

SCREENING ROOM

Warm films from a chilly climate

By Kevin Crust
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SONS miss their mothers, mothers miss their children and the idea of home is redefined in this year's Scandinavian Film Festival L.A. Three films, each an Academy Awards submission, crisscross borders to dramatize the mutable nature of love and the inexorable pull of maternal bonds.

Finnish director Klaus Härö sets the heart-wrenching drama "**Mother of Mine**" during early World War II, when 70,000 Finnish children were separated from their parents and sent to the relative safety of Sweden. A 64-year-old man named Eero (Esko Salminen) recounts in detail to his elderly mother something that has gone unspoken for nearly half a century.

Härö uses silvery black-and-white to depict the present and warm color for the past as Eero recalls the irreparable emotional harm that was done when he was sent away. Eight-year-old Eero (Topi Majaniemi) goes to live with a childless couple named Signe (Maria Lundqvist) and Hjalmar (Michael Nyqvist) on their small farm in southern Sweden. Eero and Hjalmar bond quickly, but Signe is brusque and distant for reasons that are gradually revealed. Lundqvist is marvelous as a woman suffering unspeakable pain and guilt.

Annika Hallin also plays a tortured woman in Norway's "**Kissed by Winter.**" Her Victoria is an ambitious Stockholm physician when her son, Sune, falls ill and dies while playing hockey. The tragedy drives her to rural Norway, where she becomes consumed in the work of a country doctor. Several months after she arrives, a teenage boy from a nearby refugee center is found dead in a snowbank after an apparent accident. Victoria senses something amiss, however, and the film takes on the veneer of a whodunit with suspicion falling on one of her patients, Kai (Kristoffer Joner).

Director Sara Johnsen deftly moves between the present mystery and Victoria's memories of the events leading to Sune's death. It is a poetic film that charts the nearly impossible path to forgiveness. Like Lundqvist, Hallin delivers a performance of such depth and simplicity that it is impossible to forget.

Arabic is not the first language that comes to mind when viewing Nordic films, but the first half of Sweden's "**Zozo**" takes place in civil war-torn Beirut in 1987. Lebanese Swedish filmmaker Josef Fares, previously known for his comedies, shifts to drama with a bittersweet story of a young, sensitive boy named Zozo (Imad Creidi) forced by tragedy to make a daunting journey alone.

Zozo and his family are awaiting passports and tickets to immigrate to Sweden, where his grandparents have already moved, when he finds a baby chick and immediately begins to imagine that it speaks to him in a kind, masculine voice. Soon, a bomb blasts through the family's apartment, killing Zozo's parents and sister. His older brother disappears, and Zozo is left to make his way to the airport and eventually to Sweden on his own. The second half deals with Zozo adjusting to his new home and a new language, simultaneously haunted and comforted by memories of his mother.