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Trond Fausa Aurvåg Quietly Standing Out From the Crowd

Tod Hardin · Wednesday, October 19th, 2016



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“Hi mom, meet Torgeir, a cute ex ski jumper with half of his brain still functioning.”



Trond Fausa Aurvåg

Last week we had the pleasure of introducing many of you to Netflix’s first original series, *Lilyhammer*. This quirky little show, which is actually produced by Norway’s Rubicon TV, has essentially flown under the radar here in the US, but it’s been renewed for a third season by Netflix, continues to be one of the most popular shows ever in Norway, and has steadily grown a loyal following around the globe.

What makes *Lilyhammer* interesting – what gives it that special sauce – is the supporting cast of Norwegian actors that surround the show’s lead character, played by Steven Van Zandt. They give the show a level of charm that is hard to resist, and none stand out more than Trond Fausa Aurvåg, who portrays Van Zandt’s right-hand-man, Torgeir Lien.

Aurvåg studied at the Norwegian National Academy of Theatre, is an award-winning short film director and has also taken home Norway’s highest acting award, an Amanda, for his lead role in the feature film *The Bothered Man*, in 2006.

Lilyhammer co-creator Anne Bjørnstad says Van Zandt and Aurvåg were the actors she had in mind when writing the pilot.

“We didn’t know Trond, but had seen enough of his work to know that he was a sophisticated actor with an unusual talent for comedy,” said Bjørnstad.

Talent is the key word here. Aurvåg has truly created a rich character in Torgeir, that one can’t help but fall in love with. You will root for Torgeir, be sad when he fails and elated when he succeeds ... and you will laugh your ass off in just about every scene that Aurvåg inhabits with the character.

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Bjørnstad adds this about Aurvåg:



Movie poster for *The Bothersome Man*

“Trond is an actor who always puts a lot of extra elements into the scenes, it is a thrill to see him do them. The nervous energy, the constant self-doubt and the vulnerability that makes Torgeir so lovable have a lot to do with Trond. Many of Torgeir’s mannerisms are Trond’s invention. And I think the fact that he is also a writer and director himself makes him understand what is at the core of our ideas, what he should not mess with in the scenes, and where he should channel his creativity.”

He is indeed a creative force and we should all be on alert for season three of *Lilyhammer* and all other projects that he pursues in the future. In the meantime, learn more about Trond Fausa Aurvåg below, as he was gracious enough to answer some questions for readers of Cultural Weekly.

Tod Hardin: *Lilyhammer* is an odd, yet delightful show. How would you describe it to our readers?

Trond Fausa Aurvåg: I would describe *Lilyhammer* as social-political satire mixed with a type of oddball humor that both Europeans and Americans can relate to, yet also learn from. What I like the most about *Lilyhammer* is that it has created its own universe we haven’t seen on television before. This isn’t just a typical “fish out of water” concept, and it doesn’t solely rely on the humor provided by the Mafioso twist either. The contrast between Steven Van Zandt’s big city character (with conservative political values) and the culture of a rural “hick” town in a socialist country paves the way for original story lines and character relationships.

TH: Your character, Torgeir, is one of the highlights of the show. Let’s pretend you are a woman and you are bringing him home to meet your mom. How do you introduce him?

TFA: Hi mom, meet Torgeir, a cute ex ski jumper with half of his brain still functioning. I’d stick to simple questions like ‘more coffee’ and ‘the weather is nice, isn’t it?’ – and this will work out just fine.

TH: How did you end up landing the role on *Lilyhammer*? And what attracted you to the role of Torgeir?

TFA: I auditioned for the role some months before we started shooting and got the part. I was of course intrigued by the fact that Steven Van Zandt was involved in the project, but I loved the simplicity of the character. Torgeir is a simple-minded person and that opens up possibilities of how this person reacts in certain situations. It also allows improvisation around the character. Many of Torgeir’s lines are improvised and I think that brings more life and impulsiveness to the character. Furthermore, improvisation can potentially make a scene funnier and we have a lot of fun with it.

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TH: Steven Van Zandt is not a classically trained actor. Is there a difference in working with somebody like him, as compared to working with somebody – such as yourself – who has trained at the Norwegian National Academy of Theatre?

TFA: Steven is a fantastic actor and person. Even though he is not formally trained, he was on the *Sopranos* series for ten years, in addition to having knowledge about life in general. And he grew up with wise guys in New Jersey. Steven is the perfect actor for the Frank Tagliano character. I learn a lot just by listening to him trying to solve a scene that’s not working properly. He has a different kind of American approach to it compared to the Norwegian mind set.

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TH: *Lilyhammer* is a bilingual production. Has that proven to be difficult for the cast? More importantly, do you think it has been difficult for the audience?

TFA: Norwegians are schooled to be bilingual, starts with English in school from the age of 6. When you turn 14 you choose a third language usually German, French or Spanish. In Scandinavia there's about 20 million people that more or less understand our similar language, but the rest of the world is big. So I think the biggest challenge and biggest surprise is that the English speaking countries have welcomed a bilingual show from such a secluded place.



Aurvåg and *Lilyhammer* co-star Robert Skjærstad

TH: *Lilyhammer* is a huge hit in Norway, with about 50% of the TV viewing audience watching each episode. What do you attribute that success to?

TFA: There is a lot of social satire in the show about Norwegian society. We tend to think many things are bureaucratic without necessarily knowing why. Changing it seems too much of a bureaucratic process ... that makes us laugh. And for being a people from far up north it's funny watching ourselves through Frank's and your eyes. It's a seldom thing in the Norwegian spirit to feel exotic.

TH: How has the Norwegian public reacted to the show? In particular, how have the people of Lillehammer (show name is purposely spelled differently) reacted to it?

TFA: In my experience, from talking to people that come up to me when we are shooting in Lillehammer, they are very proud of the show. They hope for many more seasons. That is very nice since we kind of take over the town when we are there shooting. Nobody has yet to come up to anyone of us to tell us to get out of town because they are sick of us. In general, people seem to like it. But Norwegians are very reserved so they usually leave you alone when they see you. They might give you a thumbs up and say 'great show.'

TH: What has it been like to work with the team at Netflix?

TFA: The wonderful thing about Netflix is that they have always treated us as part of the family – up there with *Orange is the New Black* and *House of Cards* – both on the set and socially. They are very good about telling us how proud they are of the show, and that they notice the hard work of the production team. *Lilyhammer* is historic in terms of it being Netflix's first original series. When you see how Netflix has grown and the quality of their other productions, it feels very good being a part of the Netflix family.

TH: In the opening scene of the final episode of season two, you are trying out for a production of *Glee* – singing the classic Journey song *Don't Stop Believing*. Was that really you singing and will we see more of Torgeir singing in season three?

TFA: Yep, that was me singing ... Can't say too much about season three. :)



We think Trond is a scream (scene from *Tatt av Kvinnen*)

TH: You played the lead role in both the stage and film version of *Tatt av Kvinnen*. As an actor, do you approach it differently depending on the medium

TFA: The thing about *Tatt av Kvinnen* is that the lines have a very strict composition. The play is based on a book by Erlend Loe, and became a film later on. The fact that most of the lines are taken straight from the book didn't allow much improvisation around the dialogue. Erlend Loe

writes in a very peculiar way that transforms to the dialogue between the characters in his books, so we had to preserve his “universe” in both projects. Usually it’s a big difference approaching a character in film compared to approaching a character for theater, but in this film it was a bit of the same thing actually. I knew the character well from the theatre production so it was the perfect warm up for taking the character to the silver screen.

TH: I know you have also become a father recently. Does that bring anything new to your acting – or does it change the roles that you desire?

TFA: Well, I’ve become more emotional in some ways, because I can relate to the fact of having a child. I think every life experience is a good experience for an actor.

and a bit bored by Ringo

TH: I have to ask ... you have a few interesting photos of you and other cast members with Ringo Starr that has made quite a few people laugh. What was that all about?

TFA: Boring... (Just kidding of course). The photo was taken at a Norwegian festival where Ringo had a concert. He is a friend of Steven’s so he took us along to meet him. I thought it might be fun trying to look bored while taking a picture with Ringo Starr.

TH: Is there any glimpse of season three of *Lilyhammer* that you can give us?

TFA: The only thing I can say is that what we are doing now for season three is very exiting and I can’t wait for you to see it when it gets released.

TH: The hat you wear in most of your scenes has become as much of a hit as the show is. Did you come up with the idea to wear it?

TFA: I wouldn’t say that it was my idea, but the hat was lying among tons of clothes while I was trying out different suggestions for Torgeir’s outfit. I put it on and liked the dumb anti-status feeling it gave me. It has stayed on for three seasons now, and I’m hoping it will stay on for many seasons more to come.

TH: You are an award-winning director of short films. Marian Saastad, who portrays Sigrid on *Lilyhammer*, said in an interview that one of her goals was to act in a feature film directed by you. Any plans for feature film directing?

TFA: At the moment acting has priority, but in the future I might direct feature films.

TH: Tell us something about Norway that we don’t know.

TFA: We eat the most Mexican food per capita in the world.

TH: Other than *Lilyhammer*, what’s next for Trond Fausa?

TFA: Sleep...

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