

Finland's voice is growing louder

With high production values and bigger budgets, international interest is soaring, says Alan Sim



TWO FRIENDS, Jukka and Pekka, meet after a long time apart. They drink vodka in silence for a couple of hours. Then Jukka asks: “So Pekka, how have you been doing?” Pekka says nothing,

and they continue drinking for another couple of hours. Eventually Jukka asks: “How’s the family?” At that point, Pekka stands up and shouts: “Did we come here to talk, or did we come here to drink?”

When I – a Scot – started working for Elisa Viihde, Finland’s leading streaming service, this was the joke most people liked to tell about Finland, a nation where awkward silence was embraced and a need to talk to fill the spaces frowned upon. But now it could be the Finns having the last laugh.

At the Mip TV festival in April this year, there were only six TV drama series selected for the coveted buyers’ guide ‘Coup du Cour’ title. Two of those productions were not only Finnish but also from one company: Elisa Viihde. So what’s happened to Finnish content and is the rise of VoD driving change, making Finland the next hot ticket?

For many years, the phrase ‘Nordic noir’ was synonymous with Danes and Swedes turning out beautifully crafted series and, up until now, Finnish content has struggled a little to break through. With a language that

has no relation to any of the other Nordic languages, Finnish had been left out in the cold. So what’s changed?

First of all, the thirst for local-language drama has never been so high, with broadcasters such as Netflix already snapping up two Finnish series this year and Walter Presents showing a smorgasbord of crafted series from Brazil to Belgium. People are actively seeking out fresh content and with the Nordics still hot for drama, people are keen to see what Finland has to offer.

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There have always been high production values in Finland, and you only have to look at the films of Aki Kaurismäki to see that the country has a unique voice. With a new breed of film-makers like AJ Annala coming through, that voice grows stronger.

This thirst, coupled with a new Finnish tax incentive offering up to 25% cash rebate for production costs spent in Finland, has meant a huge boost to productions overall and offers opportunities for Brits and others to come and film here too.

Elisa started investing in original programmes in 2014, and we have so far launched 11 series, but only now are we starting to see a real international interest in Finnish series. With bigger budgets, the desire from distributors to take our content is growing.

Elisa head of content Ani Korpela and I were extremely pleased that our shows *Bullets* and *Arctic Circle* were selected for the Coup du Cour award, as it’s a sign of high quality and rising interest in Finnish series. Since then, we have placed both series with international distributors. Sky Vision snapped up *Bullets* and is launching mid-October, while Lagardere is selling *Arctic Circle*.

The 10-part thriller *Bullets* is a collaboration between Finnish production house Vertigo and Nadcon of Germany, run by Peter Nadermann, who is synonymous with the *Millennium* trilogy and *The Bridge*. Co-producers are also keen to get in on the action and we can see ourselves working with British partners before long.

As the exec producer for Elisa, I am always looking for new and interesting stories, finding something that has real authenticity, whether its the sparseness of the language, the uniqueness of the landscapes or the dry humour. Finnish really does feel different from the so-called ‘Nordic drama’ and like Jukka and Pekka, the silence could be golden. ☺

➤ Alan Sim is executive producer at Elisa Viihde