

REALIZING HER DREAM

A PORTRAIT OF ACTRESS EMMA DROGUNOVA

When the exciting news arrived that she would be fêted as one of the European Shooting Stars at the Berlinale 2019, initially Emma Drogunova's feelings ran away with her. "When my agent rang up, I was sitting in a car on my way back to the hotel one evening after a long day's shooting in Cologne. The news bowled me over so completely that I let out a great shriek of pleasure." At a distance of some weeks now, she is forced to smile a bit over her emotional reaction. "The poor driver got a nasty shock!"

Certainly the 23-year-old Berliner makes no attempt to hide just how much this prize means to her. For some time now, she has been following very carefully who is honored with the title of Shooting Star – and so she can guess roughly what awaits her during the busy program days of the Berlinale. "It's certainly very special to follow in the footsteps of people like Franz Rogowski, Jella Haase, Louis Hofmann or Anna-Maria Mühe, all of whom I admire greatly," Drogunova says with delight. She is the youngest of the ten actors who will receive the award this year. "And after all, it's not just about the German market but the whole of Europe. It's totally crazy that I will be representing Germany there."

She just wants to let things happen, remaining as relaxed as possible and looking forward to it all, but she intends to prepare a little in the weeks before the event, nonetheless: "I want to watch as many English-language series as I can, so that I get myself attuned to the language and I can talk to everyone. And I want to watch all the films for which the other Shooting Stars are receiving the award. Because getting to know them and gaining insights into work in other countries is the best thing about the whole business as far as I'm concerned."

For Drogunova, who was born in Tjumen/Siberia in 1995 and moved to Germany with her parents at the age of two, the award – which she is receiving not least for her role as the dancer Anezka in the Austrian-German film version of the bestseller *THE TOBACCONIST* directed by Nikolaus Leytner – represents the high point of her career to date, a career that has not progressed purely by chance but without specific plans, certainly. Because, as she explains laughing, it is not unusual for children of Russian families to be put on the stage quite early on, so she already gathered her first experience in children's theater as a young girl. She did not feel particularly at ease there, however.



THE TOBACCONIST (© GLORY FILM/EPO-FILM/Petro Domenigg FILMSTILLS.AT)

But when a few friends appeared in advertising spots, she also made the effort to join an agency for child actors. "It started from there, in a very relaxed way," she recalls. "By the time I finally made my first short film, I had definitely developed a taste for it."

Key experiences were not only a brief appearance in the successful two-part TV drama *HOTEL ADLON – A FAMILY SAGA*, but above all her work on the short film *NICHT DEN BODEN BERÜHREN*. "I enjoyed acting, even at many castings where I was unsuccessful in the end. But here I played my first leading role, and that meant a lot to me," Drogunova recounts. "And above all, I got to know director Mia Spengler, who has become my mentor since then – something like a big sister to me. I have learned a huge amount from her, things about myself as well."

Not least, it was Spengler – with whom she later made the cinema film *BACK FOR GOOD* – who advised her to pursue her acting after school graduation as well. Nevertheless, Drogunova flirted briefly with the idea of training as a dancer; because it left her insufficient time for filming, though, she abandoned her dance course after a while. Even without much planning, one role began to follow another, including in much-acclaimed episodes of *TATORT*, cinema films such as *A JAR FULL OF LIFE* and *THE FINAL JOURNEY*,

or the TV production *TOTER WINKEL*, which was even nominated for the International Emmy last year. No wonder she can't devote much time at present to the course in Russian and French at Berlin's Humboldt University, in which she has been enrolled for several semesters now: "But anyway, I'm not doing it so that I have a B.A. in my pocket one day. I'm simply doing it for myself, so that I can work on those two languages whenever I find the time."

Drogunova speaks French fluently, as well as German and Russian, because she attended a French school in Berlin for many years. One of her greatest dreams is to make professional use of this collection of languages in the future, and the Shooting Star Award could be a first step towards realizing this dream. She is particularly drawn to the film world in France – and would like to spend a longer period working in Paris, perhaps.

But first and foremost, her interest is not directed towards one country but to the cinema in general. For as much as she may have let herself drift in terms of professional plans initially, her passion for the cinema has definitely been kindled in the meantime. Drogunova sums this up –

"My love of the cinema grew greater and greater, the more I acted myself" – after telling me about a friend of hers who is studying direction; she herself recently cast the actors for his graduation film, which meant weeks of work. "Quite apart from my own projects, I'm really interested in what new developments there are, in exciting work by colleagues who are establishing themselves, and in what director works in which particular style. For a few years now, for example, one compulsory date for me has been the Filmfestival Max Ophüls Preis in Saarbrücken, as there's nothing I love more than watching as many films as possible at a festival." She assures me that none of this will change in the future, either. Although she can assume that during the 2019 Berlinale at least, she is unlikely to have much time to watch films.

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