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'Take It or Leave It,' an accurate and tender look at fatherhood and male identity

By *Sophie Braccini*



Photo provided

moment a person becomes a parent and what it means to them.

It will take a lot to transform Erik, the violent young man always ready to start a fight to become a father. When he does, what will he do with his new-found ethos??

Feelings in this movie are not openly expressed. The people in Erik's family or in the family of Moonika, the mother of the baby, are not gifted at expressing and sharing feelings and thoughts. Therefore, year after year, generation after generation, guilt and shame are carried over and impact the younger people. Triskina-Vanhatalo also explores what makes, and destroys, families, and what are their subtle dynamics.

It is because she is interested in social changes that the director is exploring here what it is like to be a single father. She said in an interview with CineEuropa that there are three ways to be a father: through biology, society, or psychological attachment. She believes that ideally the three aspects are united in the same person, but that when it cannot be the case, the psychological father, the one who is there in good and bad times, is the most important.?

Reimo Sagor who plays Erik brings a lot of humanity to this character of a somewhat crude young man who will manage to add a completely new dimension to his persona. The way the film crew worked with a 2-month-old baby is pretty remarkable. Sagor spent time with the baby's real family before production started, carrying her, feeding her, and learning to do everything with one hand! Triskina-Vanhatalo explained that the film crew worked around the baby's schedule, her feeding and nap time, and was ready to adapt should her mood change.?

For non-Nordic Europeans there is also an interesting social documentary aspect to this movie. Work conditions for the Estonians who work in Finland are shown as pretty rough. The men who are expatriates during the week share non-glamorous quarters, and are looked down by some natives. What they want to do during their days off is take the ferry and party back in Estonia. The film offers an often unknown perspective on Estonia where Finland, Norway and Sweden are presented as lands of economic riches that attract some, but at the cost of their Estonian identity.?

This engaging movie was selected as the Estonian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 91st Academy Awards. It has received several international accolades. The film will open at the Orinda Theatre on Oct. 14 for at least one week. This is a Bay Area premiere and exclusive presentation.

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