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## Anjorka Strechel

by [Rachael Scott](#)  
27 May 2011

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In *My Friend From Faro*, Anjorka Strechel plays a young woman who pretends to be a man when she falls for a pretty teenage girl. As their relationship becomes more serious, she's forced to declare her true identity to her girlfriend and herself.

The 28-year old German born actress gives an intriguing performance and has become a big hit in Russia winning a 2010 Golden Eagle Award (Russia's equivalent to the Oscars) for Best Leading Actress for her role in *The Edge*. She lives in Berlin.

Rachael Scott spoke to her about her about Nana Nuel's intriguing film.

### Please tell us about yourself...

I started acting when I was nine years old at Theater Lüneburg where I played the ape Herr Nielson in *Pippi Longstocking*. After my high school diploma I went to acting class at Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg and then I worked at Theater Osnabrück for four years. During that time I played the main female part in two feature films *My Friend From Faro* and *The Edge (KRAI)*.

This Russian production was nominated for the 2010 Golden Globes as well as Russia's entry into the Oscars. *KRAI* won the best film at the NIKA Awards in Russia and I got the 'Golden Eagle' for my performance. So I am Actress of the Year, 2010 in Russia.

### What was it that first attracted you to the script and your character?

The script was great. It was an amazing story with humour and emotions. I liked that. And as an actor it's a challenge to create a character who has a secret, to change your look for the role and to be a different person than in your real life.

### Can you tell me about Mel and where she is in his life when the film starts?

Mel is a 22-year old girl who isn't confident about her life. Her mother died when she was pretty young and she lives with her father and her brother Knut in a small village.

She wants to go on a journey around the world with Knut, but when he tells her that he will become a father and his girlfriend will move in she's upset. She drives through the night and suddenly there's a girl in front of her car. It's an accident. When Jenny and Bianca think that Mel is Miguel she plays this game. She wants to correct the misunderstanding, but she feels happy in the situation so she finds a new identity and all of a sudden the moment of telling the truth passes.

### How did you approach playing a girl pretending to be a boy? And what mindset did you get into to play a teenager confused about her sexual identity?

Your work as an actor is to find the main problem in your character and to show how the character deals with it. This is work that you do for each role you play. Mel needs to find her identity and her view of life in general. It was interesting to create a character who's searching for their way of living and who can develop during the movie.

"My way was watching boys on the streets to get an impression from real people. How they behave, how they treat their girlfriends and how they move, so that the audience could understand why Jenny believes Mel to be a boy."

Can you talk about working with Lucie Hollmann who plays your love interest?  
Lucie Hollmann is a great actress. She is very sensitive and intelligent. We had a lot of fun

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while shooting the movie.

#### Do you share any personality traits with Mel?

Mel is a loner and I know that from school. I did a lot of sports in my youth so I did not have much time to spend with friends. So I was a kind of maverick. I could imagine how Mel feels when Knut cuts their plans of a world journey. I like playing roles not in my real life, that is why I became an actress, so I could understand Mel wanting to change her identity.



#### Why does Mel become so infatuated with Nuno?

Mel likes Nuno because he also has a secret. He is kind of unapproachable and he symbolises freedom to her. Nuno stands for Portugal, for the beach, the sea and the far away country. He is new in town so Mel's brother wouldn't know him. When Mel creates her own alter ego Nuno is the perfect person to play her boyfriend. After a while they become real friends and I like to see two loners, two people who don't fit in the world they are living, find a person they can trust.

**"I liked the story because, for me, it's a love story. It's not important whether it's between two girls or two boys or a hetero couple. It's a romantic story. Two people fall in love with each other."**

#### There are obvious similarities with *Boys Don't Cry*. What did you draw from that film when playing Mel?

I didn't copy parts of *Boys Don't Cry* when I prepared for Mel's role, not consciously. I watched Hilary Swank in the movie, but there were no special things I grabbed.

My way was watching boys on the streets to get an impression from real people. How they behave, how they treat their girlfriends and how they move, so that the audience could understand why Jenny believes Mel to be a boy, or doesn't want to see the reality. I wanted to give the audience the impression that it could be possible that Jenny and Bianca think Mel is Miguel.

Then I changed my look. I dyed my hair, normally it's light brown, but for Mel it was black. I got brown contact lens – my eyes are blue, so I was really different. When I looked in the mirror even I could believe that there was another person standing in front of me.



#### Miguel's unveiling of Mel in front of Jenny must have been a difficult scene to shoot...

It's not easy to undress in front of a camera, that is true, but it was necessary for the movie. Because Mel couldn't explain what she wanted to say the consequence was unveiling.

#### What do you know now you wish you'd known before you started the film?

I liked the story because, for me, it's a love story. It's not important whether it's between two girls or two boys or a hetero couple. It's a romantic story. Two people fall in love with each other. There's a problem so they can't be happy their whole lives because Mel didn't tell the truth in the beginning.

The movie itself is a great movie for everyone. The ending shows that Mel will find her way in life. She's found the strength to get out of the circumstances she grew up in and she can make her dreams come true. She will manage to do what she really wants.

**"I didn't copy parts of *Boys Don't Cry* when I prepared for Mel's role, not consciously. I watched Hilary Swank in the movie, but there were no special things I grabbed."**

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**What do you think of the state of 'gay cinema' at the moment? With films like *A Single Man* and *The Kids Are All Right* do you think we're going through an unprecedented level of acceptance within the industry as a whole?**

I'm not a scientist. I can't analyse situations in the movie business. I think that the industry is interested in showing life in its whole range and to show themes which concern the audience, the people on the streets. But I realise that the industry is much more interested in 'gay cinema' than it was 20 years ago.

**What are your favourite gay-themed films?**

I only know *Boys Don't Cry* and *My Summer of Love*, which I watched while preparing for the role. Ah, and *Milk*, of course. And *Monster*.



**You won a Golden Eagle Award for Best Leading Actress last year for *The Edge* and the film was nominated for a Golden Globe. It looks like it's an unusual story. What is it about and how did it feel to win the award?**

*The Edge* is set in 1945 in a gulag in a Siberian village. The war is over and Ignat, an engine driver, is sent to a village called Krai. My character, Elsa, lived for four years in a steam engine in the forest on an island because she fled when her father and friend were killed. The bridge is broken so nobody can catch her. Ignat wants to get the steam engine and finds Elsa on the island. At first they fight, but then they manage to live and let live. They build up the bridge together and he takes her back to the village, but there's not much hospitality.

It's a movie about love, bravery and strength. What you have to do when you want to live your own way. The message is: "There are no enemies".

**You started your career as a theatre actress at the age of nine. Are you hoping to move away from the stage and concentrate on your film work from now on?**

I come from a theatre background and hope I can act on stage my whole life. Apart from that I'm concentrating on filmmaking at the moment, which does not mean I won't be on stage any more. But I like the realism of film and I can experience and learn much more in movies right now than in theatre. I hope to get the chance to play many roles for the screen.

**Is there a thru-line in your work? What types of projects interest you the most?**

A thru-line. Well, maybe I like playing characters who don't fit. Who have problems with their neighbours, with the circumstances they are living in, with their environment, who can't deal with their life. I like playing strong characters who have their own view on life and who try to live in their own kind of way.

**So you like to juggle in your spare time...**

Yes, I juggle in my spare time and I do lots of other things like horse back riding, sailing and diving. It's a pity that I do not have enough time for that! By the way, the interest in juggling came from a friend who lives in London now who's a theatre director, as well as a writer, Philip Thorne.

**My Friend From Faro [2010]**

**Studio:** Peccadillo Pictures

**Released:** 16 May 2011

**ASIN:** B004CSKCRM

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