Scandinavian Film Festival L.A.

Take 5/Take 10

The Five Nordic Countries gear up for Take 10 of Scandinavian Film Festival L.A. Northern Lights for Melrose Heights—
By James Koenig—Founder/ Director Scandinavian Film Festival L.A. reflecting on nearly a decade of Nordic Film in "Tinsel Town"

The incredible influence of moving images is undeniable—the screen shapes us, dresses us, fires our imaginations, changes our language, speaks volumes without language, projects the unspoken language of the heart—of love, of hate. Moving images beguile us, lie to us, lead us on, proffer progress or propaganda, offer awareness, or blinders, stop wars, start wars—culture wars, give voice to unwritten history, hold a mirror up to make us uncomfortable, make the invisible visible, give us hope, redemption and release! Of course, sometimes images just entertain and pacify—and take us from the mundane, turn our brains to mush, and let us have a moment of "zoning out" or "it's NOT the economy stupid" as we escape, or grunt and engage in cosmic kickboxing-good vs. evil. One of the most incredible phenomenon of contemporary history is the dance between human culture and film culture. In this dance, both individual identity and commonality come into focus. And that is why I love to read subtitles and why I founded Scandinavian Film Festival L.A. which just completed its nineth year at the Writers Guild Theater in Beverly Hills. The festival pivots around screenings of "Oscar" submissions and additional current feature films, shorts, and documentaries from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. It all started in a darkened theater at a kid's matinee.

I was a dramatic kid—no wonder I ended up with so many involvements in those things we lump together as "the arts!" When I was in kindergarten or first grade I so believed in the moving images I saw in cartoons that I went on top of our garage and jumped off with an open umbrella in lieu of a parachute. Hey—it worked in the cartoons. Fortunately it was onto a pile of sand and I didn't break anything. (There was no Take II! I was not destined to be a stuntman.) Much of my life is orchestrated with the wonders of making music as a singer, director, teacher, writer, and arts advocate. But truthfully the same elements that make for good music—make for good film. Hmm it was somewhere between church and Mighty Mouse that I developed an interest in "classical" singing. Well, I guess singing Mr. McGregor in a children's production of Peter Rabbit at the reknowned Dallas Theater Center wasn't quite yet "classical" singing—but it was a "taste." Storytelling—image, action, and reaction. I still remember how astonished I was when a little kid saw me after a performance and looked both scared and outraged. The power of performance—of connecting with an audience, of moving an audience (in that case moving that kid to kick me in the shin!)

For me, in film, indeed, in the arts—the answer to the question "Guess who's coming to dinner?" should be "The truth!" It was over a decade ago that I was invited to a screening of Liv Ullman's directorial debut film "Sophie." Although I am not of Scandinavian heritage I had become involved in Scandina-