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Berlinale FILM CAPSULE: Bright Nights (Arslan, 2017) Norway

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

German Director Thomas Arslan brings it home with his latest Golden Bear nominated film, *Bright Nights (Helle Nachte)*. Arslan had been previously nominated for the Golden Bear, the festivalâ??s top film prize in 2013 for his film *Gold*. *Bright Nights,* making its world premiere at the 67th Berlin International Film Festival in Competition, tells the story of a single, working father, Michael, who reunites with his son, Luis, after the loss of his own father.

Arslan proves he is a master of cinematic language from the opening scene set within an industrial batch plant on a waterway. The image of a plant operator seated at his indoor work station wearing a protective hard hat speaks volumes. The lighting recedes from a medium to high key to low key lighting. The man removes his hard hat and drops his head into his hands exasperated. The scene transitions to the solidly built man walking through the night in profile. Reinhild Blaschke managed the Production Design. Director of Photography Reinhold Vorschneider allows much of the story to unfold with long takes.

Later in the film, after discovering his father has died, the man has opted to bring his son to help remediate his fatherâ??s cabin. As Michael is packing up his fatherâ??s belonging, a silence ensues where Michael comes to the realization, he doesnâ??t really know his own son.

With a sense of his own mortality now, Michael seeks to reconnect and re-establish a relationship with Luis. Visually pleasing mise-en-scene depicts scenes of father and son hiking and fishing in breathtaking Austrian locations. However, not everything is perfect in this natural sportsmanâ??s paradise. Luis feels confused and rebels.

The relationship teeters in the balance when an young woman befriends the son and the two share their experiences. The son decides to give his father a second chance. Going for one last hike the father drives for through a gray, fogged in road. The drive goes on for an uncomfortable amount of time signifying the large amount of gray space in the relationship.

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The film transitions revealing vibrant colors of green and yellow symbolizing a time of joy and healing with a touch of red foreshadowing a powerful element of emotionality is still present. The relationship dynamic between Michael, played by Georg Friedrich and Luis, played by Tristan GÃ¶bel drives the narrative. Both actors deliver very compelling performances.

In my opinion, the climatic image comes quickly thereafter, as the son goes off on his own. A wide angle long shot of the man running across a mountain ridge with a large mountain range looming in the background slightly out of focus reminiscent of Peter Oâ??Toole in *Lawrence of Arabia* as he rides solo across the barren Arabian desert. Again, the cinematic language is so much greater than mere words. The lengths the father is willing to go to in order to re-establish the father/son relationship bond is beyond measure. Reinhold Vorschneider served as the filmâ??s Director of Photography.

While there are many father/son relationship dynamic films, there is only one *Bright Nights*. Highly recommended. A cinematic language extraordinaire.

*Featured photo courtesy of Berlinale.de and @Schramm Film / Marco Kruger

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Date Created
February 18, 2017
Author
hollywoodglee