



fish

The Last Hammer Blow - (Le dernier coup de marteau)
(France 2015)

DIRECTOR : Alix Delaporte

RUNNING TIME : 83 mins

RATING :

Synopsis:

Soccer mad 14 year old Victor lives in a community of trailers & huts on the seaside with his single and severely unwell mother. When his mother announces that she would like him to live with her parents, Victor decides instead to seek out his long-absent father.

Review: Boyd van Hoeij

A downcast French adolescent is convincingly torn in a hundred different directions in *The Last Hammer Blow (Le dernier coup de marteau)*, the second feature from director Alix Delaporte.

As in her first feature, *Angele and Tony*, this title is a rather introspective work, in which the nonverbal aspects of the actors' performances often speak louder than words. The stars of her debut film appear again here, with Clotilde Hesme playing Nadia, a severely ill, trailer-dwelling mother while Gregory Gadebois is Samuel Rovinski, a famous conductor who's also the estranged father of Nadia's child. However, it's taciturn newcomer Romain Paul who steals the show as their tight-lipped 13-year-old son, Victor.

Life as an adolescent is complicated for everyone, though for Victor it's even more complicated than for most. His mother suffers from a serious but unnamed disease that has made work impossible for her and the single mum and her son have no money for the upkeep of their beachside trailer as winter approaches. As if that weren't enough for a teenager to worry about, the pressure is on at school; Victor's soccer coach (Farid Benali) wants him to prepare for special tryouts since he's clearly got talent; the teenage daughter (Mireia Vilapuig) of the Spanish neighbors looks mighty interesting — it helps that she's into daisy dukes and bikini tops — and to top it all off, Victor's father, a famous conductor he's never known, has arrived in nearby Montpellier, rehearsing for a performance of Mahler's Sixth Symphony with the local orchestra.

Cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 19th November 2017

8.15 pm Tuesday 21st November 2017

Review Cont.

Rather miraculously, Delaporte, who co-wrote the screenplay with Alain Le Henry, keeps not only all her narrative balls in the air but manages to keep all the events and demands on Victor grounded in something akin to reality, as they never feel like plot contrivances meant to put the pressure on the protagonist. Thankfully, even if there's talk of money, or rather the lack of it, this is not a film that's primarily interested in class issues or ideas of high versus low culture. And though clearly interested in music, which seems almost a necessity since none of the characters are particularly articulate about their feelings, thankfully *The Last Hammer Blow* doesn't overdo it in terms of musical metaphors either.

Indeed, one of the strongest moments in the entire film sees Samuel sitting down with his son for an impromptu pizza lunch after the youngster has secretly hitchhiked to Montpellier several times to attend his rehearsals and to try to get his attention. Though both want to talk to each other, they have so little in common and know so little about one another that they struggle to come up with something meaningful to say. So instead, father and son rattle on about the things they do know about: music and soccer, respectively.

This non-conversation, charged with an undercurrent of love and the clear desire to act like normal human beings in a normal father-son relationship, is typical of Delaporte's subtle *modus operandi*, in which the meaning of each scene has to come from reading between the lines. Similarly, wordless shots such as the one of Victor driving a scooter straight into the sea without even a helmet on, enhance the material as they offer suggestions of his psychology (here: frustration) as well as moments of visual poetry.

After playing lovers of sorts in *Angele and Tony*, Hesme and Gadebois have practically no scenes together in this film, since Nadia wants nothing to do with her former lover. However, the actors' shared cinematic past subtly influences the dynamic here and each finds the perfect blend of their own personalities with that of their respective characters. Both play second fiddle to impressive newcomer Paul, however, who's in practically every frame and who's nothing short of mesmerizing. His Victor is constantly looking to hold on to what's tangible while trying to come to terms with all of the elements in his life that seem to be in an uncontrollable flux.

The loose and natural cinematography, by Claire Mathon (*Stranger by the Lake, Angele and Tony*), has a noted preference for shooting scenes at magic hour, in order to imbue the protagonists' difficult family life and rickety (if pretty well-equipped) trailer in the dunes near the sea with touches of unexpected if clearly deserved beauty. The film's score, by Evgueni and Sacha Galperine, initially plays with indie-rock guitar clichés before it starts to integrate more classical material as soon as Victor's initially unwilling father appears.

Source: www.hollywoodreporter.com Boyd van Hoeij 9/3/2014 - Edited extracts accessed 19/4/2017.

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COMING UP:

December	<i>Kumiko the Treasure Hunter</i> (USA)	Sunday 10 th & Tuesday 12 th
February '18	<i>Jimmy's Hall</i> (UK)	Sunday 11 th & Tuesday 13 th
March	<i>Just to be Sure</i> (France)	Sunday 11 th & Tuesday 13 th
April	<i>Neruda</i> (Chile)	Sunday 8 th & Tuesday 10 th
May	<i>Like Crazy</i> (Italy)	Sunday 13 th & Tuesday 15 th
June	<i>The Teacher</i> (Czechoslovakia)	Sunday 17 th & Tuesday 19 th

Some Thoughts On: *The Fencer*

We are all Estonians!

There is a growing backlash against the film industry's use, or in my opinion misuse, of film trailers, which contain a plethora of 'spoilers' that give away key plot elements, turns and highlights. *Allied* is a recent, and obvious, example of this. Which is why, I don't read the reviews for our wonderful films until I have seen them and had a chance to digest the many layers that inevitably lie within.

Well, the film certainly wasn't about fences, as nice as it is as a much-used metaphor for the barriers between us! The metaphor of fencing was most apt nevertheless, as the film revealed itself. And for those gorgeous and stoic children of School No. 2 it was a lesson in life. Endel, as their father figure provided them with the skills to thrust and parry in life and for Marta and her final touch, the ability to attack – to step forward, seize the day and 'foil' your oppressors.

And it was in the context of a subjugated people, that these lessons gained their symbolic power. We were reminded at various times in the film and in a variety of ways of this oppression. The flight of Soviet jets overhead, the feared knock on the door and the omniscient presence of the Soviets, lent an Orwellian backdrop to the mood and action. But, as Endel stressed in one of his lessons with the children, one must slide quietly whilst thrusting. Within the confines of what was effectively a police state, a parent community supports its children, romance blossoms and children find new dreams and achieve them.

Which gets us to the climax of the film. OK, the spotlight on the victorious children was out of a 'David versus Goliath' film genre in which one would include Lurmann's *Strictly Ballroom*, but you have to admit, it was sweet and dare I say, uplifting. The Dance Federation became the Soviets, represented by a rather tall and arrogant Moscovian youth, versus the diminutive catalyst for their challenge, Marta. Films like *The Fencer* capture ideals within those of us who wish to live in, nurture and defend a society that cherishes the rights and freedoms of all its citizens. These film makers value the lives of the underdog and the downtrodden and give voice to the silenced. I can only speak for myself, but I happily walked out of the theatre feeling *Ich bin ein Estonian*.

Paul Williams

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Murder on the Orient Express : presented by CanAssist (Cancer Assistance Network)

Thursday 9th November 2017 screening at the Empire at 6pm for 6:30pm

Tickets \$25 include light refreshments

Kenneth Branagh, Johnny Depp and Michelle Pfeiffer head an all-star cast in this latest lavish remake of Agatha Christie's famous 1934 novel.

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Message from the President

Wonderful news this week as announced by The Empire's James Forbes at our Tuesday 17th Oct. screening. Once again, The Empire has been voted the best regional cinema in the country. On behalf of you all I would like to extend our congratulations to this so richly deserving cultural heart and icon of the Highlands. Take a bow Richard, Gerard, Dave, James, Penny, Jess and staff. Well done!

On the 9th November, CanAssist is having a fund raising premiere film screening of the remake of *Murder On The Orient Express*. You will find the details elsewhere in the newsletter and on the email flyer that most of you would have received a couple of weeks ago. I urge you to support this event if you can, as once more FISH is paying for the screening costs. This means that virtually all funds raised from ticket sales, will go directly to this wonderful charity to help them continue to provide support and pharmaceuticals to long term cancer patients in the Southern Highlands.

Big changes are ahead for our website. Steve and Helen Jones, along with their terrific team at Highland Creative and FISH Committee Website manager Neill Ustick, are busy at the moment working on introducing a new system that will update, streamline, improve the look and make it easier to use and access. It will also make the website more accessible and, hopefully interesting, to all and sundry. Keep an eye out for the 'new and improved' in the very near future.

We now have the next four films that will take us through to June and conclude our current season. One each from France, Chile, Italy and Czechoslovakia that will, we trust, maintain the diversity and integrity of their predecessors. I always enjoy these selection periods for FISH as the anticipation for the taste of things to come always returns with great strength. I know I share that feeling with many of you. Bring 'em on!

Speaking of the taste of things.....for all you wonderful FISH members who display exemplary cinema etiquette month after month by being seated before the scheduled screening time, and, who also refrain from talking from the very opening moments of our films, you are to be rewarded. Yes, once more we are going to provide you all with a traditional Choc Top at our two December screenings. They are not compulsory, however, for those of you who love such things, enjoy!!

Yours in film, **Ross Armfield**



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