

Guest of Honour



Swedish thriller *Heder* (Honour) is breaking new ground in front of and behind the camera. DQ was invited to Stockholm to spend the day on the set of this women-led project.

By Michael Pickard

Swedish law firm Heder is under attack. A ridiculous number of plants has been delivered to the firm's Stockholm office in the hope of creating chaos. And unfortunately for Maria Nohra – who plays officer manager Leila in this Viaplay drama, also titled *Heder* – she is the one left to clean up the mess.

The unorthodox invasion is the latest wave in a rising tide of threats and obstruction against the staff of the all-female company, which positions itself as a voice for victims of sex crimes, with lawyers who fight for justice for those who need it most. But the firm's four partners – played by Swedish actors Alexandra Rapaport, Anja Lundqvist, Julia Dufvenius and Eva Röse – have another battle on their hands as they try to keep a fiercely guarded secret from their past that threatens to undermine their work and would spell the end for Heder should the truth be revealed.

When DQ visits the Swedish capital on day 34 of the 80-day shoot in October to watch the eight-part series being filmed inside the law firm's offices, it's clear the partners are upsetting the wrong people, hence the strange delivery that is confusing business that day.

But *Heder's* stars aren't just partners on screen. In fact, the series – described as *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* meets *Sex & the City* – is unique in that it was created by Rapaport, Lundqvist, Dufvenius and fellow actor Sofia Helin (*The Bridge*), who are also all exec producers. Together, they have been integral to the development and production of the series, working on the scripts and overseeing the entire project together with producer Birgitta Wännström and exec producer Calle Jansson. The show is produced by Bigster, the firm set up by Wännström, Jansson and







Julia Dufvenius is caught on camera

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Birgitta Wännström, producer



Director Richard Holm in discussion with Alexandra Rapaport and Dufvenius

Rapaport following their collaboration on another Swedish drama, *Gåsmamman*.

Filming on *Heder* began at the end of last August and has now moved to the office sets that take up the space behind Bigster’s headquarters. As Leila tries to explain the plant deliveries, Rapaport’s Nour is not amused. But as soon as head writer and lead director Richard Holm calls “cut,” she breaks into a smile. Holm is similarly relaxed, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows and headphones around his neck, as he talks to members of the crew.

In another scene, Nour, Elin (Dufvenius), Janni (Lundqvist) and Karin (Röse) are in their glass-walled central office – which comes complete with a panic room – discussing how to release some important information they obtained illegally.

Sitting on a bench outside the doors to the

Heder office, Rapaport says she is “happy and excited” at how the shoot is going. “It’s really overwhelming and unreal, because we created this and it’s happening, and people are working and they get paid! It was all in our head a year ago and now it’s here. We have all eight episodes and they’re really good.

“It’s much more of a thriller than a legal drama. It’s all in there because it’s funny sometimes yet it has this big mystery. It has a heavy drive forwards. There are no dead spots. It’s really smart.”

Nour, she explains, is all about surface. “She’s quite shallow because she’s afraid of her own darkness, so she hides where she comes from, which is part of the mystery in the series. Who is she? What is her secret? She’s fighting for good, and I like that the bottom line of all this is who’s the victim and who’s the perpetrator?”

Rapaport says the driving force behind the show was the desire of a group of friends to work together and with other women actors in the Swedish television industry who had rarely met before on screen. “And if we do meet,” she adds, “we always talk about a man or something relating to men. Now we’re relating to each other, and we’re not talking about our feelings. We’re real human beings. We’re alive.”

Now that filming is well underway, Rapaport also reflects on a tough year bringing the show into production. “We’ve been working our asses off and there have been ups and downs,” she says. “It’s not been a smooth path. But now it’s all coming to us. We struggled so hard together and got to know each other so well. Eva is fitting into this group like a hand in a glove,” she adds of Röse, who was cast later in development.

With its focus on defending the sexually abused, the drama is also extremely topical, coming as #MeToo and Time’s Up are at the forefront of the global film and television industry. Sweden has had its own movement, #Tystnadtagning (#SilenceAction), and Rapaport says there are lots of parallels between the series and the actors’ real-life experiences. For example, in the panic room, there is a wall covered with ‘dick pics’ the characters have been sent on social media.

“I’ve got dick pics on my Instagram so I said they could have one of mine,” the actor adds. “That’s the harassment we’re used to. There are a lot of parallels to real life. But not all the women in the series are nice and the men are not all bad. It’s not black and white. It’s about human beings. This is for everyone.”

There’s a sense of celebration in the air when news spreads on set that the eighth and final script has been locked down. The actors, together with writers Linn Möller, Kararina Ewers, Anna Ströman Lindblom, Katia Juras and Peter Arrhenius, the directors and Wännström have all been involved in the process, and their quest for perfection has meant ongoing discussions over the fine details of the scripts until this point. “We know if we can make it better, we have to do it, even though it upsets everyone in the crew,” Wännström says. “It makes more work for them but if it’s going to be better, it’s worth it.”

Constantly moving back and forth between the set and the Bigster offices, Wännström says that while *Heder* is a thriller, there’s also a deeper message hiding in plain sight. “It should be exciting, scary sometimes and very entertaining, but the issue is also there. We started way before #MeToo and it was so strange [when it happened]. It was strange that we started this project before but it was also a feeling of ‘finally,’ because it’s such an important thing for not only women but the whole of society.”

Back on set, Leila can be seen arguing with a courier in the hallway outside the Heder office when a large brown box spills out of the delivery man’s hands and opens on the floor, sending



L-R: Heder stars Eva Röse, Anja Lundqvist, Julia Dufvenius and Alexandra Rapaport

dozens of pink sex toys rolling onto the carpet – the latest malicious package to be sent to the firm.

Then, in preparation for the next scene – a pivotal moment when the four main characters realise why they have been receiving threats – all four stars can be found deep in conversation with director Holm as they discuss changing the lines they are about to record.

Holm was working with Rapaport and Wännström on *Gåsmamman* when they began talking about *Heder*. “When I heard about the cast and these four great Swedish actresses, I didn’t really know the story but I was very interested to see what they had come up with,” he says. “When we sat down and Sofia presented her idea, it was too good not to be involved in and to evolve the story with them. It’s been a great process.”

The visual style of the series, which is distributed internationally by Eccho Rights, aligns with the characters’ moods. The first three episodes were filmed using tripods, dollies, steadicams and cranes as the lawyers are introduced. But when the central plot begins to unfold and the tension rises, the camerawork becomes increasingly unsteady thanks to a switch to handheld cameras.

Working with actors who are also exec producers and have been involved throughout the production has been a boon for Holm, who says the leads have been incredibly prepared for each scene. “You don’t have to take the time to set them in the mood. They come in and they know what the scene is about, which means you can have more time to work on the guest actors and other people around it,” he explains. “It’s great because they know their characters and we’ve developed them together. Sometimes we end up in script discussions but, since three of them are also producers, they are very keen to move it forward.”

With women making up 60% of *Heder*’s crew, female viewpoints permeate the drama. “It’s been scary to dive into a show with a female perspective and hear what they go through,” Holm adds. “We did a scene with Nour walking home and she has her keys as a knuckleduster, fearing she is being followed. A lot of women on the crew said they had done that too, and the men said, ‘Really?’ It’s been an eye-opener in a totally different way.”

Dufvenius plays Elin, a tech genius and hacker

who is fearless but reckless; a recovering alcoholic wife and mother who struggles to balance the conflict between work and family. “She’s new for me, I’ve never done anything like this,” the actor says. “If a Swedish casting director had cast me, I’d be Karin because that’s mostly what I’ve been doing, those upper-class, reserved characters. She’s more warm and flips out sometimes. So she’s new for me. That’s really exciting.”

Dufvenius says working on *Heder* has been a “blessing,” having first worked with Lundqvist on comedy projects and a podcast. “We have to create different parts for women,” says the actor, who had also previously discussed potential collaborations with Helin. “It’s so modern, what we are doing, and I’m so happy. I thought my idea about a new area

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Actor and executive producer

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“I want it to give women a bigger arena for them to work in and behave. In the very first scripts with the writers, the women were hugging each other and we were like, ‘Do we always hug each other?’ It’s a cliché. We could just throw them away and make something different in a witty way, in a smart way, with a lot of humour. Hopefully we will entertain the public.”

In between scenes, Röse can be found singing, laughing and joking with other members of the cast and crew until the next take is ready to roll. The star of Swedish crime drama *Maria Wern*, she auditioned for the part of Karin as she was intrigued by the storyline and inspired by the opportunity to

work with her friends. “It’s very seldom you can work with your female colleagues, because there are always men everywhere,” she says. “Me, Alex and Anja went to theatre school in the same years so we’ve been following each other since we were in our 20s, but we’ve never really worked together.

“I also know Sofia, so when I found out that I got the part, we were talking together and she gave me her blessing. She’s been very supportive and super cool. I felt very welcomed when I joined.”

Karin is a strategist and social mastermind, who finds herself hampered by her upper-class upbringing and the fact *Heder* is part of her mother’s own legal empire. “She’s also interesting because she’s married and she has a kid, but she doesn’t see him because he’s at boarding school. Why did she leave him like that? Why does she have all these lovers? Why is she in an open marriage? How did they get that to work, or why? She has this appearance in the office and with her posh husband, a politician, but then she has a secret life.”

Meanwhile, as Janni, Lundqvist finds herself playing the more physical member of the *Heder* team, with her character taking it upon herself to go after criminals while unafraid to use psychology or her sexuality to get what she wants. “She’s the doer,” the actor says. “She’s the one who goes out in the night with a torch and can open locks and has connections on the street. Usually I do more typically female characters and comic things. Janni is not so emotional – I often get very emotional parts because I’m very good at crying!”

Beyond her on-screen role, Lundqvist says making *Heder* has been “much more scary” than her usual jobs, as it’s the first time she has worked as an executive producer. “There’s more self-doubt but it’s much more fun,” she explains. “I’ve been longing for this, to be able to have more power and to decide what story we will tell.”

When Holm calls cut on the final scene, it brings to a close a particularly long day. On-set discussions and script changes have meant proceedings have overrun by 90 minutes, causing cast and crew to hurry home. Not everyone is quick to leave, however, as Wännström and Jansson return to the office to prep for the next day’s shoot and take a moment to watch the first trailer for the series.