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## 'The Little Comrade' - a poignant Estonian movie presented at Orinda Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



Photos provided

soldiers and takes Leelo's mother away. As she leaves, Helmes asks her daughter to be a good girl and from then on the little girl tries her best to be good, thinking that if she does, her mother will come back.

The film depicts a country where people risk being reported and deported to Siberia for something as small as owning a flag or sports trophy. Every family has members who have been sent to the gulag. The Soviet power is abused by those who collaborate with it in ways and for reasons that seem so absurd today. At the center of all this darkness, little Leelo is a source of innocent light. The naive little girl with her childhood righteousness is full of charm, but could also become a source of danger for her family. The young actress is directed with mastery by Moonika Siimets and her performance resonates with truthfulness.

Leelo dreams of becoming a pioneer and wants to be a good little comrade. She hears everything, sees everything, but does not always understand the extreme danger that faces her father. The father/daughter relationship is at the center of the story with a dad who desperately wants to protect his daughter and allow her to have a happy childhood. He and his family suffocate under the yoke of Stalinist tyranny and one can feel their strong spirit coming out in gusts of rebellion.

The movie also subtly shows the palpable cowardice of those who do not want to make waves, and the outright perversion of those who have taken side with the tyranny to gain personal advantages or to exert revenge.

One of the loveliest aspects of the movie is the restrained and sensitive way feelings and emotions are shown. A simple exchange of glances awakens in the mind of the audience the more complex layers of emotions than any outrageous and noisy display would have.

The film is an adaptation of the autobiographic novel "The Little Comrade" by Estonian poet and author Leelo Tungal. In an interview during the Arras Film Festival, Liina Vahtrik, who played one of the main characters in the film, explained that during that period of time 30,000 Estonians were deported to Siberia, which represented 3% of the population then. She added that the fears and trauma had seldom been explored in Estonian movies until very recently.

"The Little Comrade" will open at the Orinda Theatre on Aug. 9 for at least one full week.



Photos provided

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