Berlinale FILM CAPSULE: Return to Montauk (SchlÃ¶ndorff, 2017): Germany

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson.

Director Volker SchlÃ¶ndorff debuted *Return to Montauk (RÃ¼ckkehr nach Montauk)*, at the 67th Berlin Film Festival in Competition. Volker having previously adapted â??Homo Faberâ?• draws again from the world of Max Frisch with new variations on the motifs of happiness and the pain that comes with remembering.

Opening in spectacular fashion with titles and music swarming in and out, around, across and seemingly through the viewing screen, *Return to Montauk* starts out on a high, buzzing note. From here the viewer is dragged down into the abysmal life of aging writer, Max Zorn, embodied well by Stellan Skarsgard. Well past the norm for a mid-life existential crisis, Max doesnâ??t seem to adhere to that adage and decides to go there anyway.

He has a beautiful and loving wife/partner in Clara, portrayed by Susanne Wolff, who would walk the ends of the earth and back for Zorn. Clara has taken up a residence in New York to make sure Maxâ??s book receives its due publication â?? a very personal novel that tells the story of a great but failed love affair.That being said Max seems to envision his life from some distant metaphysical space as he allows a long-forgotten affair to consume his being.

His novel details the affair he so flippantly discarded years earlier as he finds himself struggling to make ends meet financially. His then lover, Rebecca, played divinely by Nina Hoss, has moved on achieving a high-degree of success as a New York lawyer specializing in financial mergers and acquisitions.

Max can smell the money and follows the scent with support from another earlier acquaintance, Walter, portrayed by Niels Arestrup, a seemingly wealthy, albeit aloof, art collector. Walter is well aware of Maxâ??s situation and knew Max and Rebecca as a couple. Throwing all caution to the wind (and thatâ??s putting in midly) and with little thought of Clara, Max incredulously goes all in and meets up with Rebecca.

The two return to Montauk, situated at the far end of New Yorkâ??s Long Island, where their flame had ignited years before. Director of Photography, JÃ©rÃ´me AlmÃ©ras provides solid cinematography

accenting a rather luscious mise-en-scene. Editor HervÃ© Schneid utilizes continuity editing in large part with some intimate long takes as the once-lovers take mesmerizing and exquisite seashore walks. Costuming is spot on from Majie Poetschke and Angela Wendt.

Interestingly, most of the film revolves around Max rekindling the long-ago extinguished relationship with Rebecca. Max tries to get close. But Rebecca stands in her truth, grounded in the present. Sheâ??s worked to get to where she is building a formidable new life with a now deceased partner. Yet, she is still reeling from the past hurt she experienced with Max.

Unfortunately for Max, the well ends up being deep and dark inside. Yes. The two shared a love and being adults reconnect intimately during their weekend together. Rebecca, however, coolly rejects a present day relationship with Max. Nevertheless, a symbiotic and somewhat cathartic healing occurs for Rebecca. Meanwhile, Maxâ??s metaphysical, roller-coaster ride continues, plunging his relationship status with Clara to an unexperienced new low.

While *Return to Montauk* finished out of the running for the Berlin International Film Jury prizes it is nonetheless a beautiful film with excellent casting by Cornelia von Braun, Amy Rowan, and Meredith Jacobson Marciano. The production design by Sebastian Soukup is noteworthy with a few subtle nuances that further specific aspects of the filmâ??s narrative while enhancing the already mentioned luscious mise-en-scene. Highly recommended.

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