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'The Guilty' - a unique thriller in Orinda and Moraga

By *Sophie Braccini*



Poster provided

"The Guilty" is a movie like very few others. Think Aristotelian drama: one place, one time, one action. Think redemption; think inner challenge and minimalist thriller. This is a piece of art from a form perspective, and a very successful suspense story that builds on a nerve racking increasing tempo until the denouement and catharsis for the hero.

Director Gustav Möller takes spectators on a riveting adventure while the camera does not leave the confines of a dusty dark office. Alarm dispatcher and demoted police officer Asger Holm, played by Jakob Cedergren, answers emergency calls from the Danish equivalent of our 911. When the movie opens, we don't know why he was sent there, but his frustration is palpable. It is his last day on the job, the last hours of what seems to have been a punishment, when he gets a phone call from a terrified woman, Iben, who seems to have been kidnapped.

When the call is suddenly disconnected, the search for the woman and her kidnapper begins. Holm has nothing but a phone and a computer but he is determined to rescue her. The policeman oversteps the boundaries of his role, calling on former partners, trying to save the victim and prove to himself and the world that he is still capable of making a difference.

But Holm is outside of the situation; he makes assumptions that lead to decisions that can become catastrophic.

The action takes just as long as the movie itself, and during that hour and a half, the audience empathise is pulled further inside the story. The real tour de force of Möller, the director, is that by the end of the movie the audience has the feeling of having "seen" the whole thing, and lived through the drama. The different characters are more precisely outlined and developed than in other movies that show much more. Möller draws on the imagination of the spectator. Like when a great book gives the feeling that you are part of the story, this film draws you in.

Cedergren's performance, of course, is spectacular. He is on camera from start to finish, often in closeups, and it is his emotions that captures the audience. The voice talents had to be just remarkable, considering that is the only thing connecting the audience to this character. Jessica Dinnage stands out as Iben, channeling the wide range of emotions of her character through her voice.

The single location of the movie never feels cheap, instead it increases the anxious tension created by the fact that the hero is bound to this place while a drama is unfolding outside of his grasp. The fact that it happens in real time also intensifies the thrilling effect.

There is no respite in the film, no pleasant moment to relax in between tense scenes; the action is intense from start to finish, leaving the spectator breathless.

"The Guilty" is part of the International Film Showcase that for more than eight years has brought top international movies, including many Oscar selected films, to Orinda once a month. Now Lamorinda is twice blessed since after the first week in Orinda, the foreign films selected by Efi Lubliner and Joe Canterbury will play for a second week in Moraga. This Denmark submission to the 2018 Oscars will open Nov. 2 at the Orinda Theatre and Nov. 9 at the Rheem Theatre in Moraga. For more information, visit internationalshowcase.org and lamorindatheatres.com.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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