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Oscar-nominated international film opens at Orinda Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

It was hard for any movie to beat German film "All Quiet on the Western Front" for the International Film Oscar this year, but contender "Close" also deserves to be celebrated. The movie from Belgium (in French and Dutch) brings an unusual touch of poetry and finesse to a complex topic. The rhythm, the beauty of the imagery, the remarkable acting by everyone, makes this heart-breaking film a definite must-see. It will show in Orinda from April 21 for at least one week.

The story written and directed by filmmaker Lukas Dhont (his first film, "Girl," won Camera d'Or at the 2018 Cannes Film festival) is a very personal story that paints the friendship between two boys, Léo and Rémi, as they transition between the innocence of childhood and the difficult years of middle school. Two friends, united like two brothers in a communion of spirit, share their games, their joys, their care-free time. But as they enter middle school, the eyes of others are quick to label their

closeness and end their innocence. One of them, Léo, will react by joining the hockey team and distancing himself from his friend. The catastrophe that will ensue will change their lives forever.

In an interview for the Hambourg Film Fest, Dhont explained that he wanted to paint a friendship between two young boys that is very intimate and full of love. "We are used to seeing friendships between girls that are very deep and passionate and we are not used to seeing that in boys," said Dhont, who put a lot of himself in both main characters of this movie. He explained that as a youngster he did not identify with the group of girls or of the boys, but that he created a distance with the boys who wanted to be close to him because he did not want the sexual label. His movie pays homage to the friends he lost. "Friendships define who we are and an abrupt breakage can stay with us for a long time," he added.

"Close" paints the violent reality of middle school pressure to belong with subtlety and elegance. It remains soft in spite of the tough topic it addresses. The closeness to nature, the beautiful rhythm of the seasons that is evoked throughout creates the deep and respectful mood that permeates throughout movie. It is an impressionist movie with a dark serious undertone.

Dhont also has a gift for choosing and leading his actors to inhabit his vision. Eden Dambrine as Léo and Gustav De Waele as Rémy were chosen by Dhont, who asked of them to really get to know each other, so when it came time to act, things were natural. By the same token, once he chose the two mothers - Léa Drucker and Emilie Dequenne - he asked them to do everyday life activities with their "sons," such as baking a cake. The two women are consummate professionals and Dequenne's performance is especially superb. Dambrine, a youngster that Dhont met in a train, is so true, vulnerable and strong, deeply moving.?

This beautiful coming-of-age film is brought to Lamorinda by the local nonprofit International Film Showcase and will open at the Orinda Theatre on April 21. Tickets at <https://www.orindamovies.com/>

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