



**NEW RELEASES**

# Tove

## **Director Zaida Bergroth on 'Tove'**

*Tove Jansson is such a popular figure around the world, but especially in Finland. Can you tell us about your first encounter with her work?*

I have this book, *Finn Family Moomintroll*, autographed by Tove. It has my name on it, and she even drew a little Snufkin on the first page. That's my treasure – I got it when I was a little child. All these stories have always been in my life.

*Did the process of working on this biopic change what Jansson meant to you?*

I thought I knew quite a lot about Tove Jansson but there were so many things that came as a surprise for me. I've always admired her, but she felt a bit distant somehow. My admiration was a challenge in some ways, as I needed to be able to look at her from the eye-level. After making this film, I feel so much closer to her.

We focused on the ten years in her life that preceded her breakthrough with the Moomins. In a way it was easier to relate to the life of this younger Tove, struggling with her artist identity, trying to find her voice and place in the world. It widened my picture of her; I got to discover her as a complex person, with her own insecurities and self-doubt but also with a willingness to love all the way. When she fell in love with Vivica Bandler, she fell really hard. There are so many sides to Tove. I hope the film will widen the way others view her as well.

*Talking of Vivica Bandler, she is such a hypnotic character in the film.*

*The spectator falls equally hard under her spell, alongside Tove. How did you go about portraying such an unconventional love story?*

Vivica Bandler could have a movie made about her. She was a wonderful woman and an artist as well. She was married but had many lovers. She really loved women. This relationship with Vivica Bandler was life-changing for Tove; it affected her deeply. Vivica's unconventional style felt refreshing, modern and free. Yet in the end, she was still attached to the protections and façade her heterosexual marriage provided her.

Tove was more of a romantic and wanted to love and be loved openly, even though it was 1940s Finland. She was so happy to fall in love with a woman. Not enough people know about that aspect of Tove's life. Vivica later wrote in her autobiography that her inability to love Tove back as fiercely was one of her biggest regrets. The power dynamic between them definitely shifts during the film.

*Tove is not your first experience dealing with real-life characters. How does this project fit into your larger work and what was most challenging about taking on the genre of the biopic?*

*Maria's Paradise* (2019) looked at evangelical 'cult' leader Maria Åkerblom. Though it was based on a real character, it was still a pure fiction film. We took all the liberties we could.

This is my fifth feature; they all have been very different experiences. But there is something about the all-female team I had for this project that feels special, and also fits the project. We worked pretty closely with Sophia Jansson, Tove's niece and the creative chairwoman of Moomin Characters Ltd. She encouraged me to make a film about a real person, not an icon, to dare to make my own version of Tove. She read our scripts, commented, but never demanded anything. I had all the freedom, but still we could fact-check.

I was quite unsure to take on this project in the first place. I feared biopics and the ways in which they can restrict one's creativity. But I realised, working on a biopic, you are still an artist, you still need to make your own version of that person. After you've done all the research, you have to chisel your way through that. My mother was an artist and occasionally painted portraits... She was my inspiration to find my own colours in portraying Tove. Nobody can tell about the real Tove Jansson; the only way you can respect the person you are portraying is by offering a unique perspective.

*Something I find fascinating in biopics is also how they should be about capturing a spirit, a certain kind of energy rather than just biographical facts...*

Yes, exactly. I was after a certain energy and spirit that I imagined belonged to Tove Jansson. She loved joy; she loved splendour; she was playful. During the casting, I was looking for an actress with a similar childlike willingness to go after adventures, tendency towards melancholy, as well as flirtatious nature. All these qualities came almost naturally to Alma Pöysti, and I am so glad she accepted the role.

*The reproduction of postwar Finland's historical setting, the atmosphere, the lighting is very evocative. What was it like to work with director of photography Linda Wassberg and your other collaborators on set?*

It was interesting to try to recreate Helsinki after the war, but luckily there are places which are well preserved, like the theatre, for example, or the original home of the Jansson family. We made Tove's studio ourselves. This studio was really the heart of the film, where she worked and where she loved.

Linda is a wonderful cinematographer. From our early discussions, we wanted the film to be as alive as possible. We did not want it to have the wrong kind of nostalgic or sentimental feeling but to appear somewhat light, alive and intimate.

Shooting on 16mm film, it gave us this beautiful texture and light. There is a softness and rawness to film – it has its own poetic mind somehow; you can't control it. We studied Jansson's paintings to find our colour palette. We really wanted to immerse ourselves in her world.

*What are you working on currently? What should audiences be expecting from you on the horizon?*

I've been working so much in the past years that I'm enjoying this moment of slowness. It's a lovely place to be for a moment, not having any idea of what will happen next.

**Interview by Chrystel Oloukoï, [bfi.org.uk](https://www.bfi.org.uk), 18 March 2021**

TOVE

Director: Zaida Bergroth  
Producers: Andrea Reuter, Aleksí Bardy  
Script: Eeva Putro  
Story by: Eeva Putro, Jarno Elonen  
Cinematography: Linda Wassberg  
Editor: Samu Heikkilä  
Production Designer: Catharina Nyqvist Ehrnrooth  
Costume Designer: Eugen Tamberg  
Make-up Designer: Riikka Virtanen  
Sound Designer: Micke Nyström

Cast

Alma Pöysti (Tove Jansson)  
Krista Kosonen (Vivica Bandler)  
Shanti Roney (Atos Wirtanen)  
Joanna Haartti (Tuulikki Pietilä)

Finland/Sweden/Denmark 2020  
100 mins

The screening on Sat 10 Jul 14:30 will feature a pre-recorded intro + Q&A with Tove’s director Zaida Bergroth and lead actress Alma Pöysti. Presented by Reclaim The Frame, a mission to bring ever-greater audiences to films by women to widen and enrich cinema’s perspective of the world, run by charity Birds’ Eye View, and backed by the BFI’s Audience Fund.

Director Zaida Bergroth appears on the Feminism in Nordic Cinema Panel as part of the **Woman with a Movie Camera Summit** 17 and 18 Jul.

NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

Nashville

Continues from Jun

Ultraviolence

Continues from Jun

Supernova

From Fri 2 Jul

Another Round

From Fri 9 Jul

Jumbo

From Fri 9 Jul

Tove

From Fri 9 Jul

Deerskin

From Fri 16 Jul

Girlfriends

From Fri 23 Jul

Mandabi

From Fri 23 Jul

THE CINEMA OF MÁRTA MÉSZÁROS

The Girl (Eltávozott nap)

Mon 5 Jul (preceded by ‘Introducing Márta Mészáros’ talk); Fri 16 Jul 20:50

Binding Sentiments (Holdudvar)

Tue 6 Jul 20:50; Sat 17 Jul 15:20

Don’t Cry, Pretty Girls! (Szép lányok, ne sírjatok!)

Wed 7 Jul 17:40; Sun 18 Jul 18:40

Woman With a Movie Camera Presents: the World Restoration Premiere of Riddance (Szabad lélegzet)

Sat 10 Jul 17:30 (+ pre-recorded extended intro by Márta Mészáros); Wed 21 Jul 21:00

Adoption (Örökbefogadás)

Mon 12 Jul 18:00 (pre-recorded intro by Selina Robertson, Club des Femmes); Thu 22 Jul 20:30

Nine Months (Kilenc hónap)

Tue 13 Jul 17:40; Sun 25 Jul 12:30

The Two of Them/Two Women (Ők ketten)

Wed 14 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 18:10

The Heiresses (Örökség)

Sun 18 Jul 15:20; Tue 27 Jul 20:30

Diary for My Children (Napló gyermekeimnek)

Sat 24 Jul 14:10 (+ pre-recorded extended intro by Márta Mészáros); Wed 28 Jul 17:50

Diary for My Loves (Napló szerelmeimnek)

Sat 24 Jul 17:30; Sat 31 Jul 20:30

Diary for My Father and Mother (Napló apámnak, anyámnak)

Sat 24 Jul 20:45; Sat 31 Jul 14:40

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