



74 Internationale
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Panorama

sex

A FILM BY
DAG JOHAN HAUGERUD



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ABOUT THE FILM



LOGLINE

Two chimney sweeps living in monogamous, heterosexual marriages both end up in situations that challenge their views on sexuality and gender roles.

SYNOPSIS

Two men, both in heterosexual marriages, have an unexpected experience that challenges them to reconsider their understanding of sexuality, gender, and identity. One has a sexual encounter with another man, without considering it either as an expression of homosexuality or infidelity, and discusses it with his wife afterwards. The other finds himself in nocturnal dreams where he is seen as a woman, stirring confusion and leading him to question how much his personality is shaped by the gaze of others.

SEX is a warm and inquiring drama about how intimacy and freedom operate in modern relationships and gender roles, penned by Dag Johan Haugerud. Haugerud has established himself as one of Norway's foremost directors, following the critically acclaimed films BEWARE OF CHILDREN, THE LIGHT FROM THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY, and I BELONG. Jan Gunnar Røise and Thorbjørn Harr shine on the big screen, in characters whose understanding of themselves is challenged in fascinating, liberating, and at times frightening ways.

SEX is the first part of the trilogy SEX DREAMS LOVE. These three freestanding films by Dag Johan Haugerud all revolve around desire, identity, and the longing for freedom.



SEX, DREAMS, LOVE

A TRILOGY.

In the words of the director:

With SEX, I wanted to make an entertaining, amusing, and thoughtful film about two chimney sweepers who experience unexpected challenges regarding sex and gender.

The film explores the boundaries we establish in our lives around sex and gender, and whether they are expansive enough to encompass all of who we are and have the potential to be. I wanted to point out that sexuality and sexual identity are not always connected. Neither are our feelings of love and our sexuality, even though we often think they are. The film is also about gaining more freedom in how we express ourselves physically and emotionally without hurting the people we care about.

I also wanted to show how rapidly emotions can shift from enthusiasm, ecstasy, and joy to shame when discussing sex. It's intriguing how, even in modern society, questions about sex and sexuality carry so much anxiety and moral weight.

I chose to depict two seemingly heterosexual men who have a strong, confidential friendship that allows them to discuss intimate experiences and seek support in each other's perspectives. Male friendships of that kind may not be as common as one would wish, but they are certainly a possibility. One of the things I believe film should do is not only reflect the current state of things, but also how things could be. Introducing an engaging idea in the mind of the audience, a new way of thinking that might lead to further thoughts and conversations long after the film has ended. That is what I see as the true potential of cinema.

Finally, the film also explores the living conditions of a big city, showing how our surroundings impact our daily lives. We navigate our way through towering buildings and bustling traffic, an experience that can be both exhausting and harsh. But it can also be beautiful, as we are trying to show in this film by documenting the nuances of everyday life in the city.

Interview with the director **DAG JOHAN HAUGERUD**

In your opinion, what is SEX about?

I think the film is about sex and sexuality. It examines whether the boundaries we set up in our lives when it comes to sex and gender are wide enough to contain all that exists within us and all that we have the potential to be. In that sense, I suppose it's also a film about how to grant oneself a greater degree of freedom. At the same time, it's also about masculinity, friendship, and religion.

In SEX, we meet two men reflecting on their sexuality. Can you expand on what you wanted to explore through this?

Something I find important is offering a concrete contribution to the debate surrounding gender identity. What is gender identity exactly? How does it feel to have a gender, and what is it that, emotionally speaking, distinguishes the respective experiences of being a man, a woman, or non-binary? We constantly exert limits on our own lives and those of others. Can something I perceived as distant from me actually be a part of who I am? These are questions the men in the film attempt to find answers to through conversations with each other.

I believe that one of the primary roles of film is to initiate discussions that viewers might not engage in by themselves. This film is an attempt at making life feel bigger for those watching.

Did you intend to say something about sexual orientation in this film?

It's worthwhile to assume that people's sexual experiences are more wide-ranging than one might initially think, as well as more diverse than what the categories they identify with make space for. Sexuality is more amorphous than what tends to be represented. It also shows that there's a difference between sexual practice and sexual identity. It isn't a new idea, but I still find it interesting to examine the implications of this.

The main characters in SEX work as chimney sweepers. Why did you give them this profession?

When I write a script, I always find it fun to pursue a range of professional fields. I was intrigued by chimney sweepers, because it's a profession I know little about and that is shrouded in a mythical aura. Many people have a positive impression of them, and they are thought to have a strong sense of community. There's even a European chimney sweeper festival that takes place annually in Italy. People from various nations meet up there and walk in a parade wearing their countries' individual uniforms.

Few women do this work, although it is increasing, so I suppose you could call it a traditionally male-dominated industry and therefore a good starting point for conversations about male gender roles. Moreover, making a film about chimney sweepers gives rise to the possibility of filming scenes on roofs, with plenty of shots displaying the sky and fantastic views.

You have worked with both Jan Gunnar Røise and Thorbjørn Harr on multiple occasions, and you specifically wrote *SEX* with them in mind. What makes you feel that they suit this film so well?

I wrote this film with them in mind because I wanted to work with them, and because I wanted to try to create roles that could challenge them and give them an opportunity to explore new sides of character work. After all, when you work with actors as talented as they are, you want to give them the chance to sharpen their craft further. Besides, I enjoy being in the same room as them because they challenge me all while cultivating a fun atmosphere. That's really important, not just for me, but for everyone on set.



THE CHIMNEY SWEEPERS - WHO ARE THEY?

We asked the actors Thorbjørn Harr and Jan Gunnar Røise about the characters they play in SEX.



Thorbjørn Harr:

Usually, when I work with a character, I quickly understand what sort of person he is and why he says what he says. It wasn't like that in this film. My character wakes up from a dream in which he meets David Bowie, and Bowie gazes at him as though he were a woman. He grapples with the emotions that the dream gives rise to and questions the boundaries he adheres to, as well as whether gender really holds sway over who he is. I remember asking Dag Johan the following question: Are you sure you want me to be the person who does this? In this film, I offer something that feels true without really understanding what's going on. And I think that's a good thing. My character spends so much time grappling, so I think it makes sense that I, as the person playing the role, also wonder what on earth it's all about. My character could have been much more predictable, with more conventional feminine traits, but we chose to take it in a different direction.

One of the things I find the most interesting in SEX is the friendship between the two main characters. Men are perhaps not thought to be particularly adept at expressing themselves, but we can if we want to. I had a similar thought when I watched a dance performance a little while ago. The possibility of conveying emotions through physical movement exists in us humans, if we are willing. It isn't easy to become a dancer, but merely seeing what others are able to do can be inspiring for one's own life. Similarly, men may not sit around chatting all that much, but it's possible if we are willing to. And I think we ought to do it more. I really hope many men go and see this film.

Jan Gunnar Røise:

I've worked with Dag Johan on multiple occasions, but I don't think he's ever pushed me this far in an emotional direction before. My character has cheated on his wife with a man, and tells his friend, who is also the manager in the chimney sweeping company they are both employed in. I had a different understanding of my character before we began rehearsing, that he was a bit tougher, but while we were filming I found myself becoming more and more vulnerable—and in more and more of a predicament. It was cool. Having sex with a man became much more complicated and had far bigger consequences than both the chimney sweeper and I had initially imagined. Eventually, a deep and painful rift opened up between the character's sense of identity and the feeling of freedom he had felt.

There is also something very exciting about the environment we're acting in. Both in terms of the newly constructed buildings and highways, as a symbol of everything we're pushed into against our will, as well as the chimney sweeping profession itself. Perhaps it is more difficult to examine gender roles in an environment that tends to be male-dominated? For me, SEX is a drama of ideas guided by the question "what if"?



BIOGRAPHIES

DAG JOHAN HAUGERUD (born 1964) is a screenwriter and director, known for his critically acclaimed novels, feature films, and short films. His feature film *I BELONG* (2012) won the Amanda Award as well as the Canon Awards for best film, director, screenplay and supporting actress (Laila Goody). He had a sweeping success with *BEWARE OF CHILDREN* (2019): in addition to the Dragon Award for best Nordic film and actor (Henriette Steenstrup) at the Gothenburg Film Festival, it also won a record amount of nine Amanda Awards following the international premiere in Venice, including for best film, director, screenplay, and male lead. It also won the Film Critics Award, the Norwegian cinema managers' Sølvklumpen award, and the Nordic Council Film Prize. Dag Johan Haugerud has also written several novels published by the Oktober publishing house, and has created a number of critically acclaimed short films. *SEX* is the first film in the trilogy *SEX DREAMS LOVE* to have its premiere.





JAN GUNNAR RØISE (born 1975) made his debut as a feature film actor in 2000, with the film *THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS*, and has since participated in the making of over 30 films. He is best known for his roles in *HAWAII, OSLO* (2004), *COMRADE PEDERSEN* (2006), *A COMPLETELY AVERAGE DAY AT WORK* (2010), *IN ORDER OF DISAPPEARANCE* (2014), *BEWARE OF CHILDREN* (2019), *PØRNI* (2021), *PERFECT STRANGERS* (2022), and most recently *POWER PLAY* (2023) in the role of Reilulf Steen. He attended the Norwegian Academy of Theater in 2000, and has since been cast in a number of productions at the National Theater. Jan Gunnar featured in Dag Johan Haugerud's first motion picture *THE PROFESSOR AND THE ORIGAMI GIRL* (2005), and received both the Canon Award and Amanda Award for his role in Haugerud's *BEWARE OF CHILDREN* (2019).



THORBJØRN HARR (born 1974) made his debut as a feature film actor in 2003, with the film *DESTINATION MOSCOW*, after a number of television roles when he was younger. He has since featured in around 30 films. He is best known for his roles in *MARS & VENUS* (2005), *VIKINGS* (2013), *22 JULY* (2018), *KIELER STREET* (2018), *BEWARE OF CHILDREN* (2019), *THE TUNNEL* (2019), *PERFECT STRANGERS* (2022), and most recently *POWER PLAY* (2023) in the role of Kåre Willoch. He graduated from the Norwegian Academy of Theater in 2000, and has since been cast in a number of productions at the National Theater. He has won both the Per Aabel Honorary Award (2005) and the Hedda Award for Honorable Artistic Achievement (2012). Thorbjørn featured in Dag Johan Haugerud's first motion picture *THE PROFESSOR AND THE ORIGAMI GIRL* (2005). He has been nominated for three Amanda Awards, winning best supporting actor for Haugerud's *BEWARE OF CHILDREN* (2019).



SIRI FORBERG (born 1970) currently serves as artistic director at the stage art festival Høstscena in Ålesund. As an actress and performer, Forberg has participated in a number of theater productions. She has participated in television and film productions like 22 JULY (dir. Pål Sletaune) and BEWARE OF CHILDREN (dir: Dag Johan Haugerud). Forberg has for a number of years worked as an artistic producer and dramaturge, and has launched a series of international collaborations in the field of performing arts.



Birgitte Larsen (born 1981), educated at the Norwegian Academy of Theater, has had an impressive career marked by a number of notable roles at the National Theater. She has also been cast in a range of film and TV productions, including EN UDØDELIG MANN (2006), THE BOTHERSOME MAN (2006), I BELONG (2012), and GRITT (2021), for which she was nominated for best actress.



MOTLYS is an independent production company that has produced motion pictures like *BIG BOYS DON'T CRY* (1995), *COMRADE PEDERSEN* (2006), *THE MAN WHO LOVED YNGVE* (2008), *NORTH* (2009), *OSLO, AUGUST 31ST* (2011), *I BELONG* (2012), *LOUDER THAN BOMBS* (2015), *BEWARE OF CHILDREN* (2019), *NINJABABY* (2021), as well as the television series *HOME GROUND* (2018-19) and *POWER PLAY* (2023-24). Motlys films have competed at all the big international film festivals, including Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Sundance, and Toronto. The company has received 55 Amanda Awards for its feature films. In the fall of 2023, Motlys celebrated its 40th anniversary, making it Norway's oldest existing production company.

MOTLYS and VIAPLAY GROUP present in co-production with OSLO FILMFOND

SEX

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Costume Designer IDA TOFT

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