Ever since the massive global hit that was The Killing, Scandinavian drama has been panning above its weight, winning over critics and viewers internationally as well as influencing its European neighbours.

The latest Nordic noir success story is Sweden’s The Fat and the Angry (Uttär och naffa), which scooped another international award for the region when it picked up best non-English-language drama at the inaugural C21 Drama Awards last November. It came a close second earlier in the year at the Seoul Drama Awards with a Silver Bird goes in the TV movies category. Based on true events in Gothenburg’s criminal underworld, the two-part show, which premiered locally in Sweden in February 2014, joins a long list of award-winning Nordic dramas with international careers, including Happy ever After, The Killing, Wallander, Borgen and The Bridge – as well as Mamman, which has been the subject of speculation about a BBC remake.

The Fat and the Angry highlights an important feature of Scandinavian dramas: co-production. Made by Göta Film and Swedish-Swedish SVT, its partners included Finnish production contract YLE and Swedish film production company Film i Väst. With a few exceptions, Scandinavian drama’s international partnerships came out of necessity. Says SVT head of drama Christian Wikander: “The hourly cost for a drama in the SVT has gone up, which means we’re all searching for new money, and this drove the producers and the broadcasters to reach out and broaden the network.”

As the popularity of Nordic noir shows no sign of waning, DQ asks Scandinavian drama’s key players where they plan to take the genre next.

By Gün Alyuz

If anyone can find success with this approach, it’s the Scandinavians, see Lindeberg, executive producer of international drama projects at YLE, explains. “We’ve been coproducing since 1995. It’s really good for Nordic drama that we have an extra face and two important funds within the Nordic countries.” One of these is the Nordic Film and TV Fund, where Finska sit on the board.

“THERE’S MUCH TO BE GAINED BY HAVING A LOT OF SMALLER FUNDING AND REGIONAL FUNDING CONTRIBUTIONS, EVEN THOUGH THEY DON’T PAY MUCH,” AGREES STENIAN BÄRS, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER OF NORDIC DRAMA. BÄRS LEAD SVT IN 2014 AFTER 21 YEARS TO JOIN MTG-OWNED NICE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP WHERE HE’S NOW AN EXEC PRODUCER HEADQUARTERS INTERNATIONAL COPRODUCTION. “THE TRICK IS TO HAVE TOO MANY PARTNERS AT THE SCRIPT STAGE,” HE SAYS. “WHEN YOU HAVE A COUPLE OF SCRIPTS, THEN YOU NEED TO DISTRIBUTORS AND COWORKERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.”

Beyond the region, Nordic drama’s international appeal has grown thanks to increasingly sophisticated, social media savvy audiences and their expanding tastes, says Wikander – adding that this has also helped prise open the door to the UK, a notoriously closed market for subtitles, non-Anglo-Saxon fare.

“I THINK AUDIENCES ARE VERY WELL-EDUCATED AND USED TO ALL KINDS OF STORIES, PLOTS, CHARACTERS AND ALSO LANGUAGE,” SAYS THE SVT MAN. “BECAUSE SOCIAL MEDIA IS SO BORDERLESS, WE SHARE SO MUCH IN OUR PARTNERSHIPS, FROM ONE PRODUCTION TO THE NEXT. THE TRICK IS TO HAVE TOO MANY PARTNERS AT THE SCRIPT STAGE,”

Says SVT’s drama commissioner and producer with an annual output of four longform drama series (4050) and four mini-series (3000) across crime, family drama and comedy, on a budget of around SEK 25-30m.

“Around half of our output is coproduced, largely with its longstanding Nordic partners such as DR, NRK and YLE. But it has also attracted a growing band of Europeans and North Americans interested in remake rights to shows such as The Bridge, and ‘but fat’ drama Real Humans, with the latter now being remake by Shame-owned Radios for the UK’s Channel 4 and AMC in the US. Acadia.”

“Drama Quarterly, Spring 2015

DQ - Spring 2015

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT: NORDIC NOIR

The fantastic upside for all of us working in Scandinavia today is that we’re approached by broadcasters and international producers in a way we’ve never seen before, and that’s a great opportunity for us.

Christian Wikander

SVT

The show aired in spring 2014 to a million-plus viewers, selling internationally via Germany’s ZDF. A second season is now in the pipeline.
There's a bigger appetite for Nordic and Swedish drama than what TV stations commissioned, and that's caused a bottleneck.

Peder Gustafsson
Another Park Film