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'Woman at War' - one ordinary woman's relentless fight for the environment

By Sophie Braccini

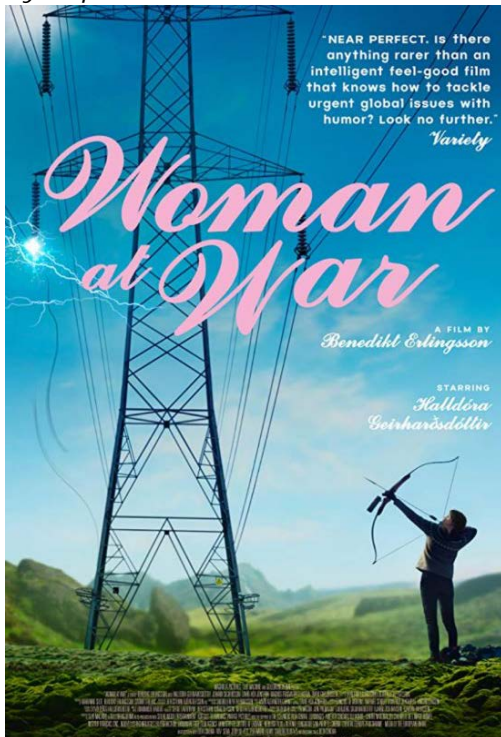


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It is the offbeat humor that creates the delightful pleasure when watching the film "Woman at War" ("Kona fer í strid"), starring Icelandic actress Halldora Geirhardsdottir and her limpid green gaze. In this story, Halla, a woman in her 50s, fights against an aluminum industry giant that is threatening the beauty of the Icelandic natural environment and polluting the grounds. With a single telescopic cable Halla cuts off electrical installations and blocks the entire production facility. Then starts a game of hide-and-see with the drones that are sent to find the intruder.

"Woman at War" is much more than a film about a superhero converted to ecology. This second feature film from Icelandic director Benedikt Erlingsson has neither sex nor blood, but is a political tale with quirky, sometimes rightfully biting humor.

Halla is soon nicknamed by the local media the mysterious woman of the woods, but all the while Halla leads a double life - sometimes a saboteur, and the rest of the time a charming and congenial choral master. Her life gets an added complication as she tries to adopt a baby daughter from Ukraine, and her twin sister is about to leave for India.

In the magnificent natural setting of Iceland, Halla the activist is followed by a group of free jazz musicians, mute supporters of her cause. There are many interesting secondary roles surrounding Halla, most of

whom do not know about her secret fight, and they are part of the many surprises that will delight viewers up until the end.

Erlingsson is a wonderful storyteller who has composed a rich saga in wild Iceland. Nature itself is a character in this movie. It can be hostile when it drenches Halla with icy showers as she flees, it can protect her when she finds a sheep hide to fool the drones, and it can heal with its warm springs.

Erlingsson is the heir of Icelandic medieval storytellers that wrote the long sagas of 12th century heroes. In this movie Erlingsson stages the life of ordinary people, who through single acts of bravery become heroes, at least for a brief moment. The director shows people who act more than they reflect. In "Woman at War," Halla's fight for the environment is acted out, not discussed. The name of Halla links to the rich history of Iceland: it is the name of a 17th century bandit who survived for 20 years in the highlands of Iceland.

Geirhardsdottir, who portrays Halla, is a surprising newcomer to the silver screen, at more than 50 years old. She was a well-known live theater actress, but had never been cast in a movie. Her presence, her beauty, as she transforms from a simple woman next door into a warrior, is unique and moving.

"Woman of War" is a must see. It is brought to Lamorinda as part of the International Film Showcase that features a notable foreign film almost every month in the East Bay. The movie will open at the Rheem Theatre in Moraga on April 12 for one week, and will show at the Orinda Theatre starting April 19 also for one week.

More information at www.lamorindatheatres.com.

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