

# 'This Life'

Some must die, so others can live

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

It is not by chance that Anne Grethe Bjarup Riis' movie, "This Life," was a big success in Denmark, its country of origin. The director shows a piece of that country's history at a time when the younger generation is asking questions and wants to understand what happened during World War II. But it also has universal appeal, telling how a handful of people can make a difference, and the consequences, good and bad, of personal engagement. It also touches the heart because it talks of family, of loyalty, and of the often understated and misconstrued role women played in this major conflict.

The movie that will play at the Orinda Theatre in early April tells the story of a Danish family that revolts against the German invasion of their country in 1939. As part of a close-knit community, the Fiils have a

large extended family and own a beautiful inn. The movie begins with the women cooking in the kitchen for the 25th wedding anniversary of owner Marius Fiil and his wife Gudrun. The war has not really reached this northern region of Denmark yet, and while it is clear the government has decided to collaborate with the invader, Danish laws are still in place.

During the dinner and party that ensues, a fracture begins between the guests: some think that the government's decision was cowardly, while others defend the Germans, believing they will protect the Danes against communism. Shortly after, the Fiils have to make a choice when they are asked to help organize the parachuting in of both people and equipment coming from England. The decision has life and death con-

sequences for everyone, and their values are tested to an extent they could not have imagined.

Bjarup Riis shows how good people can be crushed by the pitiless juggernaut of history.

At the center of the movie is the couple: Marius (Jens Jørn Spottag) and Gudrun (Bodil Jørgensen). As the head of the household, when help is sought, people talk to Marius; but when asked for his decision, he says he has to talk to his wife, first. Gudrun is the relentless worker, the hinge on which the family revolves. Soft spoken, gentle and strong, she is a moral compass. The Fiils have sons and daughters, including the fiery Gerda who cannot be kept at home when others go out and fight.

The characters shine with humanity and an honest love for each other. The title alerts viewers that not all of the characters survive the ordeal, and that certainty creates an unnerving tension as the movie approaches its denouement. But there are also many light and fun moments in the movie, just like life itself.

The dominant visual tones in the film are very warm and a bit subdued. "This Life" is solid, much like the people featured in the film who became reluctant heroes.

"This Life" is will be shown at the Orinda Theatre as part of the International Film Showcase April 4-11. For more information, visit internationalshowcase.org.

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# SMC Spring Production Opens April 2

Submitted by Sharon Cahill



Photo by Michael Cook

Saint Mary's College student actors, Samantha Ricci and Michael Kuzmack, rehearse for the

upcoming Performing Arts Department spring production "ANTIGONE(S)" which will show at 8 p.m. April 2-5, and at 2 p.m. April 6 at LeFevre Theatre. This winner of the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award and the Drama Desk Award, is about two families – parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives – who struggle to understand the mystery, misery and magic of love. Tickets: \$10 general; \$8 seniors (65+) and non-SMC students; \$5 SMC faculty, staff and students. For information or reservations, call (925) 631-4670 or go online to www.brownpapertickets.com.

# 'Muppets Most Wanted'

By Derek Zemrak



Photo provided

Thus far 2014 looks like the year for kids' films: "Lego," which broke box office numbers, then "Mr. Sherman & Peabody" and now Hollywood has released "Muppets Most Wanted."

The previous Muppets movie, "The Muppets" released in 2011, grossed over \$86 million at the U.S. box office and was made on a \$45 million budget. What does that mean? Sequel! "Muppets Most Wanted" revolves around the Muppets themselves instead of the humans as was the case in "The Muppets" – Jason Segel and Amy Adams do not return in this sequel.

In "Muppets Most Wanted" the tone is set quickly in the opening musical number, as they poke fun at themselves with the music line "Everyone knows that the sequel's never quite as good" – classic Jim Henson humor. The line

probably refers to the 1999 Muppet flop, "Muppets From Space." From that musical number on, I knew I was in for an enjoyable 1 hour and 52 minutes.

The Muppets are on a world tour and get caught up in an international jewelry heist as they deal with a Kermit the Frog look-a-like, the impostor, Constantine. The 40-plus year olds in the audience will appreciate the return of a more classic Jim Henson style dialogue and screenplay. Some of the children will not get the humor but neither did we as kids, which is okay. They will love the vibrant colors and the loveable puppet characters they see on the big screen that were created over 40 years ago on PBS.

The human supporting roles in the film include Ty Burrell ("Modern Family"), as a very funny Clouseau-like In-

terpol agent; Ricky Gervais ("The Office" (UK), "Extras") as Dominic Badguy, Constantine's criminal sidekick; and Tina Fey ("30 Rock") as a Russian prison guard. Also, as with the classic Muppets shows, the movies have several cameo appearances – Celine Dion, Lady Gaga, Salma Hayek, and Usher, to name a few.

Some may say they miss the humans as the leads, but I say it's the Muppets' movie and I'm glad the focus has returned to be on them. "Muppets Most Wanted" is rated PG.

Derek Zemrak is a film critic, film producer and founder of the California Independent Film Festival. You can follow Derek on Twitter @zemrak for the latest Hollywood news. Derek can be heard every Friday on KAHJ 950AM on the Poppoff Show.

## LYNN'S TOP FIVE:

# Taxes 2014 - Plan now for confidence later!

By Lynn Ballou, CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™

A rainy weekend – perfect time to get those taxes done, right? Wait – not so fast! As I'm writing this the IRS is just now finishing the instructions for a couple of new forms. So the tax software companies are just now updating and testing their software. They tell me hopefully this coming weekend (March 8) I'll be able to file my return. Yup, they are still due April 15! Makes you want to hug your tax pro, right?

So by now, even though all the forms are ready and hopefully your last corrected 1099 is in your hands, this will still be the year that will test your patience – until you get a peak at your return and then it will be the year that you realize tax planning for 2014 needs to start right now! Here are some of the bigger tax surprises that I think will be in store for you and what you need to do now so that next year will be "Ho hum," and not "Oh no!"

1) Cap Gains Pass Throughs: They say that "making money on your money" is what it's all about, right? Well congrats, because many of your investments were busy this past year doing just that. And with very few if any losses left on the books to offset gains, some of your holdings are passing your share of the gains through to

you as we haven't seen the likes of in almost seven years. If these investments are in after tax accounts, be prepared to come up with the money to pay the taxes on this gain for 2013 and then include this in your planning for 2014 so you aren't unprepared at tax time next year. I think a lot of Americans will be pulling money out of their investments to pay this year's taxes, which of course could lead to more gains taken – sigh.

2) The Pease Limitations: One of the least enjoyable and least discussed experiences you may encounter is the return to phase outs of certain itemized deductions. Called the Pease limits after the Congressman who wrote the bill (Ohio, if you want to send him any love notes), these were suspended during the fallout from the global economic crisis. I guess Congress has bought in to the notion that the economy is better, because these limits are back! This will affect those of you with combined married filing jointly income of \$305,050 or singles with \$254,200. This complex law basically results in you losing as much as 3 percent of certain itemized deductions once you hit these income thresholds. Learn the specifics and how it might affect you when you are working on tax planning for this year.

3) The 0.09 percent solution: According to the IRS website, www.irs.gov, this new additional Medicare Tax, which went into effect on Jan. 1, 2013 applies to an individual's wages and self-employment income that exceeds a threshold amount based on the individual's filing status. The threshold amounts are \$250,000 for married taxpayers who file jointly, \$125,000 for married taxpayers who file separately and \$200,000 for all other taxpayers. Although an employer is responsible for withholding on this if you earn more than \$200,000, what about if you are married and together you must pay but separately your employer wasn't required to withhold? Be aware of this iceberg: you might not have been on top of this for tax season 2013, but now you know and can be better prepared.

4) Yup, another add on Medicare Tax!: In our offices we call this the good news bad news tax because it only applies if you have substantial investment income of a certain type, but once you do – and many retirees and avid savers in our community fall into this group – there are taxes to pay. Taxpayers with income over \$200,000 and married filers with income over \$250,000 should check to

see what their investment income is and how this tax might apply. This could be a bit of a stealth tax for you, as your investment income is probably rarely the same year to year. A large capital gain one year could put you in line for this tax that you would normally otherwise avoid.

5) Can I get a safe harbor? Well – maybe! With underpayment penalty tax rates higher than what you can earn in your savings account, it pays to pay attention to these rules. For some taxpayers, you can get by with paying in 90 percent of your 2013 taxes through withholding in 2014. For others, it's more complex. Check in with your tax pro or the IRS website to learn more. And really check into the rules for California – they are more complex, onerous and sticky than the IRS rules now. Go to www.ftb.ca.gov to learn more.

So in closing, it's a call to arms, basically, and by that I mean arm yourself and your tax pro now with information! And please note: this information is not intended to be a substitute for specific individualized tax advice. We suggest you discuss your specific tax issues with a qualified tax advisor. This is also a reminder that all the best tax planning now is certainly in your best interests, but you'll

want to check in later in the year to be sure you nailed it. Or see what new fun Congress has cooked up for you! Otherwise you could be looking at another "Oh no" tax season next year instead of "Wow – got that covered!"



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