



A man called Ove

Director: Hannes Holm
Country: Sweden
Date: 2015

A review by Alissa Simon for *Variety*:



A touching comic crowdpleaser that may call for a tissue or two by the end, “A Man Called Ove” is Swedish director Hannes Holm’s irresistible adaptation of Fredrik Backman’s eponymous bestselling novel. It’s a heartwarming tale about a stubborn, short-tempered man with steadfast beliefs, strict routines and the feeling that everyone around him is an idiot — and no reticence about telling them so. After new neighbors accidentally run over his mailbox, the cantankerous old git’s solitary, regimented

world is shaken in ways he would never have imagined. U.S. distributor Music Box Films, which has spun popular Swedish literature-into-film fare such as “The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo” and “The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window And Disappeared” into box office gold, surely has another winner here. In Sweden, the pic netted more than 1.6 million admissions, making it the fifth most popular local feature of all time.

The action unfolds both in the present and in the past. The knowledge that audiences are given in the flashbacks allows them to reassess the protagonist, thus supporting the film’s underlying theme about the unreliability of first impressions; as one would expect, there is heroism and genuine goodness lying beneath his prickly exterior. Nevertheless, upon first encounter, Ove (played by Rolf Lassgard in the present, Filip Berg as a young man and Viktor Baagoe as a boy) comes off as one of those annoying, nosy souls found everywhere in the world, the ones who assiduously obey all written instructions and tell you to do so, too. He’s the terror of his suburban neighborhood, where he used to be the chairman of the residents’ association until he was voted out, something that he considers a betrayal and still can’t forgive. He continues to patrol the alleys and the walkways, blithely disposing of wrongly parked bikes and chucking shoes at stray cats.



Ove is privately mourning the recent death of his adored wife, Sonja (Ida Engvoll), and intends to join her in the cemetery as soon as possible. One of the film’s running jokes is that he’s simply crap at offing himself. But each suicide attempt sparks a long flashback, revealing more and more of his backstory and making him a more sympathetic character. We see Ove grow up as a resourceful small-town boy in a different sort Sweden, one with a slower pace and different values; he experiences much pain and suffering yet always perseveres. He falls in love with Sonja, a teacher, on a train. He drives a Saab; he would never, ever buy a Volvo. Over his lifetime, he develops a well-justified hatred for

bureaucracy, and he takes great pleasure in sticking it to “the white shirts” and “the bastards sticking their nose in” whenever he can.

Ultimately, it’s a friendship with the new neighbors — practical, pregnant Parvaneh (Bahar Pars), her young daughters (Nelly Jamarani, Zozan Akgun), and her hopelessly unhandy husband Patrik (Tobias Almborg), who never has the correct tools — that gives Ove a new lease on life, as does an unwanted “cat nuisance.” Holm makes poignantly clear that being needed is an essential human desire, and life is so much sweeter when shared with others. Like the novel, Holm’s screenplay makes Ove an archetypal figure, yet one with his own unique story to tell. The film cannily uses repetition, such as Ove’s patrol of the housing complex, to show how the character changes and grows, and also how the local community’s perception of him alters.

While the entire cast is terrific, Lassgard and Pars are the standouts. The former’s imperious, slightly paunchy, somewhat formal Ove seems far older than 59, and his sniffs, “pah’s” and finger pointing linger in the mind long after. As the passionate and opinionated Persian woman next door, Pars takes what might, in other hands, have been a stereotype and makes her into a real person. Holm uses the actors’ contrasting heights and physiques to pleasant comic effect.



Assembly is crisp, with clean, widescreen lensing by Goran Hallberg (“The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared”) that’s always a pleasure to watch. The only bone to pick is with Gaute Storaas’ score, which is sometimes too insistently sentimental.

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