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SYNOPSIS

IT'S ALL SO QUIET

(Boven is het stil)

Dir. Nanouk Leopold

Netherlands, Germany / 2013 / 93 min / DCP

In Dutch, with English subtitles

Aspect ratio: 1.85:1 Sound: Dolby

Opening Night Selection – Panorama, Berlinale

Best Feature – Torino GLBT Film Festival

Grand Jury Award for Outstanding International Dramatic Feature Film – Outfest

Official Selection – Frameline

Official Selection – Palm Springs International Film Festival

Helmer, a single farmer in his fifties, lives with his aged, bedridden father in the Dutch countryside. His working days are marked by the visits of milk collector Johan, a man of his own age for whom Helmer holds a secret fascination. One day Helmer decides to renovate the house, buying himself a new double bed and moving his father upstairs. His life gains even more momentum, when adolescent farmhand Henk comes to help him out.

The late Jeroen Willems, in his final leading role for the big screen, turns in a powerful, slow-burn performance. In this battle of wills between two powerful personalities—the father, once domineering and now in decline, and the son, preparing to live his own life when his father is gone—what is left unsaid takes precedence over dialogue. But when unexpected words do come to Helmer late in the film, their quiet force is indisputable.

IT'S ALL SO QUIET is based on the novel *Boven is het Stil* by Dutch author Gerbrand Bakker. The novel has won many awards in the Netherlands and abroad and has been translated in more than twenty languages.

PRESS

“Leopold's careful staging of the scenario contains shades of Carlos Reygadas' similarly lyrical and country-set *Silent Light*. In both movies, nature takes on definition as a palpable force with greater substance than the precise demons haunting each character. Stillness dominates, from the first shots of cornfields at sunrise to the final one that finds Helmer lying among them. When *It's All So Quiet* comes full circle, the title is virtually an understatement.”
– Eric Kohn, *indiewire*

“Outstanding...should have been in competition [in Berlin]...this film would have held its own in even the most demanding Competition.”
– Olaf Möller, *Film Comment*

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Helmer is almost fifty. He is good-looking and strong. But his body has started to show the signs of aging. His father is about eighty. His strength has left him. His body isn't doing what it needs to do anymore. That's what the future looks like. If Helmer wants to take action to change something about his life, now is the time.

Helmer brings his father upstairs. His father will die. Because Helmer is about to show his true nature to the world. Helmer is a homosexual. He has hidden this from everyone, as well as from himself. Helmer knows his father will die, just like his twin brother has to die again to relieve Helmer from his other burden. His twin brother was better than Helmer at everything. A better man. A real man.

Helmer and his father have an austere, cold relationship, which throughout the story develops into more of a mutual acceptance and understanding. After death, there is room for love.

The physical aspect is an important ingredient of the film, as well as the relative ages. The older father with respect to his son's age and the son looking back on his younger years. The son washes his father, carries him down the stairs, bodies close together, *nolens volens*. The son looks at himself in the bathroom, in the mirror, he studies his body. The son spying on the milkman, observing another man's body, a man his own age. The arrival of youth. Henk lets Helmer observe him, on purpose. His young body reminds Helmer of different times, the past. Only when Helmer sees Henk does he realize how old he is.

The small dark room of his father symbolizes the room of death, the end. A large, brown, king-sized bed from another era. A window, curtains drawn. The overbearing silence. Father will not leave this room alive. Helmer learns what it's like to lie here, to end all. We can hear the breath of his father, until he escapes, until it is over. After the death of his father, Helmer finds himself alone in this room.

IT'S ALL SO QUIET is a story about a man who frees himself. He frees himself from the engrained vision he has of himself. How his father sees him, how the world sees him, how he sees himself, everything will change. Helmer has to rediscover himself, to find out who he always was.

Motivation

I think Boven is het stil is a very nice book. This is the first time that I'm making a film inspired by a book. The most important reason was, of course, the fact that it was a good story. I want to develop myself as a filmmaker and I believe that adapting a novel played an important role in this.

Another important reason is that I was eager to make a film about a man. After four movies about women I felt the time was right for a different subject. Again in this I am happy to make use of an existing story, treading carefully.

Visual Style

My latest films—GUERNSEY, WOLFSBERGEN and BROWNIAN MOVEMENT—were all of a similar style. After BROWNIAN MOVEMENT I felt like I had completed something.

A visual search for permanent camera views, wide shots and long shots dominated the storytelling. I had the urge to throw myself in the deep end and tackle a new challenge.

IT'S ALL SO QUIET is all shot freehand. We barely rehearsed, this also in contrast with my previous films. This also arose through time limitations, but I thought it was a good idea to use this as an inherent property of the film. It was my first time shooting digital. This added to the freedom we already had, because of the digital camera's light sensitivity. This meant we could shoot 360 degrees on set, which allowed us to shoot all sides of the room in one shot. One 'take' was usually 'one card' of 10 minutes, in which we could try several things without having to cut. The freedom this method of shooting opened up was enormous. You can carry scenes on further than written in the script and have the possibility to repeat the lines over and over within the same take, etc.

The form is different, but the team with whom I usually make films has stayed approximately the same. Frank van den Eeden as director of photography, Elsje de Bruijn for production design, Katharina Wartena as editor, and sound design by Andreas Hildebrandt. I knew that these people with whom I was about to embark on this new adventure view film the same way as I do. The only thing you've actually got is your intuition—whatever you think makes a scene, a shot, a location, a cut or a sound important.

The cast was new. Jeroen Willems, Henri Garcin, Wim Opbrouck, Martijn Lakemeier and Lies Visschedijk. All very good actors. Quite necessary if you want to rely on heavy improvisation. Only very few words were needed to get my vision across. They all brought their own ideas about their own character development to the table. For example, their way of walking, clothing suggestions and backstories.

Jeroen Willems gave a wonderful performance. He was an inspiring person and talented actor. I feel terrible having only discovered this so late, I would love to have made many more films with him.

The Book

Stienette Bosklopper and Els Vandevorst approached me to write the script for *IT'S ALL SO QUIET*. I wanted to try it. I had never converted a book to a screenplay before. The idea was that someone else would direct it. The only thing I was scared of was: what if I fall in love with it, when I write it? I wanted to at least have the option of directing it myself. However, nobody actually expected me to direct it, not even me. And then I fell in love.

Before I could write the screenplay, I didn't touch the book for 6 months. I had read it and thought it was beautiful. But I knew that in order to make it into a script I'd have to cut a lot. I didn't dare to go at it straight away. Because then you have to make it your own. And it wasn't mine.

Gerbrand Bakker had given me complete freedom in adapting his book. He said his book was finished and that it was simply up to me to make a film out of it. He did read many versions of the script along the way, sometimes including some hilarious misunderstandings: "Geert? Who is Geert again?" (This is Helmer's dead brother, called Henk in the book, just like the manservant, but in the film it would've been too confusing if everyone were called Henk.)

Many storylines from the book disappeared. It's more as if you're 'in' the book, in Helmer's

world, what that feels like. I wanted to come close to him and see the world from his point of view. I realized you can tell far less with a film than a book. If you do it my way, that is. But what you do tell in a film, you can make more palpable, by exploring it with images and sounds. A moving curtain, a hand on a duvet, a spinning washing machine; that, to me, is the world of Helmer.

It's been an honour to make a film out of this book. And learning all about calves, fertilizer plants, milk tanks and men. They are beautiful.

Nanouk Leopold, Rotterdam January 2013

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Nanouk Leopold graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Rotterdam in 1992 and from the Film and Television Academy in Amsterdam in 1998. Her graduation film WEEKEND won the Tuschinski Award at the Netherlands Film Festival. Her first feature ILES FLOTTANTES was selected for the Tiger competition of the International Film Festival Rotterdam. Her second feature GUERNSEY, selected for Quinzaine des Réalisateurs at Cannes, was nominated for six Golden Calves and won two Golden Calves (Best Director and Best Actress) and the Dutch Film Critics Award at the Netherland Film Festival Utrecht. WOLFSBERGEN premiered at the International Forum of New Cinema Berlin (Special Mention Caligari Film Prize) in 2007, won two Golden Calves in Utrecht and was selected for the Toronto International Film Festival. BROWNIAN MOVEMENT premiered at Toronto International Film Festival in 2010 and had its European premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival (Forum). BROWNIAN MOVEMENT was also nominated for six Golden Calves and won two: Best Director and Best Screenplay.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2013 IT'S ALL SO QUIET (BOVEN IS HET STIL)
Feature, Circe Films & N279 Entertainment (via Two Donkeys BV), 93 min. DCP
- 2010 BROWNIAN MOVEMENT
Feature, Circe Films, 100 min. 35mm
Golden Calves Best Director and Best Screenplay Netherlands Film Festival 2011,
International Film Guide Award New Horizons Film Festival 2011, Best Actress
Festival des Deutschen Films 2011, Toronto International Film Festival 2010, Forum
Berlinale 2011

- 2007 WOLFSBERGEN
Feature, Circe Films, 93 min. 35mm
Special mention Caligari Film Prize International Forum of New Cinema, Berlinale 2007, Golden Calves Best Cinematography and Best Supporting Actor Netherlands Film Festival 2007, Toronto International Film Festival 2007, IndieLisboa, Melbourne International Film Festival, Espoo Cine International Film Festival
- 2005 GUERNSEY
Feature, Circe Films, 92 min. 35mm
Golden Calves Best Director and Best Actress Netherlands Film Festival 2005, Dutch Film Critics Award Netherlands Film Festival 2005, Quinzaine des Réalisateurs Cannes 2007, Brussels, Jerusalem, Hamburg, Esonne, Pusan, Chicago, Mill Valley, the Hamptons, Denver, Budapest, Crossing Europe Linz, European Film Festival Poland, Museum of the Moving Image New York
- 2002 LA GRANDE GUERRE
TV-adaptation theatre play by Hotel Modern, AGAT Film/Arte, 50 min.
- 2000 ILES FLOTTANTES
Feature, Circe Films, 85 min. 35mm
Utrecht Prize City of Utrecht 2001, J. Jordaan Award from Art Foundation of Amsterdam International Film Festival Rotterdam - Tiger Award Competition, Karlovy Vary, Flanders, Cairo, Bergen, Kiev, Sao Paulo Mostra, Pusan, Stockholm
- 1999 MAX LUPA
TV film, VPRO television, 45 min., Beta sp shot on 16mm
- 1998 WEEKEND
Graduation film, 16mm, 27 min.
Tuschinski Award for best student film Netherlands Film Festival, Kodak Award Munich Film Festival, Bologna International Student Film Festival

BIOGRAPHIES OF CAST

Jeroen Willems (Helmer)

Jeroen Willems (1962-2012) unexpectedly passed away on December 3rd, 2012. IT'S ALL SO QUIET was one of his last films. Jeroen appeared in many successful films and television series, like OCEAN'S TWELVE (2004), SIMON (2004), KOMT EEN VROUW BIJ DE DOKTER (2009), MAJESTEIT (2010), DE TROON (2010) and LIJN 32 (2012). He was also loved for his work in the theatre and was a gifted singer who performed the songs of Jacques Brel. He won two Golden Calfs: Best Actor for his role in NYNKE (2001) and Best Supporting Actor for TV film COP VS. KILLER (2012).

Henri Garcin (Father)

Henri Garcin (1929) is a Belgian actor, who has been living in Paris since 1949. He appeared in films by Dutch director Alex van Warmerdam (ABEL, DE NOORDELINGEN, GRIMM). The last few years he has been playing in international productions as MY BEST FRIEND (2006), SWEET MUD (2006), THE PINK PANTHER (2006) and CA SE SOIGNE (2008).

Martijn Lakemeier (Henk)

Martijn Lakemeier (1993) debuted at the age of fourteen as Michiel in the film WINTER IN WARTIME (2008) by Martin Koolhoven. He won a Golden Calf for Best Actor and the Rembrandt Award for Best Dutch Actor for this role. After this he starred in LOVER OR LOSER (2009), SONNY BOY (2011) and the TV film DAYS OF GRASS (2011). Martijn plays one of the main characters in the television series DE GEHEIMEN VAN BARSLET (2012).

Wim Opbrouck (Dairy driver Johan)

Wim Opbrouck (1969) is a Flemish actor and singer. He starred in theater plays by the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie, Toneelhuis and NTGent and in Ten Oorlog (1997), a twelve-hour theater marathon. He also played in television series STILLE WATERS (2001) and IN DE GLORIA (2010). Since 2010 he's the artistic director of NTGent. The last years he played in various films: CAN GO THROUGH SKIN (2009), VREEMD BLOED (2010), ISABELLE (2011) and MADONNA'S PIG (2011).

CAST

Jeroen Willems
Henri Garcin
Wim Opbrouck
Martijn Lakemeier

Helmer
Father
Milk collector
Henk

CREDITS

Director & writer
Nanouk Leopold

Producers
Stienette Bosklopper - Circe Films
Els Vandevorst - N279 Entertainment

Co-producers
Herbert Schwering - Coin Film
VPRO Television

D.O.P
Frank van den Eeden SBC

Production design
Elsje de Bruijn

Editor
Katharina Wartena

Composer
Paul M. van Brugge

Sound design
Andreas Hildebrandt BVFT

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