



Stockbridge Community Cinema

Programme Notes 17 November 2017

A Man Called Ove (15)

2017 2hrs 7mins

Director and Scriptwriter: Hannes Holm
(based on the novel by Frederik Backman)

Cast

Rolf Lassgård	Ove
Bahar Pars	Parvaneh
Filip Berg	Unga Ove (young Ove)
Ida Engvall	Sonja
Tobias Almborg	Patrick
Klas Wiljergård	Jimmy
Chatarina Larsson	Anita
Börje Lundberg	Rune



This article by Stephen Saito originally appeared on moveablefest.com on 30 Sept 2016.

When Hannes Holm submitted a first draft of his adaptation of Fredrik Backman's wildly popular novel "A Man Called Ove," the Swedish author replied swiftly – and tersely. "Yes," Holm says, still a bit incredulous about the one-word reply. "A man of very few words. He uses all of them for his books!" Holm is a bit more verbose, to say the least, and perhaps that's why the wily filmmaker was the ideal choice to make the bittersweet comedy about a curmudgeon (played in the present day by Rolf Lassgård, and his younger self by Filip Berg) whose recent dismissal from the factory he's worked at for 43 years is a cause for reflection on his life, particularly his romance with his late wife Sonja. He too is ready the Great Beyond, but when his attempts at suicide fail spectacularly, Ove fights to protect the few borders he feels he can still has some control over as the culture radically changes around him – the gated community where he chastises anyone who dares drives through it and the gruff exterior he puts up to protect his inner feelings. His defences in both regards are tested by the arrival of new Persian neighbour, Parvaneh (Bahar Pars), and her family, who start asking for favours as they set up house, but soon appear to be the ones helping Ove by getting him out in the open and giving him a renewed sense of purpose.

"A Man Called Ove" is undeniably heart-warming, but with Holm at the helm, it's never cloyingly so, his sharp sense of humour making all of Ove's edges – his antipathy for cats and Volvo drivers (as a Saab purist) – particularly pointed and harder to sand off, but that much more rewarding when they begin to ebb. With the film recently tapped by Sweden as its official entry to this year's Oscar foreign language category after becoming one of the country's highest grossing films of all time, Holm was in Los Angeles on the eve of the film's release in America to discuss how he was able to make Backman's story his own only after surrendering himself to it fully, how real-life Oves almost sabotaged the production before it began and how the tricky shoot had him literally herding kittens.

How did you get interested in this?

I didn't [laughs]. No, usually I write my own stories, but I met Annika Bellander, the producer, and she showed me the book and [asked] would you want to do this? It was a best seller in Sweden at that time and I hadn't read it, but it sounded like a comedy, and I've done a lot of comedies. [So I thought] Life is short. I want to do some other things, so I said, "Thanks, but no thanks." But because I don't have so much money, I kept the copy of the book [I was given] and the same evening I started to read it. When the morning came, I was crying and I thought, "This is so good," because this story has both elements of comic relief and sadness in it. I called Annika and said, "Ok, I really want to do this," and then I met Frederick Backman, who I heard was very Ove-like – and he was a bit grumpy, but he said, "Hannes, I don't know anything about filmmaking. So please, write the story." So I can say that films can change people, but in a way, this film has changed me. I really wanted to tell my own stories, but nowadays, I'm more curious about other people's stories as well.

Is it true your parents might've been an influence on this story? It is that generation.

Yes, but it was also connected to writing my own stories because after the first day of writing, it was so stupid of me to add new elements into Frederic's story. So many films [adapted] out of popular books are so bad, and I started thinking, how come? The book lovers are so aggressive. They come to the cinema with the impression, "Now we will see how the director massacred my novel!" and they [will] often claim that the book is their own. So I gave that some thought and realized I can't shoot the book's story [verbatim] — I must steal the story from the book. So I read it like 200 times to get the story into my veins and then I threw the book away and started to write the story. It was like when you've read a good book, and you meet a friend, and your friend asks you, "What was it about?" And you tell the story from the book. As you tell the story, it's not the story in the book — it's your version of the story, but you have to keep some highlights.

We are a very small Swedish production with a budget of \$350,000, but I was so shocked when the production company didn't want to have the cat in the film. It was like, "You don't want to have the cat? What about all these aggressive book lovers? They love the cat." So I really struggled to keep the cat. We couldn't afford, as you do [in America], the digital companies who can make whatever you want, but we could afford two very similar cats called Magic and Orlando — Magic was aggressive and Orlando was the sleepy cat, and they were so similar [that] every day, we'd take the wrong cat to the wrong scenes and [together] they'd... [Holm makes squawking noises like a fight], so we'd have these injuries to Rolf [Lassgård], [but] we also had great luck with the cats as well.

Were they easy to cast? With those piercing blue eyes?

The cats were easy to cast, but the cat owners...[laughs] In Hollywood, you have cat trainers, but in Sweden, you have cat owners and they're constantly lying people. I asked them, "Can the cat follow the actor?" Yes, it can follow the actor. "Ok." "Can the cat say 'meow' when I want it to say 'meow'?" Yes. Of course. "Can the cat stop when I want it to stop?" I start to feel [suspicious], [so I ask], "Can the cat take my car and buy some beers?" Yes! And that was the way of talking to the cat owners. The cats could do everything, but when we had them on set, they couldn't do anything. So it was like taking away the cat owners and dealing with the cats themselves.

Visually, the film becomes very fluid with a lot of steadicam shots. Did that grow out of the story or just your own personal style?

The style of the film often depends on the story, and together with my [cinematographer], we had this discussion of making Ove's life in the beginning of the film like [direct, static shots], and then when he starts to interact with Parvaneh, we start to move the camera more smoothly. It was pretty tough shooting. We were lucky because we looked for these semi-detached [row] houses in the middle of Sweden and something happened that we didn't think of. When we started [scouting locations], we would walk into the houses and there he was — [people exactly like] Ove, [saying] "Stop! What are you doing here? Who are you?" So it was pretty tough for us to find the houses because every day we met this Ove-kind of guy, stopping us. Then we found this house [that's in the film] and thought this is the place to shoot, and it was exactly in the same town where the Saab car was built in Sweden. Of course, Ove loves the Saab and every day we could go to the Saab museum and pick the cars for the [different scenes], so that was great luck. And the people in that village town thought that we were shooting the film just because they had the plant in that town, but it wasn't. Myself, I drive a Chevy.

Do you have a driver's license?

I do. I drive a Toyota. Was it easy to get permission to use the other cars? You're not particularly kind to Volvos [laughs]. In a way, it was easy because it's still Swedish and a well-known brand. And there really was this struggle between Volvo and Saab from when I was a boy up until they stopped producing Saab. Volvo people in Sweden were more like very kind of career [oriented], but calm people and Saab people were sporty and more adventurous, so being a Saab driver, you're tougher. I grew up in a Saab family.

When you've got two actors playing the same character, was it a challenge to keep it consistent?

Yes, working with Swedish film with not that much money, it was, but I called Filip [Berg], who played young Ove, to be with us the first week of the shooting, so he sat beside us and watched Rolf, the older version, so he could see how he moved. It's one thing that I've been taking from Ingmar Bergman — I don't actually like Ingmar Bergman so much because of the lack of humour in his films, but he loved his actors. It's so important because actors can be very, very [difficult], but you must really love them because they're going to shine on the screen.

This has been one of the highest grossing films ever in Sweden. Have you been able to enjoy it?

What can I say? It's fantastic. I'm a bit of an underdog and I really need to change and be happy about it [laughs]. It's nothing that we really thought [would happen]. The best thing with it is that with Ove, it's a film about life and it's a film that's very hard to pitch. If it wasn't for the bestselling novel, you never could raise money for this kind of film and that makes me happy. I also love to hear stories about people who went home to the person they love and hug them because you never know when it's too late.