



Torfinn Rønning Sanderun clutching the Best Fiction award at Amandus 2008

dvoted.net

— young Nordic filmmakers have a place to go

Robin's not having a good day. A few minutes ago he was enjoying himself with his best school friend and the world seemed safe and good. Then, out of nowhere, these two big boys appear, looking for trouble.

Childhood innocence is a tenuous gift...

Robin, a three minute drama short made by fledgling Norwegian film makers Torfinn Rønning Sanderun and Eirik Saeter Stordahl won the Best Fiction award at Amandus 2008, a Nordic festival dedicated to short film. Put Eirik and Torfinn's ages together and you don't quite get to 40. This is an auspicious start for two of the star members of dvoted.net, a pan-Scandinavian website offering comprehensive resources to young and aspiring filmmakers from the region.

"Our research before launching dvoted.net revealed that Nordic youth wanted three things: to be 'discovered', to show their work to each other and to get easy access to professional advice," says 28 year old Swede Pontus Hummelman, the site's Project Manager. Once the Nordic Council of Ministers was convinced by the research, the project was handed over to a Committee made up of representatives of Film Institutes from the five countries and the site went up very quickly. It was 2004. True to the wishes of the young filmmakers, it offered them a platform to showcase shorts, documentaries and animated shorts which they made using various resources available in their countries. The site became rapidly populated by a community of young enthusiasts and a large number of short films. dvoted.net peer reviews also became an effective way of testing new work and building a network of contacts.

The dvoted.net online mentoring scheme was also an immediate success. "I was struggling to find a structure that would convey the story effectively in three short minutes," says *Robin* script writer and co-director Eirik. With the help of dvoted.net, he sent off the first draft to Norwegian script editor Katrina Valen, who was signed up as a dvoted.net mentor. "Through the site, she sent me back four pages of notes!" he adds. "They were very valuable to me. They helped me condense the story and make it clearer and sharper."

Through the Academy pages of the site, dvoted.net also offers a wealth of written resources, posts or background material on every aspect of the filmmaking craft. Young filmmakers find it useful, especially those who see the making of shorts as a chance to experiment with the best possible production standards. Eirik and Torfinn both saw it this way, approaching the production of *Robin* as if it were a feature. "We shot in Super-8 because we wanted to set the story in the 70's and needed a slightly retro feel to the film which DV could not deliver." Undaunted by the technical challenge, the pair also rented professional equipment to produce tracking shots to professional standards. For both these difficult technical options they found a wealth of advice and guidance on dvoted.net.

dvoted.net runs like your typical 21st century de-centralised web-based service. While Pontus sits in an office in Stockholm, his main editor is based in Copenhagen and there are local editors in each of the participating countries. “There is no self-conscious sense of our belonging to a ‘Nordic’ culture. Our societies and core values are very much alike, and we understand each others’ languages, but at the end of the day, dvoted.net is just a pragmatic response to demand, not an attempt at imposing some sort of vague Nordic ideology on the young,” reflects Pontus, whose favorite film is not a Bergman classic but Wim Wenders’ *Himmel über Berlin (Wings of Desire)*. Eirik further expands on the pragmatism. “Norway alone is too small to provide a film support network of significance. dvoted.net helps pull resources together from all the countries in the region so we end up multiplying opportunities and playing inside a much bigger talent pool.”



Career tracks – Eirik, Torfinn and assorted volunteers on the shoot of *Robin*

Eirik also points out there is a tradition of high quality, ambitious films made on a pan-Nordic scale, with attendant improvement in budget and production values. He sees Joachim Trier’s youth drama *Reprise*, a 2006 Norwegian film with a Swedish cinematographer, a Danish editor and a mixed cast, as the most recent example of this successful trend. “Initiatives like dvoted.net help get into the early habit of seeing the industry we’re in as a regional one, enabling us to have bigger ambitions as filmmakers,” he adds.

It all sounds very upbeat, but what part does dvoted.net play – if any – in helping Nordic film hopefuls step up into a professional career in the film industry? “This is a key part of our strategy,” says Pontus. “We list on the dvoted.net homepage all the shorts festivals that can give visibility to the work produced by the members and support them with applications. And when a film wins, as *Robin* did, we publicise these achievements on the site. This creates a useful feedback system which industry professionals can use for talent spotting.”

The ‘Members of the Week’ section of the site supports this promotional strategy and though the site is still a little young to assess its impact, a few good news stories are beginning to emerge. 28 year-old Manuel Concha, a dvoted...er... devotee, has just been made an award by the Swedish Film Institute to direct *Bashtu*, his first feature. Concha first came to the attention of the Swedish fund after his short film *Stunder* was published on dvoted.net, to critical acclaim from his peers.