



FILM: **TONI ERDMANN**

FDG RATING: 3.4   
Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Maren Ade: *Director*  
Peter Simonisch: *Actor, Toni Erdmann*  
Sandra Huller: *Actress, Ines*

DATE: May 21, 2017

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **TONI ERDMANN**

If any of us have embarrassing relatives, they will pale in comparison to divorced, paunchy, middle aged, disheveled, jokester, Winfried Conradi, who introduces himself as Toni Erdmann, during one of his many disruptive charades. At first glance he and his extremely serious, all career-business-ambitious executive daughter are polar opposites until you realize that Ines is unknowingly playing a role as well. She dresses, says, and does exactly what is appropriate in every business interaction, often contradicting what she actually said when glaringly corrected by higher level executives, and then countering with, "Yes, of course, that is what I meant." Ironically, as the story slowly unfolds, Toni at times, in all his obvious clownishness, fake teeth included, has more success than Ines in being acknowledged by her male business associates. There are many scenes that satirically point to what's not right or fair especially in the business world and Ines is in the center of it trying very callously to close an important contract. She has joined the ranks of modernization and efficient business practices at the expense of workers, closing her eyes to any hurtful repercussions.

We surmise that Inez has become who she is in rebellion against her father, a music teacher with no ambition. After Winfried's beloved dog dies, he decides to venture out and unannounced, visit Ines who is working for a global consulting firm in Romania. She handles herself very professionally despite her father's disheveled appearances in her work place as he introduces himself as the German ambassador and at a social event, as a freelance management coach. We were surprised that she actually invites him to accompany her at some very important business meetings and evening events indicating an affectionate bond although she clearly does not approve of his behavior. The purpose of his antics seems to be to jolt her out of her conformity.

The underlying confrontation is finally expressed in an outburst where Ines says, "Are you insane?" A more insightful question was when Winfried asked Ines, "Are you happy?" Her response was to analyze the question rather than respond emotionally. We could tell that Ines was angry that her father wasn't there for her as she grew up. Winfried makes a joke about his executive daughter never having time for him. He says he has hired a substitute daughter. She says, "Great, maybe she can call you on your birthday."

The film is close to 3 hours so we witness lots of outrageous, humorous incidents as Winfried wears down the façade Ines has so relentlessly created for herself. The culmination is the birthday brunch she hosts where because of final frustrations at getting everything right including her too tight dress, she ends up greeting her guests naked, making up the excuse that it is a team building technique.

Some of us enjoyed the humor but others didn't, criticizing the antics as lame, and slapstick. As Ines is slowing unraveling, her Dad convinces her to sing a song while he plays the piano when they visited a Romanian family at their home. To an audience of strangers, she belts out "The Greatest Love of All," especially the line "They can't take away my dignity". It was an uncomfortable scene and several of our resident reviewers expressed empathy for Inez, describing the situation as very sad. It's almost a tug of war between the Ines and her father where Ines is trying to hold on to her joyless formulated career life and her dad is creating one painfully awkward situation after another to get her to realize life really should be more fun rather than a calculated career route.

Both actors were very believable despite the absurd personality of Winfried Conradi/Toni Erdmann. Sandra Huller was excellent as Ines and it's hard to believe that Peter Simonisch really isn't an outrageous prankster in real life. There is a poignant father daughter bonding at the end of the film. We decided the best way to watch Toni Erdmann is in the comfort of home where it's easy to take a break or even split viewing sessions over a couple days.

Toni Erdmann was one of the Academy's final 5 Oscar nominated foreign films for 2016, receiving glowing reviews from top film critics. However, we weren't quite as ecstatic. While some genuinely laughed out loud, appreciating the humor and satire as well as the complexity of the father daughter relationship, others grew detached. Our mixed responses resulted in a respectable rating of 3.4 on a scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, [adedic@pacbell.net](mailto:adedic@pacbell.net)

[Film Discussion Group](#) (FDG) organizer