



ABOUT ENDLESSNESS

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

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Magnolia Pictures

Opening April 30th, 2021, in Theaters and on Demand

76 minutes

Swedish with English Subtitles



*2019 Venice International Film Festival Winner: Silver Lion for Best Direction



A scene from ABOUT ENDLESSNESS, a Magnolia Pictures release. Photo courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

SYNOPSIS: A reflection on human life in all its beauty and cruelty, its splendor and banality.



A scene from ABOUT ENDLESSNESS, a Magnolia Pictures release. Photo courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

We wander, dreamlike, gently guided by our Scheherazade-esque narrator. Inconsequential moments take on the same significance as historical events: a couple floats over a war-torn Cologne; on the way to a birthday party, a father stops to tie his daughter's shoelaces in the pouring rain; teenage girls dance outside a cafe; a defeated army marches to a prisoner-of-war camp.



A scene from ABOUT ENDLESSNESS, a Magnolia Pictures release. Photo courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

Simultaneously an ode and a lament, **ABOUT ENDLESSNESS** presents a kaleidoscope of all that is eternally human, an infinite story of the vulnerability of existence.



A scene from ABOUT ENDLESSNESS, a Magnolia Pictures release. Photo courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

Roy Andersson on ABOUT ENDLESSNESS

An interview by Philippe Bober

Some of the themes in ABOUT ENDLESSNESS are present in your other films: optimism represented by youth, but also war and despair, and the absence of God. Here you show a priest who doesn't believe in God. Would you say there is always a balance between hope and despair?

Roy Andersson: The main theme of my work is the vulnerability of human beings. And I think it is a hopeful act to create something showing vulnerability. Because if you are aware of the vulnerability of existence, you can become respectful and careful of what you have.

I wanted to emphasize the beauty of existence, of being alive. But of course, to get that, you need to have a contrast. You need to show the bad side, the cruel side of existence.

Looking at art history, for example, a lot of paintings are very tragic. But even if they depict cruel and sad scenes, by painting them the artists have in some way transferred the energy and created hope.

For each of your films, you have taken inspiration from paintings. What were your influences for ABOUT ENDLESSNESS?

I am interested in the Neue Sachlichkeit artists because of the strength of their paintings. In my opinion, they are extraordinarily sharp and detailed: everything is in focus, everything is very clear and distinct. You can't find this sharpness in film history: the background has to be out of focus. That's why I find these paintings very inspiring for my scenes: everything is in focus, even the grotesque moments in life.

I am often very jealous of painting because I feel that film history doesn't have the same quality as painting history. I really want movies to be as rich as painting can be.

Is there one specific painting that inspired you for this film?

I like Otto Dix's "Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von Harden" very much.

The Neue Sachlichkeit movement took place in the 1920s just before the apocalypse. Would you say that ABOUT ENDLESSNESS is also taking place just before an apocalypse?

I hope not. It would be very pessimistic to think we are living in such a moment. I don't think even Otto Dix believed an apocalypse was coming, but he warned us about the possibility. All of his paintings can be seen as warnings. That is also true for the Old Masters, they portray our existence but also warn us about its brevity: "Let us remember that life is not eternal. And you have to be thankful for the time you have left."

You also mentioned architecture as an influence, that the Swedish Functionalism movement of the 50s was an inspiring aesthetic element for your films. What is the connection between functionalism and ABOUT ENDLESSNESS?

I had the ambition to show the existence in all its aspects: that includes functionalism, modernism, Stalinism. It's a mixture of multiple ambitions to create houses, to create societies. I didn't have the ambition to create a pure style, I wanted to show our time, and in Sweden, functionalism was very popular and used abundantly.

You have said that the presence of a narrator in the film is inspired by the character of Scheherazade in the Arabian Nights. Is this also why you chose a woman to be the storyteller?

Yes, that was a choice. I was hesitant: I tried with a man, and even with my voice but finally found it more interesting to choose a woman. She's like a fairy, very clever, maybe even eternal. It is the first time that I have used a voice-over, it is new to me. I was influenced by the voice in HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR. In certain scenes, the main character describes what the audience sees on-screen at the same time. And I really loved it.

Your films always include historical scenes, why is it so important for you?

I've always been very interested in history. It was my major at university: I studied the history of literature, history of philosophy, even Nordic languages. I was especially interested in the two World Wars. For instance, I was fascinated by the pictures of WWI that I saw as a teenager.

In the film, the war scenes depict the losers. Why?

Yes, winners are not interesting. Because we are all losers in some sense. It is important to acknowledge that in the end, no one is a winner. I am not a pessimistic person but the fact is: there is no hope. Life is a tragedy. I'm not the first person to say it.

I thought it was about hubris, represented by Charles XII, or Hitler in your films.

Yes, in some periods in your life, especially when you're young, you experience this hubris. You think you are invulnerable, that you will always win. That is very characteristic of young and strong people. I also experienced that feeling myself, especially when I was around 25 and had just made A SWEDISH LOVE STORY. That was my hubris period when I thought I would always be a winner, that I would never lose if I fought and worked hard enough.

I wanted to ask you about youth in your films: what does it represent for you?

It's very beautiful, most of the time. I especially like to look at children because they are so full of ideas, hope, and vitality; it's beautiful to look at. As long as you are young you keep this hope but then you lose it step by step, as you grow older.

For instance, I really like the scene showing the father and daughter in the rain, on their way to a birthday party. The father forfeits his umbrella to help her, an act of selflessness, whilst the daughter just wants to have her shoes tied, and that is so nice to see. Also, in the scene with the girls dancing, I think it's very charming to see the vitality of these young people who are very happy to exist, they love to dance and so that is what they do. There is something contagious about their energy.

You have a very special sense of humor. What do you find funny?

I think truth is very often funny. When I started my career, I was inspired by Milos Forman, Jiri Menzel, and other Czech filmmakers. They showed us existence in a very humorous tone. Depicting people that are a little lost, so to say. Not losers, but a little lost. And I really like these films, showing us that kind of humor: small but very funny stories. A lot of filmmakers attempt to create this everyday humor, but it's very easy to fail. I also fail many times, but I don't give up.

Did you shoot everything in your studio?

Yes. Apart from one exterior, the scene with the German army marching, which was shot in Norway.

What were the most challenging scenes in the film, from a technical point of view?

It has to be the flying couple scene. Even setting aside the making of the model city of Cologne, it took us a very long time. The scale is maybe 1/200. For example, the Cathedral is half a meter high.

The whole city is an enormous set. It took a month to build.

What does this scene mean to you?

It is a terrible reminiscence from history: that a beautiful city was bombed and destroyed. But in spite of that, I wanted to show that life goes on. Love, tenderness, sensuality keep existing. It was important to show these sides of existence over a destroyed city.

Though you have these historical scenes, there is a sense of timelessness to your films and here it also ties into the title.

Yes, I wanted to have these scenes which are very close to being timeless though we see it is September or snowing or a historical scene there should be a feeling of timelessness. Again, I am inspired by paintings, and artwork that talks to us in our time talked to others two hundred years ago, or more. It suggests that we human beings are quite similar throughout the ages and time.

The "endlessness" of the title has nothing to do with the never-ending space. It is not in terms of science, endlessness in this film is about the endlessness of signs of existence, the signs of being human.



A scene from ABOUT ENDLESSNESS, a Magnolia Pictures release. Photo courtesy of Magnolia Pic

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