primitive, the returned caveman or the present Homo Sapien?"

Allowing for these multi levels of relationships and subplots to blossom in the film required the insights of Steinbiss and Hixon to allow the characters space for this to develop and unfold. One such subplot sheds light on our present-day phenomena of the "creation and dismantling of stars by the media." Steinbiss describes his method of "having a closed eye on the characters and allowing more distance by x-ray point of view on current cultural phenomenon, social commentary, all becomes in the end one point of view." Even in his own small world, Steinbiss describes a related social phenomenon like this, "Sarah Muelhause, who portrays Barbara in *Neander Jin*, is the up and coming German actress with international potential. When we won the INDIE for Best of Show, it was covered nationally by the *BILD-Zeitung* and Sarah and I were invited to the olden Baer ceremony at the end of the recent Berlin Film Festival. The flashing lights on the red carpet were hers."

A Great Collaboration

Neander Jin was an idea that Steinbless proposed to Jeff Hixon in January 1, 1996. Hixon's interest in European history, Steinbess' interests in showing the world the beautiful Rhineland, the humor of German people, and the quirky idea of time travel, grew into a script that took years of development in Germany and America between the two men. When Hixon reported, "the quality is amazing, we can do it," Steinbiss bought a camera and computer with a final cut program and the real adventure began.

The script attracted very special and perfect professionals. British acting legends, American top actors, they plunged into it "changing vacations and lowering usual fees to be a part of it" Steinbless reports. Then with careful processes of making a "simulation" movie to see what they had and adjust the script, Steinbess "saw the characters really coming off the page with an

exceptional cast" and upgraded everything, getting the best they could in specialists, sound, location, director, effects, and color.

In truth, viewers have a good time, they laugh, they are entertained, maybe overwhelmed by the multi level story telling and various genres and styles, which is a great thing. Steinbiss feels satisfied that his audiences are smart, "they don't have to leave their brain at the cash register while watching a comedy." And *Neander Jin* surely gives audiences a comedy with meat.

Moving Forward

So what happens to *Neander Jin* now that it has just been finished? To begin with, it has won the coveted Indie for Best of Shows. "Audiences are sure to enjoy this movie" was the judgment of the Indie Fest. As a first time filmmaker, Florian recognizes the unique opportunity a non-traditional film festival such as the Indie Fest has afforded him. "Winning the Indie was a great experience," says Steinbiss. "You can apply to nearly every festival in the world. Even some of the relative small ones get thousands of applications, and in the end a lot of festivals seem to be a closed shop. I was very happy to receive a prize like this. It is also good for the festival. It shows filmmakers that their work is carefully judged and that they have a good chance to win with an original and well-crafted film."

Steinbiss plans to devote the next year and a half to showing and selling the movie worldwide in the traditional way. For him, things take time, and he's patient and willing to spend whatever time it takes. "There is no reason to rush," he explains. "The post production also took 1 1/2 years. I'll do festivals first, theatrical distribution, DVD BluRays, cable TV and the net at some point. It was a huge investment. We can't give it away for next to nothing right away."

But along with getting *Neander Jin* out to people who want it and should see it, he is already at work on his next films, including a sequel for *Neander Jin* which is, as Steinbiss put it, "Even more fun."

What does Steinbiss say to aspiring independent filmmakers? "Limit your locations and the number of actors. Write for locations that you can get and for actors you know and can afford. Don't write the dialogue too early. Put every scene on a card and get your three acts together. Write the dialogue at the very end. Rewrite as much as you can. Make a reading of the script with actors. Buy a camera and an editing program, if you can shoot real high definition on film rate. Later you can go to NTSC or PAL. Get a good sound guy. Be sure to be able to get the music rights before you put it in the film. Start your music research early. And, don't use your own money!"

To the audiences of *Neander Jin*, Steinbiss says, " [They] can enjoy the healing powers of the comedy, and talk afterwards about the film, life, or even better, love."

For More Information:

Mr. Florian Steinbiss

Constant Flow Productions

chef@neanderthalman.de

www.neander-jin.de