



FILM: **WOMAN AT WAR**

FDG RATING: 4.2 ☺☺☺☺○

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

Benedikt Erlingsson: *director, co-writer*
Halldóra Geirharðsdóttir: *actress, Hala and Asa*

DATE: August 23, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **WOMAN AT WAR**

In the 2018 film, *Woman At War*, Hala, a 50ish single, beloved choir director, has a secret identity: When no one is looking, she becomes a woman warrior, trekking miles across the gorgeously photographed mountainous terrain of Reykjavik, Iceland, to reach the Rio Tinto aluminum plant's power lines which she cuts rendering the plant as well as the city powerless. We witness her fifth such attack, as she out runs the helicopters and hides in crevices to escape the drones, so successfully that news reports claim it must be "organized sabotage by a foreign terrorist network." In reality, it's just her. She is out to save the world, or at least her beloved Iceland, from the massive aluminum plant that's poisoning her homeland.

Save the environment or save a child. That is the dilemma she faces when the adoption request she submitted 4 years ago, becomes a reality. As one film discussion participant stated, those two missions really aren't so different.

The film's serious subject of ecological destruction by a local aluminum plant is treated reverently but with the perfect infusion of carefully calibrated humor. Like a Greek chorus, in a Greek tragedy that lyrically comments on the dramatic action, the director adds in the opening scene, an odd three-piece band unseen by Hala, although they are standing in the field behind her, bellowing droll oompah sounds from an accordion, drums, and sousaphone. One discussion participant described the sounds as the spirit of her activism since they reappear at significant dramatic intervals, rhythmically matching the rhythm of the action. A traditionally costumed Ukrainian cappella trio appears when Hala is focusing on her maternal emotions concerning the adoption. Yes, it's a bit absurd, but does add a unique element of comedic levity and could be explained as merely in her imagination: her mind giving musical manifestations to her emotional struggles.

The actress, Halldóra Geirharðsdóttir, shines in the physically demanding role: One participant described her as an endurance runner athlete. She also plays her twin yoga instructor sister, Asa. While Hala is out to improve the world, Asa is on an inner journey with plans to join an Ashram. There's an endearing quirkiness to both of their personalities. We enjoyed the sisterly bond they shared which becomes crucial to a pivotal point in the story.

In the opening scene, Hala almost seems like a trained assassin, masterfully lifting her bow and arrow, taking aim, and releasing the arrow with pin point precision allowing the end of the attached weighted cable to squarely hit her target. Woman warrior, or Mountain Woman as she calls herself in her ecological manifesto, she is also so spiritually connected to her habitat that she seems like an earth mother, especially when she melds into nature laying flat against the grass, hiding in earth crevices, and camouflaging herself inside the carcass of a sheep.

We had many favorite scenes such as when the drones buzz close to her head but her face is covered by her Nelson Mandela mask. And when a local greenhouse farmer (who they discover through a quick genealogy iteration is probably a cousin) hides her in the back of his truck, and carries her to a hot spring to revive after she evaded pursuers by jumping in a freezing lake. He later becomes an accomplice, facilitating a power blackout in Hala's absence. Then there is the young man, foreign tourist bicyclist who more than once is in the wrong place at the wrong time, becoming the assumed culprit for the sabotage Hala has caused.

One published critic summed it up nicely saying that the film approached weighty themes with a very light touch..."an environmental drama wrapped in whimsical comedy and tied with a bow of midlife soul-searching." With spectacular cinematography we might add.

Entertaining, inspiring, and original, with important relevant themes, *Woman At War* scored a positively highly charged 4.2 on our scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net

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