

# Away

## PRESS NOTES

**Press Contact**

Tiffany Kilgore

Head of Marketing

Cinema Management Group

[marketing@cinemamanagementgroup.com](mailto:marketing@cinemamanagementgroup.com)

+1 310 488 7672



**Logline:**

The story is about a boy traveling across an island on a motorcycle, trying to escape a dark spirit and get back home

**Short Synopsis:**

A labor of love, *AWAY*, is an amazing feature length animated film; written, produced, directed, and composed entirely by one very talented person: Director and Animator, Gints Zilbalodis. Gints worked on the film for three and a half years, handling all aspects of production including writing, designing, animating, post-production and composing the musical score.

Told in four chapters, the young boy travels across a mysterious land, crossing barren deserts and beautiful forests, all the while being pursued by a relentless dark spirit. Along the way he makes a series of connections with different animals and reflects on the possible ways he ended up on the island. Part dream, part reality, and in a way, the storyline is a reflection of the creative process of the making of the film itself. The main idea of *AWAY* is our common, universal need to find a connection.

Filled with stunning visuals, Zilbalodis' images speak for themselves in this dialogue-free film. This is Zilbalodis first full-length feature film production, after having already produced and directed seven animated shorts including *Priorities*, *Aqua*, and *Oasis*.



### **Interview with Director, Producer, Composer and Animator, Gints Zilbalodis:**

#### **1. What inspired you to create a feature film?**

I've always wanted to make a feature film. I made a few shorts before this one, but I wanted to make a feature eventually. I thought that an easier way to make a feature would be to break it up into four chapters, easier for the financing and easier to manage the story. I was used to the short film format, telling the stories in a few minutes, which is why I made the chapters separately. Otherwise, if I had started everything at the same time, it would be a little overwhelming. Another reason I wanted to make a feature film was because in short films, you don't get a lot of time to spend with the characters, so you can't really develop the characters that much. Usually short filmmakers want to create a mood and it's more about the single moment, but I wanted to tell a bigger story, which is why I wanted to make a feature.

#### **2. Where did the story for AWAY first come from?**

This story in particular is kind-of similar to the production of AWAY. The storyline of the single character traveling across the island alone, in a way the story is quite personal for me, I didn't really realize this when I was starting. I didn't really think about the subjects that much, I was more thinking about the story structure and character motivations, and just the practical stuff. And then I finished, I realized it was very similar to the way I

made it. The spirit/monster in the film, is my anxieties, and fears, and stress from making the film. It can be quite stressful making the film with the deadlines and self-doubt.

### **3. Is Animation all that you've done?**

I've done some live action short films, but I've done mostly animation. I did one live action short, but that is the one I'm least proud of. I'd like to do more live action, but I feel more comfortable in animation right now.

### **4. How old were you when you started experimenting with animation?**

It's hard to say, because I've been doing very simple animation maybe since I was eight, like Lego Animation. When I was 15 years old, I started getting more serious about it and started to make more complex stories.

### **5. Did you go to school for animation, or are you self-taught?**

I'm mostly self-taught. I did go to a high school for art, mostly painting and drawing, but after high school, I went straight to working in animation. One of my short films while I was in high school was the most successful one so far, PRIORITIES, being accepted into over 50 festivals, helped me get funding for the next film, FOLLOWERS.



### **6. Were there any films that inspired you when you were a little boy?**

Yes. I still to this day watch films with my Father, but when I was little, it was the films from Directors like Hitchcock, Kubrick, Scorsese, Forman, Kurosawa, that really had an impact on me and inspired me to get into film. I remember watching and being influenced by North by Northwest, Rear Window, Dr. Strangelove, 2001, Taxi Driver, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and the Seven Samurai. The Brackenwood series' cartoons also left a strong impact on me growing up.

## 7. What inspired your animation style in creating AWAY?

There was direct inspiration for certain characters and landscapes in AWAY from films, video games, and trips I experienced. For example, the *Future Boy Conan* (1978) cartoon is one of the best things Miyasaki created, had incredible world building that I admired. *The General* (1926) is one of my all-time favorite top 5 movies that has the perfect slow chase in film. *Duel* (1971) is another great slow chase movie. And *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005) I just replayed and is so so good! All of Alfonso Cauron's films are inspirations to me, but the camera work in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004) was exceptional.

The Motorcycle part was inspired by a few films such as *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004) was a direct influence on the main character finding and riding the motorcycle as well as having one of the all-time greatest soundtracks. And *On Any Sunday* (1971), which is an excellent documentary about motorcycles and has some complex shots that I know how they made in 1971. *The Last Guardian* (2016) is a stunningly designed video game about a boy and animal relationship. *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) is an incredibly simple and human story that inspired me, along with *3000 Leagues in Search of Mother* (1976), by Isao Takahata. The way nature was shown in the film, *Badlands* (1973), inspired me to want to play with that in films. The very emotional video-game, *Journey* (2012), which is about a Hero's Journey, and told in a more abstract way was an inspiration as well. For the dark spirit in the film, *It Follows* (2014) has the best example of why I prefer slow suspense over shock scares.

My trips to Iceland and Lanzarote inspired some of the beautiful landscapes in the animation as well.

## 8. What do you see for yourself in the future of animation?

I've already started making my next animated film. I see myself making features now. I don't know if I'll do them all by myself again, but at least for now, I'll begin doing it myself and once I get far enough, I'll try and get a small team. I've been very happy with the experience of making AWAY, so I don't see a reason to change it.

## 9. What inspired the characters in AWAY? Was there any symbolism that they represented for you?

Yeah, I think the symbolism came after because I only discovered what the film was about once I finished it. I had some ideas what the cats would mean, but you really have to spend time with them to figure them out. The main theme of the film is connecting with people and the cats kind-of show up in the film at the point where they represent the bad aspect of connecting with people. They are maybe too connected and don't have personalities themselves, like a cult. When I was working on the film, I didn't want to make things too difficult for myself, so I wanted to make things that were easier in animation. One of the difficult things to make is a crowd, and this is the only part that has a crowd. I first thought I would give each cat their own personality and colors, but

then I realized that would be difficult and I felt I could actually make them all the same... in the same design, so they are moving in sync. I took one cat and copied it and pasted it many times, so that made the process of doing the animation much easier and I think it benefited the story because if you just take one part and duplicate it many times looks cheap and lazy, but I think it actually adds to the story because the cats are more creepy when they are moving. The birds represent the main character, the boy, who go on a similar journey. He also wants to reconnect with his family in a way. That's where the bird came from. For the elephants, I didn't really think about the symbolism, I just needed to show that the lake was shallow and reflective, so I decided to put something really heavy on it. But once I finished, people started asking what the deeper meaning, but some of those are just accidents.



**10. In the process of the three years making AWAY, what took the longest?**

It takes a long time to start things, so the first chapter took a year and a half, and the other three chapters took another year and half. It takes a long time to begin things and figure out how to start the story and get the funding and make all the models, but once you start, it's easy to add a few more scenes and doesn't take much effort because you have everything prepared.

**11. Could you describe your approach in how you animated AWAY?**

Usually in animation, you start with a script and storyboard, which is the right and safe way, especially when you have a large team so everyone knows what the film will look like. But I don't have a team and didn't really have a script, so I started straight away with sketches and characters and locations. I started to animate without the storyboard and improvised. And then took the camera and shot it from different angles. It was more improvised than the normal way of making animated films and I would find these happy accidents; it was very organic.

**12. Was AWAY always going to be dialogue free?**

Yes, I wanted the visuals to drive the story. I didn't even have the option for having dialogue. I designed the story with that in mind with only putting one human in the film, so he doesn't have to talk to anyone, there's only animals.

**13. How long did the music composition take to create?**

I only started doing the music about half-way through the production. The music took just a few days and I enjoy getting results, so that's the fun part of making music, you get immediate feedback. I think that was the most enjoyable part of the process of making this film. I don't play any instruments myself, so the music here is really simple, it's just a few motifs repeating. I don't like it when in most films the music only plays for a few minutes, in between people talking, and I wanted to give space for the music to play and help it create a sense of immersion and this hypnotic feeling and cycles of motion.

**14. Were there any musicians that impacted you in creating the composition for AWAY?**

The music of Gustavo Santaolalla, Max Richter, Johann Johannsson, Nick Cave & Warren Ellis, Kow Otani, Joe Hisaishi, Hans Zimmer, Trent Reznor & Atticus Ross, Philip Glass, Sigur Ros, Koji Kondo and many more.

**15. If you were to describe AWAY to someone, how would you describe it?**

It's a feature length animated film about a boy and a little bird, who are traveling across an island and trying to escape a dark spirit who's trying to eat them while they are trying to get back to their family. It's a very linear story with more complicated details. I've shown it to both children and adults and people from all ages have responded to it. The characters go through a lot of different conflicts, so it's easy to empathize with them.

**16. What do you want people to take away from the film after they've seen it?**

I wanted to create an immersive experience where people can forget themselves for 75 minutes. To be transported to this different place and be immersed. I want people to experience the different moods and atmospheres that animation has to offer.

**17. What advice would you give an upcoming animator?**

I would suggest them to try and do their own thing and try not to imitate anyone else's style and just discover their own voice. I've been working pretty much only on my own films and I've been very lucky, but if you work hard enough, you can do your own films. It's a lot more satisfying. And I would also suggest trying and make things that are not too difficult. It's really not necessary to do the most complicated things, sometimes the simple things are more effective.



**Director's Statement:**

I'm very happy and relieved that I managed to actually finish the film. The main theme of the story is about connecting with people and I can't wait to share it with the world.

**Director's Biography:**

Gints Zilbalodis (1994) is a Latvian filmmaker and animator. His fascination for filmmaking began at an early age watching classic films and making shorts and commercials. He has made 7 short films in various mediums including hand-drawn animation, 3D animation and live-action and often mixing their characteristic aesthetics.

**Filmography of Director:**

Rush (2010, short, animation, comedy)  
Aqua (2012, short, animation, adventure)  
Clarity (2012, short, live-action, fantasy)  
Priorities (2014, short, animation, adventure)  
Followers (2014, short, animation, action)  
Inaudible (2015, short, animation, drama)  
Oasis (2017, short, animation, adventure)  
Away (2019, feature, animation, adventure)

**PRESS QUOTES:**

“Made entirely by Zilbalodis, this truly one-man band film is astonishing. This minimalist, tense and quiet film is filled with gorgeous, emotive scenes (notably the spectacular Mirror Lake chapter) as the boy (and his small bird sidekick) desperately flees what he assumes is a sort of giant Grim Reaper. The ending is wonderfully oblique and open ended.”

– *Chris Robinson, Animation World Net*

International Sales  
Cinema Management Group  
8383 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 320 • Beverly Hills, CA 90211  
+1 310 300-9959