



REVOLUTION-MINDED: *Ane Dahl Torp is Nina, a Marxist-Leninist doctor in "Comrade Pedersen."*

Foreign films dissect human connection

By Robert Abele
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The Scandinavian Film Festival L.A. continues this weekend at the Writers Guild Theater, and if anything might emerge as a theme, it's the unexpected lengths people will go to to feel connected to something. In Danish filmmaker Pernille Fischer Christensen's claustrophobic but compelling two-hander "**A Soap**," unsentimental Charlotte (Trine Dyrholm), having ditched an abusive boyfriend, moves into an apartment above lonely, TV-soap-obsessed transsexual Veronica (David Dencik). A series of escalating favors brings these two naturally suspicious neighbors into each other's orbit, and eventually into a kind of companionship that starts to resemble love. But what kind of love? Christensen isn't the most sure-footed of storytellers, but she has a keen grasp of character tension.

In the Norwegian feature "**Comrade Pedersen**" — which spans the Mao-inspired radicalism of the late '60s through the '70s — the torrid hookup between Knut (Kristoffer Joner), a spindly, nervous high school teacher, and fervent Marxist-Leninist doctor Nina (Ane Dahl Torp), blond, athletic and armed for revolution, is a metaphor for the crash-bang temptations of ideology. In Hans Petter Moland's exquisitely shot but tonally offbeat effort, communism is the allure of a lover who promises a utopia of eroticism but who won't commit when it comes to the bourgeois indulgences of a real relationship. As a depiction of a Maoist cell's slow disintegration, "Pedersen" has certain potency, but the love story is a jumble.

The standout, however, is another Norwegian offering, Erik Richter Strand's "**Sons**," a nervy film that earns its genre shifts among dark comedy, drama and thriller because it deals in lives that seem trapped between childhood and adulthood, between a time of knowing nothing about the world and the age of being able to process its harshest realities. Twenty-five-year-old Lars (Nils Jorgen Kaalstad) is a temperamental public pool lifeguard spurred to outrage one day when he notices a notorious rumored molester named Hans (Henrik Mestad) splashing among the kids at the pool. Armed with a video camera, Lars embarks on an ill-thought-out hunt for proof to show his boss — who won't take action to bar the man without evidence — and in the process becomes the riskiest kind of crusader, one whose morality is wrapped up in long-unexamined layers of pain. The performances are complex, most especially those of Kaalstad and Mikkel Bratt Silset, as the hollow-eyed boy Lars fumblingly tries to protect. Strand's portrait of a society unable to care for its young is awash in tart ironies. Ultimately "Sons" plays like the appropriately messy vigilante thriller our times need, an antidote to the comfortable justice of predator-nabbing "Dateline" specials, and the idea that exposure is the same thing as closure.

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