

A NEW THRILLER FROM THE
DIRECTOR OF **NOKAS**

AND THE PRODUCERS OF
HEADHUNTERS



**AKSEL
HENNIE**

WES BENTLEY
STEPHEN LANG
STEPHANIE SIGMAN
ANE DAHL TORP
JØRGEN LANGHELLE
JONATHAN LAPAGLIA



PIONEER

A FILM BY ERIK SKJOLDBJÆRG





A FILM PRODUCED BY
FRILAND

IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH
PANDORA FILMPRODUKTION
GARAGEFILM INTERNATIONAL
NORDISK FILM
FILM I VÄST
MRP MATILA RÖHR PRODUCTIONS
LES FILMS D'ANTOINE



PIONEER

“When Your Greatest Adventure Turns Into Your Worst Nightmare.”

BASED ON HISTORICAL EVENTS

PIONEER is set in the early 80's, at the beginning of the Norwegian Oil Boom. Enormous oil and gas deposits are discovered in the North Sea, authorities aim to bring the oil ashore through a pipeline 500 meters deep. Petter, a professional diver, is obsessed with reaching the bottom of the Norwegian Sea. Along with his brother Knut, he has the discipline, strength and courage to take on the world's most dangerous mission. But a sudden, tragic accident changes everything. Petter is sent on a perilous journey where he loses sight of who is pulling the strings. Gradually, he realizes that he is in way over his head and that his life is at stake.



THE DIRECTOR

Erik Skjoldbjærg (1964) is a talented and well-respected Norwegian director and writer. After attending the National Film and Television School in London (1990-1994), Erik Skjoldbjærg got a lot of international attention with his feature directing debut “INSOMNIA” (1997), which he also co-wrote. The film was very well received, and sold to more than 20 countries worldwide. The American remake was

directed by Christopher Nolan, starring Al Pacino, Hilary Swank and Robin Williams. Erik Skjoldbjærg was credited as screenwriter for the remake. In 2001, Skjoldbjærg left his native Norway for Hollywood, and directed the adaptation of the popular Elizabeth Wurtzel novel “PROZAC NATION”, starring Christina Ricci, Jessica Lange, Anne Heche and Lou Reed. Erik has directed several television series,

commercials and corporate promotion films in Norway as well as several award winning short films. His last film “NOKAS” was released in October 2011, and became a box office hit in Norway (250 000 admissions.) Erik was awarded “Best Director” at the 2011 Amanda Film Award for this film, the highest honour for directing in Norway.


DIRECTORS NOTE AND VISUAL CONCEPT

“PIONEER” is a portrait of a Norwegian deep-sea diver in the early 1980’s, set within the thriller genre. I’m drawn to stories told through the protagonist’s point of view. In “PIONEER” I looked to create a character that is searching for a truth, which threatens his ability to comprehend reality. Thus the distinction between paranoia and conspiracy is at times blurred. True to the genre, the film has a protagonist and a number of potential antagonists.

In terms of genre, we aimed to reinterpret the American 70’s thriller. Growing up in the 70’s, I was heavily influenced by films such as “The Conversation”, “Chinatown” and “All The President’s Men.” These films inspired not only my aesthetic approach to filmmaking, but also my interest in genre films. I believe genre films can be used successfully to explore character dilemmas for a wider audience. I wanted to reinvigorate the approach I used in my first film “INSOMNIA”, by directing a character driven thriller.

To me, much of filmmaking is about giving an audience the physical experience of going somewhere different. In “PIONEER” we wanted to convey the physical and emotional impression of what it’s like to work at the bottom of The North Sea. Inspired by research, we aimed to contrast the claustrophobia of the diving bell and helmet diving with the enormity of the clear, dark sea. I took great inspiration from the way sci-fi movies deal with infinity and scale. We also aimed to make the sea blacker than the traditional notion of blue sea.

As “PIONEER” is inspired by real events, the film also has an historic aspect. I grew up in a country that had discovered enormous oil and gas resources that we didn’t know how to utilize. Experiencing the change in our national mentality through the period of blooming wealth served above all else as my inspiration to direct “PIONEER”. To me, it’s ultimately a story about the ways sudden wealth changes you.



**ERIK SKJOLBJÆRG:
“PIONEER TAKES
PEOPLE WHERE
THEY HAVE NEVER
BEEN BEFORE”**

After its successful launch in Haugesund, Erik Skjoldbjærg's (pictured) Norwegian thriller "PIONEER" opens today nationwide on 160 screens. The director spoke to us.

How did the project land on your desk?

Erik Skjoldbjærg: The producer, Christian Fredrik Martin, came to me several years ago. He had heard of the idea of North Sea divers from two Norwegian film graduates, Kathrine Valen and Cathinka Nicolaysen. The angle that appealed the most to me was to depict the pivotal moment in our history when we had discovered oil but didn't know if we could secure the resources. I grew up in the seventies and I remember that those were totally different times. I was interested in showing how we managed to secure those resources to become a rich nation. Another key element is that my first film, "INSOMNIA," was a thriller told from the main character's point of view and I wanted to explore this type of thriller again.

You share the writing credits with no less than four people, including the Swede Hans Gunnarsson (Arn) and

Norwegian Nikolaj Frobenius (co-writer of "INSOMNIA"). What were the major challenges in the writing process?

ES: I started working with Kathrine and Cathinka. We did a lot of research. It was like a filtering process. We soon decided we would take all researched material and mold it into a thriller. The challenge was huge. After working on a few drafts we turned to Hans Gunnarsson who has lots of experience working on different genres. He helped develop the lead character of Petter (played by Aksel Hennie.) Then I collaborated with Nikolaj Frobenius who helped build the plot into the thriller genre. The research was complex because the pioneering oil period is something that not everyone wants to be associated with. There is an ongoing conflict between some of the divers and the government, who are supposedly responsible for some sort of neurological traumas that the divers suffered after the experiments. So the subject is still controversial in Norway. The case is currently under review at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

We spoke with the divers and researched various events and accidents that took place. We used all of this as a template for

our film and condensed it into a simple story for the audience to follow. But a lot of elements are based on reality.

There are two aspects to the story: a heroic aspect with divers wanting to push their limits, and a darker side of human exploitation and sacrifice linked to the financial ambitions at stake...

ES: Yes we decided to show today's audience what it must have felt at the time. The divers then had a mentality similar to people doing extreme sports today. They were adrenaline junkies who wanted to push their limits. At the same time, we tell the story from the point of view of a diver who discovers the power struggle between the Norwegian government and the international oil community about who is to control the oil.

In terms of casting, was Aksel Hennie in your mind when you wrote the script?

ES: Yes he was. Aksel was very involved from the very start. Besides the fact that he is a very emotional actor, he has a screen presence and understands the process of filmmaking. He was a fantastic collaborator throughout the film.

Was it difficult to nail down the three US actors?

ES: It's hard for Scandinavian films to attract US actors in supporting roles. The only way to do it is if you wait until just before the shoot. Wes Bentley came in four weeks before shooting, Stephen Lang two weeks before and Jonathan LaPaglia one week before. It was truly nerve wrecking.

Claustrophobia and paranoia are portrayed in most of your works and in this film again. How did you work with your production designer and cinematographer to create those feelings?

ES: Basically the film shows that in the seventies, there was a lack of concern for security, unlike nowadays. All technical equipment of the time is no longer in use. We had difficulty finding sets such as gas chambers and diving ships, so we ended up building it all. Our gifted production designer Karl Júlíusson has done major sets for Kathryn Bigelow so he had the experience and the authority to deal with this challenge on a Scandinavian budget. Similarly the costume designer Anne Pedersen did a great job. Then, as the film is a co-production, I was working with an inter-

national crew and ended up taking on Swedish cinematographer Jallo Faber. It was one of the best creative choices I ever made because I really think that our idea to recapture the seventies feel in Scandinavia was the right one. We also did research on industrial diving. We decided to create claustrophobic spaces and infinite spaces because that's the reality for North Sea divers. We looked at top shots and angles from above because the film is about people at the bottom of the sea and at the bottom of the hierarchy. We were also inspired by sci-fi movies that deal with infinity and scale in an interesting way.

In terms of location shoots, I think you went to Iceland to shoot some underwater scenes?

ES: We had the Finnish underwater team from Matila Röhr MRP Productions. They said the clearest water you can get with sand at the bottom is in a lake in Iceland where you have water from a glacier being filtered by lava sand that comes into this underwater trench. It's incredibly clear and perfect for underwater filming. We shot other underwater scenes in Germany.

The film opens in Norway and has been selected for Toronto. Are you anxious to see how the international audience will react to this Norwegian tale of underwater heroes and conspiracy thriller?

ES: Above all, the film takes people where they have never been before, on an epic adventure. We'll see how people will react in Toronto, but signs are that there is an audience as the film has been pre-sold to several territories including the US and Japan.

What's next for you? Any interest to go back to Hollywood where you have a name as the creator of Insomnia that was eventually remade by Christopher Nolan?

ES: I have several projects. Among those is a script that I'm developing with Bjørn Olaf Johannessen, who wrote Everything Will Be Fine for Wim Wenders. Our project is based on Gaute Heivoll's novel 'Before I Burn', itself inspired by the true story of a pyromaniac who started dozens of fires in Southern Norway in the summer of 1978.

As for Hollywood, I've been there. If the proper project comes along and I can work freely on it, then I will consider it. I'm always open to explore new things. We'll see in Toronto!

Written by Annika Pham

Director Erik Skjoldbjærg



THE ACTORS



AKSEL HENNIE (1975, Norway) - *PETTER*

Aksel Hennie is one of the most profiled actors in Norway. After having graduated at the Norwegian National Academy of Theatre in 2001, Aksel has worked as an awarded director, writer and actor. However, his main success has been as a film actor: He has played the lead role in a number of successful Norwegian movies.

Selected films: *HERCULES* (filming), *THE LAST KNIGHT* (post-production), *HEADHUNTERS* (2011), *A SOMEWHAT GENTLE MAN* (2010), *MAX MANUS* (2008), *COLD LUNCH* (2008), *UNO* (2005).



WES BENTLEY (1978, USA) - *MIKE*

Wes Bentley won raves for his role in Sam Mendes' Academy Award-winning *AMERICAN BEAUTY* (1999). He went on to star in films such as *THE FOUR FEATHERS* (2002), *THE GAME OF THEIR LIVES* (2005) and *GHOST RIDER* (2007) before he made his stage debut in 2010 with Nina Arianda in David Ives's award-winning play *VENUS IN FUR*. In 2012, Bentley starred in the international megahit *THE HUNGER GAMES*, and earlier this year he could be seen in *LOVELACE*. Bentley is currently filming in Christopher Nolan's next film *INTERSTELLAR*.



STEPHANIE SIGMAN (1987, Mexico) - *MARIA*

Stephanie Sigman pursued acting after a successful modeling career in her late teens and started out in Mexican television. In addition to theatre work, she then starred in *RÍO DE ORO* (2010) and had the leading role in the Cannes Selected *MISS BALA* (2011). She recently played the role as Eve in the American remake of the television series *THE BRIDGE*.



JØRGEN LANGHELLE (1965, Norway)
- *LEIF*

Jørgen Langhelle graduated at the Norwegian National Academy of Theatre in 1993, and has since played a series of roles in both national and international films, television and theatre. Some credited films are ELLING (2001), I AM DINA (2002), KAUTOKEINO REBELLION (2008) and the American remake of THE THING (2011). In 2002, he was awarded The Aamodt Award for his great achievement in Norwegian cinema.



ANDRÉ ERIKSEN (1975, Norway) - KNUT

André Eriksen started the rap group Warlocks in 1992, becoming one of the pioneers of the burgeoning Norwegian Hip-Hop scene. They won the Alarm Award for one of their albums in 2002, in addition to several Norwegian and Scandinavian championships in breakdancing. In 2010, he played one of the leading roles in NOKAS by Erik Skjoldbjærg.



JONATHAN LAPAGLIA (1969, Australia)
- *RONALD*

Most recently, Jonathan LaPaglia played the leading role in THE SLAP, which was nominated for a BAFTA, won five AFI Awards and a Logie. He was also nominated for an Australian Film Institute Award for Best Lead Actor in a Drama Series for his role. LaPaglia has played starring roles on COLD CASE, THE DISTRICT, WINDFALL and SEVEN DAYS, where he was nominated for a Saturn Award for Best Genre Actor.



STEPHEN LANG (1952, USA) - FERRIS

Stephen Lang has built a distinguished career on the stage, television and in film. His credits include GODS AND GENERALS (2003), PUBLIC ENEMIES (2009) and THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS (2009). In 2009 Lang starred in the highest grossing movie of all time, James Cameron's AVATAR, for which he won a Saturn Award. He has received several prestigious awards and nominations for his roles and endeavors.



ANE DAHL TORP (1975, Norway) - PIA

Ane Dahl Torp is Norway's leading actress. She won Liv Ullmann's Prize of Honors and was the shooting star at the 56th Berlin Film Festival. She has also won three Amanda Awards. Some of her successes are COLD LUNCH (2008), RESTLESS (2006), COMRADE PEDERSEN and DEAD SNOW. She got attention with the TV series CODENAME HUNTER (2007). She is currently playing the lead role in Bent Hamer's forthcoming feature film 1001 GRAMS.



THE MUSIC COMPOSED BY AIR

The French electronic music duo AIR has composed the music for "PIONEER". AIR'S debut EP, *Premiers Symptômes*, was followed by the critically acclaimed album *Moon Safari*, that was a best seller all over the world.

AIR have often collaborated with American film director Sofia Coppola. They composed the music to her debut film "THE VIRGIN SUICIDES" in 2000. AIR drummer and former Redd Kross member Brian Reitzell put together the soundtrack to 2003's "LOST IN TRANSLATION", including one original contribution by AIR titled *Alone In Kyoto*. The soundtrack for Coppola's October 2006 film "MARIE ANTOINETTE" featured a track by AIR titled *IL SECONDO GIORNO*. In 2010 AIR composed an original modern soundtrack for the Méliès silent film "LE VOYAGE DANS LA LUNE" (A TRIP TO THE MOON.)

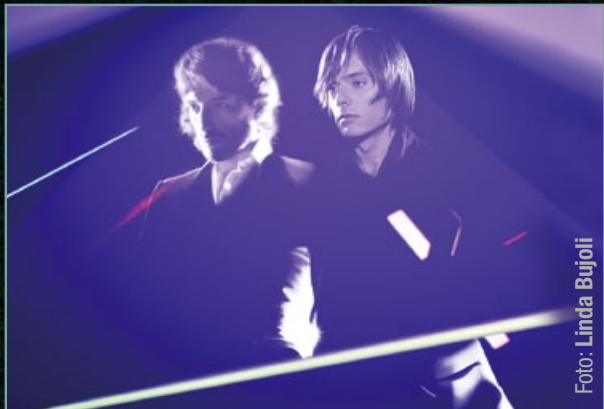


Foto: Linda Bujoli

INTERVIEW BY KJETIL LISMOEN:

What was it about the universe and the story in "PIONEER" that attracted you?

We were attracted by the industrial-aquatic world of *Pioneer*. It's a story based on real facts, which made our musical work even more intense. It's been really interesting to transform beautiful images of divers floating in water and epic adventure into sounds. But the movie also deals with a unique story of guilt and the search for the truth. The Norwegian aspect of the movie is quite unique and exotic to me as well.

Your music works wonderfully, especially under water, where we get the feeling of the endless ocean and the smallness of the characters. Could you tell us about the process of finding an expression/theme for this specific universe deep down below the ocean waves?

We call ourselves Air, but our name might as well have been "water" or "liquid". It just sounds less poetic. We wanted to

translate the feeling of danger and suspense as well. And this musical theme was a new element in our harmonic world. We've also been inspired to use real strings and horns to expand the feeling of a large, powerful sound. And we had to think about a musical dark hook, a simple phrase that comes and goes to suggest tension. I've been thinking a lot about Spielberg's "JAWS." Unusual music for us.

Could you tell us about a specific scene in the film that you are especially fond of – and a little bit about the process of making it?

At the end of the movie, Petter returns to his brother's widow's house and abandons his search for the truth. He decides to get on with his life despite his brother's death. So we came up with some music to suggest the release of tension – a transparent melody and a beautiful theme. I loved recording this part. It's more like pop. It's a moving piece.

You have written music for films before PIONEER – among them Sofia Coppola's "LOST IN TRANSLATION," "THE VIRGIN SUICIDES" and "MARIE ANTOINETTE", as well as the silent film "LE VOYAGE DANS LA LUNE (A TRIP TO THE MOON.) How would you compare your approach to these films?

Each adventure of recording music for films is different. It depends a lot on our relationship with the movie director. Basically music for films serves to increase and polarize emotions coming out from the story unfolding right in front of your eyes. It's the catalyst of what I call the mysterious chemical reaction of cardiac coherence. You're not there any more. You're in the movie. It's not about doing something interesting or poppy or catchy. It's about emotions, about reaching people's heart in the right manner. And everyone shares a common culture through music. In the occidental world, we all almost all react the same way to sound. Almost. So the range of emotions in

this movie is vast. You've got fear, happiness, glory, but not a lot of sex, I'm afraid. But love is there, so as musicians we felt that we had to build a larger vocabulary of musical tools to reach our emotional target. It's freedom. But the movie is the boss. I think that through Air's pop music, we've gained access to certain things like beats, keyboards, electronics that we could turn into film music. And we also have the orchestra that we've used before in the past, so I feel very excited about organizing all of these elements to work together to make soundtracks. I feel lucky to work with this.

I guess the freedom you have when making music for movies varies. Sometimes there are more restrictions, other times, like with "A TRIP TO THE MOON" you seemed to have greater freedom. What do you prefer? In what way do restrictions trigger creativity?

Well, when the director is dead, like Georges Méliès when it came to "A TRIP TO THE MOON", it was kind of a spiritual experience. While we were recording, we had the feeling that he was with us, giving us the energy to make the right music for his movie. And little by little we felt how all the actors from 1900 came to life. We think of people from the past as old, but in fact they were really young, and they were making a stunning movie. They were like punk rock party people from 1900, and believe it or not, we felt their presence in the studio at some point.

On the other hand, when you have a living director like Erik, his indications and desires (more accurate words than "restrictions", I'd say) pushed us to do things we weren't thinking of, and make different music from what we usually do. In that sense I really appreciated the "Pioneer" experience.

You've said in an interview with NPR that 'between "MOON SAFARI" and the original soundtrack of "A TRIP TO THE MOON", we learned how to compose for images.' Could you explain that a little?

There was a big misunderstanding about Air at the time. Because our music was very soundtracky, people assumed we were good soundtrack composers. While in fact it's a very different job to actually compose something on top of an existing image. We started getting better at that in the wedding scene in "LOST IN TRANSLATION". And then I got more and more interested in the synchronization between sound and image, making them work together as a team. But when you do that, the downside is that the music needs



to be listened to. That's why we'll never be true soundtrack composers, because we always want the music to be cool – with or without the movie.

You also said: "We don't make rock music, but psycho-acoustic music, ambience. That's why our music works so well for voyages and original soundtracks". I guess "PIONEER" is such a voyage?

I love rock a lot. I think one of my favorite bands of all time is "The Stooges", and when we were young, we had a rock band called "Orange." But at the age of twenty, I understood that I couldn't be French, born and bred in Versailles, and still play Rock. It was ridiculous. Then I forgot everything I wanted

to be, and started to make music that came naturally to me. That's when Air's style came to life. And the most important thing is that when I was a child, I started watching films on TV before buying Rock records. I started looking at cowboy movies with Ennio Morricone's soundtracks, James Bond and American TV shows like "Starsky & Hutch". So soundtrack music certainly had a bigger influence on me than "The Stooges". I just decided to express it.

Sometimes "PIONEER" reminds me of the paranoid thrillers of the 70's in American movies, like "THE CONVERSATION", the "PARALLAX VIEW". Did you have any references to other movies when you started working on this film? In

general: Do you get inspiration from film music? And from films?

Yes, certainly. Alan Pakula was our main influence in creating a kind of dreamy atmospheric suspense soundtrack for "PIONEER".

What is the relationship between your "regular" music and film compositions? In what way do they feed off each other?

When a melody turns up in the studio, it naturally becomes either an instrumental track or a pop song. It decides for us. That's the big difference compared to our friends in the English pop world. They feel they have to transform every idea into a song. But we never do that. We let the music decide.



F R I  A N D (delegate producer)

Friland AS was founded in 2002, and during the ten years the company has been in operation, it has established itself as a serious and reliable player in Norwegian feature film production. The company's main focus is to develop and produce feature films for the European market using new talents in the industry. Friland has created a network of partners in Scandinavia and Europe through co-productions and collaborations with foreign production companies. By continuously working on project development, financing and production, the company has released eight feature films.

Selected filmography:

2011: HEADHUNTERS – Director: Morten Tyldum
(co-producers: YellowBird / Norway, Nordisk Film / Denmark, Degeto / Germany)

2011: SONS OF NORWAY – Director: Jens Lien
(co-producers: Nimbus Film / Denmark, Götafilm / Sweden, Film I väst / Sweden, Les films d'Antoine / France)

2009: UPPERDOG – Director Sara Johnsen (co-producer: Riva Filmproduktion / Germany)

- Nominated for the Nordic Council Film Prize and the European Film Prize.
- 5 Amanda prizes, Norwegian Film Festival Haugesund.

2006: URO – Director: Stefan Faldbakken
• Selected for "Un certain regard" Festival de film, Cannes.
• Northern Light prize, 2006 Stockholm.

2005: VINTERKYSS – Director: Sara Johnsen
• Grand Jury Prize, AFI Film Fest.
• Norwegian entry for the Academy Awards 2006.

FILM FACTS

Title: Pioneer

Original Title: Pionér

Production Year: 2013

Genre: Thriller

Director: Erik Skjoldbjærg

Cast: Aksel Hennie, Wes Bentley, Stephanie Sigman, Stephen Lang, Jonathan LaPaglia, Andre Eriksen, Ane Dahl Torp, Jørgen Langhelle

Cinematographer: Jallo Faber

Art Director: Kalli Júlíusson

Editors: Frida Eggum Michaelsen, Jonas Aarø

Screenwriters: Hans Gunnarson, Katharina valen Zeiner, Cathinka Nicolaysen, Nikolaj Frobenius, Eriks Skjoldbjærg,

Music Composed and Performed by: AIR

Sound Designer: Frédéric Le Louët

Language: English/Norwegian

Duration: 106 minutes (25 fps)

Format: DCP

Screen Ratio: 1:2.35 -colour

Sound: DSR 7.1 and 5.1

Country of Origin: Norway

Producer: Christian Fredrik Martin

Executive Producer: Asle Vatn

Production Company: Friland Produksjon AS

Co-Producers:

- Raimond Goebel
- Mimmi Spång and Rebecka Lafrenz
- Lone Korslund
- Jessica Ask
- Marko Röhr and Ilkka Matila
- Antoine Simkine

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