

Interview with cast and crew

- *What was it like to direct a film where the lead actor was also the writer of the film? How did it influence your directorial work with him?*



- Denise Khumalo (director): It was my first time directing a piece of work that I had not written therefore I was nervous and excited. It helped me to see the story from another perspective whilst being able to connect with it on a personal level. As a director it allowed me to grow and try new techniques to further understand the actors.

- *Where did this story come from, what is meaningful in it for you? Also, how did you manage to let go of your vision of the story and let the director lead you once on set; what was this experience like?*



- Fernando Sambora (writer, actor, composer, editor, casting director, sound mixer): This story came from the feeling of frustration. The one that you have when things don't go the way you expect and when you don't give yourself a chance to at least try to change it. Those moments reminded me of somebody who used to act like Leo. Before, I could never understand the reasons behind it. Now, I think I've developed a certain sympathy for that. The most meaningful thing for me is that sometimes we need to stop thinking and try to listen to this inner voice of ours that lives within ourselves and is always looking for our good. That's what makes us do things, act!

In the beginning, I was hesitating a lot about getting a director because this would imply incorporating a different vision of the film that I not only wrote but that I would act in as well. A great deal of making that decision was on Kseniya, my producer, who insisted that we do it. I think that when someone else directs your script, the most important thing is to have this person in sync with you, willing to move in a similar direction, nurture the story in the way that will lead to the same vision. When we chose Denise, my role changed into being an actor, and this established a professional relationship in the way we exchanged ideas. To work together I opened myself, listened to everybody, and yielded in terms of **my** vision of the film: this had to be **our** vision of the film now. And that's how work should be done all the time!

Just as an anecdote, something very funny occurred during the premiere. I edited the film, and after watching it Denise approached me and said "that's a very different film than the one I had in mind while directing". This shows that we **all** have our perspective and ideas about the film, but the key is to let them go a bit and be open to the thought that the overall picture will change!

- *"What's Next?" is an experimental and surreal film. How different was your approach as a producer; what were the challenges and benefits of working on a story that basically happens inside the imagination of the main character?*



- Kseniya Yorsh (producer, casting director): I knew that the aesthetics of this film would come from the vision of the production team and their ability to communicate it to each other clearly. When your story happens in a black shapeless space, it's key to have the director, the cinematographer, and the production designer on the same page to make sure that what we film will look cinematic rather than staged or 'empty' in frame.

For me the main thing was to find the team that would 'get' each other. And we did it, creative communication between everybody was perfect. The whole atmosphere on set was extremely tranquil and peaceful, which was funny because what we were filming was actually emotionally intense.

So once I found the key crew members and saw the synergy between them, I had nothing to worry about. We got great actors, amazing crew, the logistics was easy, and it all came together really smooth producing-wise. I had the trust in our team, they were great in working with each other, and I just needed to provide a comfortable creative environment for them, without having to worry then about the process or outcome.

- *When preparing for the shoot, did you coordinate your reading of Sila with other actors, or was it an individual search for every actor?*



- Ina Rose Farestad (actress): When I prepped for Sila, it was initially an individual search. I created my own backstory and memories and made choices that I felt were strong and living inside of me. The tone of the script was pretty dark and hopeless, and by the time my Sila is appearing in Leo's dream, he is almost indifferent to life, which is the worst situation possible to end up in. I wanted

Sila to contrast this, to be light and make Leo come alive by not being so solemn myself.

Rehearsals with Denise and Fernando were a lot of fun. Denise gave me a lot of creative freedom, and together we found what was in line with her vision. Fernando, being the writer as well, was great because he had a lot to share about the script. They are both so kind, generous and talented people. So I wouldn't say that us actors coordinated our readings amongst ourselves, it was Denise who captained the ship. The first time I saw Laura's, Kris' and Zhen's interpretations was at the premier screening. That was fantastic, everyone on set did a wonderful job!