

By Anne Nordström,  
info@shipgaz.com

## Stellan Skarsgård **Report**



In the middle, Stellan Skarsgård as Randbæck in Zero Kelvin.

PHOTO: FILMARKIVET/SANDBREWS

# From sailor to Hollywood star

Shipgaz has met Stellan Skarsgård, who talks about his favourite parts in Nordic films, and shares some sea related memories from the past.

Everyone knows Swedish actor Stellan Skarsgård is a Hollywood star. Not that many, though, are familiar with the fact that he began his career working at sea. Stellan Skarsgård and his best friend managed to sign on to the Axel Gorthon, only 14 years old. That was illegal, as they were too young.

“I worked as a mess boy, doing dish washing and serving the crew during one summer. My friend was a deck boy.”

Unlike his brother, who works at sea as a chief engineer, Stellan Skarsgård did not appear as a sailor again until he later became an actor.

**Stellan Skarsgård's favourite** acting performances have been in Nordic productions. In the Norwegian film Kjaerligehtens Kjoetere, from 1995 – known abroad as Zero Kelvin – he plays a character who is an ex sailor. In two others, the Norwegian film Aberdeen and the Danish film Breaking the Waves, his character is or has

»I worked as a mess boy, doing dish washing and serving the crew«

**Stellan Skarsgård**, 59, with a track record of acting in 108 film so far, several of which are related to working at sea in some way.

of the best roles of his career, even if “I look ugly in all of them.” Moland and Skarsgård got to know each other when they filmed Zero Kelvin in 1995. The movie was shot in Svalbard. The film team was equipped with magnum revolvers to ward off polar bears. Stellan recalls that there were no houses at the filming location, besides the barracks where the main characters were supposed to live in the fiction film. The film team had to stay on board a ship at nights. The ship was not built for Arctic weather.

**“The Captain on board** was from northern Norway. He was deeply religious and prayed every morning.”

The ship was not equipped with

been working on an oil rig.

According to Stellan Skarsgård, the Norwegian director Hans Petter Moland has given him some

an echo sounder, and since the waters were unknown they ran aground near Ny-Ålesund, which is one of the world's northernmost human settlements.

“One stormy night I heard a splashing sound and noticed seawater coming in through an open porthole. I shut it and I also noticed a door on deck wide open, loudly banging.”

**Being an atheist**, Stellan Skarsgård and others on board took no comfort in prayers. They were worried.

In Zero Kelvin Stellan plays a cynical ex sailor, Randbæck, who has lost his faith in love. His opposite number, young Larsen, is romantic and naïve, which makes them a perfect match. Like a wolf Randbæck bites at every line Larsen lets out. Some of them are amusingly bitter. Once Randbæck says (about Larsen): “He’s got more hair in his ass than it takes to knit a Norwegian lusekofte.”

“I was allowed to improvise some

# Report **Stellan Skarsgård**



PHOTO: FILMARKIVET

**Stellan Skarsgård and Lars Von Trier working together in Breaking the Waves.**

of my lines and my mother helped me with it, as for example the line about knitting a lusekofte”.

Another of Stellan Skarsgård's favourite acting roles is in director Hans Petter Moland's Aberdeen from 2001. There he plays a blind drunk father - an ex oil rig worker.

**“When you play drunk** you have to relax so much that you almost crash. Then you have to try to keep straight. My kids liked it so much they said ‘Play drunk!’ when I got back from work. So I stumbled into furniture the best I could.”

In director Lars von Trier's Breaking the Waves Stellan Skarsgård plays another oil rig worker, recently married Jan, who is severely injured while working on the oil rig.

“Working with Lars von Trier is fun. Actors can improvise and do whatever comes to mind. Lars is very skilful.”

**Stellan Skarsgård's son** Alexander has also agreed to try out oil rig life, playing the main role in director Hans Petter Moland's next film, an oil rig thriller called The Elephant. The film is based on a novel by Magnar Jonsgaard, who worked on several oil platforms



PHOTO: ANNE NORDBLÖM

in the North Sea during the 1970s. The story of a menacing oil rig explosion in the frigid North Sea almost foretold the real disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Hans Petter Moland commented in The Business of Film:

“This story changed an entire society. It is Norway's rags-to-riches story, and at its core it reveals the abuse of

↑ **At the moment,** Stellan Skarsgård and his son Alexander are filming Lars von Trier's new movie Melancholia in Trollhättan, Sweden.

huge wealth and its impact on individual lives.”

The odds on Stellan Skarsgård getting a part in The Elephant ought to be low, based on Moland's and Skarsgård's regular habits. Besides acting, Stellan Skarsgård has also been a co-producer of Aberdeen and Moland's latest A Somewhat Gentle Man. ✱