

# ALWAYS

# AMBER

by Lia Hietala & Hannah Reinikainen  
together with Amber, Sebastian & Olivera

camera Lia Hietala, Amber Mastracci, Luciano Mastracci & Alma Mastracci | editing Hannah Reinikainen, Lia Hietala, Anton Hemgren & Charlotte Landellus  
music Shitkid | graphic design Bastion - Agency Studio Lab | sound design Fredrik Stålné | grading Kim Ekberg | world sales Wide House  
produced by Story | with support from UnCut, Film Capital Stockholm/Beata Mannheimer, Filmbasen/Anne-Marie Söhrman Fermelin, The Swedish Film  
Institute/Juan Pablo Libossart | in co-production with Sveriges Television/Matti Kentschynskyj | producers Göran Hugo Olsson & Melissa Lindgren  
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# ALWAYS AMBER

## Logline

Amber belongs to a queer generation which no longer wants society to dictate their identity. The teenagers proudly inhabit a spectrum of fluid identities and master their first loves and losses.

## Short synopsis

Seventeen-year-old Amber and best friend Sebastian refuse to let society label their gender. Moving through a spectrum of fluid identities, they dream together; party together; and form friendships with likeminded people. The queer teenagers inhabit an open and loving world far away from the judging eyes of others, in which everything seems possible. But when Amber falls in love with Charlie, their utopian world is shaken to its core. Trust issues begin to emerge, and in the midst of it all, Amber has to face going through their transition alone.

## Long synopsis

Meet Amber, a gender-fluid teenager. Together with best friend Sebastian, they belong to a queer generation that refuses to let the outside world dictate their identity. In Amber's coming-out, Sebastian played a crucial role, opening up a whole new, accepting and loving world far away from the judging eyes and norms of society. Everything seemed possible. Through self-recorded videos, archive material from their childhood and an intimate voice-over, we get a glimpse into Amber and Sebastian's every-

day life: hanging out after school, dyeing each other's hair and having sleepovers.

But something is challenging their utopian world. Amber has fallen in love for the first time - with Charlie. Whereas they wished Charlie and Sebastian would get along a bit better in the early stages of their relationship, Amber is now starting to worry if Charlie would rather hang out with Sebastian instead of them. A complicated love triangle is formed and quickly escalates. Sebastian and Charlie are in love, leaving Amber no other option than to break up with both of them. Broken-hearted, Amber will have to start searching for themselves again in a world where everything reminds them of Sebastian.

Through a lot of partying and self-destructive behaviour, Amber is struggling to get over the break-up. But a new future looms on the horizon, as they slowly start to build a new life. They spend more time with their mom, go on dates and find new relationships. On top of that, during their final meeting at a transgender care clinic, the verdict of a long counseling period will decide if Amber gets the diagnosis confirming their gender identity as non-binary, which would finally qualify them to get a mastectomy.

*Always Amber* is an intimate portrayal of a generation searching for their identities on new premisses. A film about growing up, love and all the ups and downs that come with it.

## Production facts

### **Always Amber**

Documentary

Duration: 75 min (58' TV version)

World premier: Feb 21 2020,  
Panorama, Berlinale

Directors: Lia Hietala and

Hannah Reinikainen

Music: Shitkid

Camera: Lia Hietala

Additional Camera: Sara Thisner

Lindstedt, Amber Mastracci,

Luciano Mastracci and Alma

Mastracci

Editors: Hannah Reinikainen,

Lia Hietala, Anton Hemgren and

Charlotte Landelius

Sound Design: Fredrik Stålné

Grading: Kim Ekberg

Grafic Art: Bastion Agency

Produced by: Story AB

With support from: UnCut, Film

Capital Stockholm / Beata

Mannheimer, Film Stockholm/

Filmbasen / Anne-Marie

Söhrman Fermelin, The Swed-

ish Film Institute / Juan Pablo

Libossart

In co-production with: Sveriges

Television / Matti Kentrschynskyj

Producers: Göran Hugo Olsson &

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### Director statement

We—Lia Hietala and Hannah Reinikainen—had two themes that were equally important when we started the process of making *Always Amber* about three years ago. We wanted the film to capture identity-forming friendships and to portray young queer people in a new light.

During your formative teenage years it's often more important to have close friends than a romantic relationship. We explored this idea and ended up with a dramatic film about two best friends breaking up. In the process it became clear that ending a friendship is absolutely as emotionally draining and exhausting as ending a romantic relationship. For us, this film goes out to all the people out there who have had their heart broken by a friend, or have broken one themselves.

The film also portrays a new generation of young queer people growing up in a progressive city, where queerphobia is not part of their close relationships. This is something that we actively chose to portray, hoping to give queer people images that do not focus primarily on the struggle of living in a cis- and heteronormative world. This is not to detract from films which portray this struggle, but we see *Always Amber* as a story which comes after this type of film.

### Directors biography

#### Lia Hietala

Born 1993 in Stockholm, Sweden, Hietala has her main base in Stockholm but her first short film *If I Say No* (2016) is financed and takes place in Norway. The film awarded her the Nordnorsk Film Center's scholarship Springbett, which resulted in her second short film *My Gay Sister* (2017). The film became very successful and won the world's most prestigious queer film prize: the Teddy Award for best short film, at the Berlin International Film Festival. Hietala continues to work with both fiction and documentary and is currently studying for a bachelor in fine arts at The University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm. *Always Amber* is her first feature film.

#### Hannah Reinikainen

Hannah Reinikainen was born 1992 in Stockholm, Sweden. She has been studying journalism at the University of Stockholm and documentary filmmaking at Biskops-Arnö. Since her studies she has been working at the production company Story, for example as a director's assistant and editor on *Shapeshifters* (2017) by Sophie Vuković. She has previously directed two short films *Nybohovsbacken* (2016) and *She only beat the one she loves* (2017). *Always Amber* is her first feature film.

# Story

## Göran Hugo Olsson

Göran Hugo Olsson was born 1965 in Lund, Sweden. Olsson was educated at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm and is one of Sweden's leading filmmakers internationally. He has made huge hits as *Fuck You, Fuck You Very Much* (1998), *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* (2011), *Concerning Violence* (2014) and *That Summer* (2018). He is one of the funders of the production company Story and has produced several films, among them *Shapeshifters* (2017) by Sophie Vukovic.

## Melissa Lindgren

Melissa Lindgren is a curator and producer based in Stockholm, Sweden. She was born in Stockholm 1986 and graduated from the University of Gothenburg with a Master in Fine Arts focusing on curation for film and video. Melissa joined Story AB as a producer in 2019 after 10 years as artistic director of Tempo Documentary Festival. She is also the co-funder and festival director of Cinema Queer International Film Festival, the largest LGBTQ+ film festival in Sweden. She is currently working on several projects in early production and development focusing on creative documentaries and art-house features. Always Amber is her first feature film.

## Story AB

was founded in 1998, producing creative documentary films for cinema, television and online distribution. The company is run by five award winning documentary filmmakers, a CEO, producers and office staff. Story also produces and represents additional talented filmmakers connected to the company.

Story has a high ambition in producing both personal and inventive films. Our main

resources are groundbreaking stories and the talented directors we represent. Story is today one of the most important production companies focused on documentaries and art house films in Sweden and Scandinavia. Story specialises in feature-length documentaries with an international reach, but we also produce short documentaries, fiction films, animated documentaries and commercial work with a documentary base.

Our filmography includes (selection) *Lucky One* (2019, Eurimages Audentia Award at the Gothenburg Film Festival), *That Summer* (2018, Telluride, Berlinale Panorama, Gothenburg FF), *The Distant Barking of Dogs* (co-producer, 2017, First Appearance Award at IDFA, FIPRESCI Award in Thessaloniki + more), *Shapeshifters* (2017, Competition sections in Gothenburg FF and CPH:DOX), *Kiki* (2016, Sundance World Competition, Teddy Award at Berlinale, IDFA + more), *Fonko* (2015, Rotterdam and London IFF), *Concerning Violence* (2014, Sundance World Competition, Cinema Fairbindet Award Berlinale, Best documentary at the Swedish Film Awards), *Belleville Baby* (2013, Berlinale Panorama, Best Documentary at Swedish Film Awards), *After You* (2013, Best Nordic Documentary Award, CPH:DOX), *At Night I Fly*, (2011, Best Documentary at Swedish Film Awards), *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* (2011, World Documentary Editing Award, Sundance + more).

Our projects have something important to say to the audience. And we see an international potential in the projects presented here. They all deal with burning questions in our contemporary society. Our long-time drive has been to reach a new audience by combining a captivating and fervent theme with an innovative form.

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