



**Patron: Jim Broadbent**  
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**Friday February 17th 2017**  
**The Commune (Cert 15)**

*dir:* **Thomas Vinterberg**

*Starring:* **Trine Dyrholm, Ulrich Thomsen, Fares Fares**

*Sponsor:* **Paul and Helen Hancocks**

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In the sub-genre of the cautionary- celebratory, weary-wise commune movie, in which shaking off conventional hang-ups resolutely fails to create a heaven-on-earth, the Scandinavians have recorded most of the better-known films. (The ideal of cooperative group living is somewhat less cherished in the Anglosphere, where the attitude might be summed up by ex-Fourierist Tom Townsend in Whit Stillman's 1990 *Metropolitan*: "I wouldn't want to live on a farm with a bunch of other people.") Notable Nordic examples include Lukas Moodysson's *Together* (2000) and Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* (1998), and lo and behold Thomas Vinterberg's *The Commune* bears the mark of the Zentropa company, co-founded by von Trier, Vinterberg's primary one-time comrade-in-arms in the Dogme 99 manifesto/gambit/stunt, the brief existence of which attests to the tenacity of communal action in the Danish mind.

The 1970s commune in which Vinterberg's film takes place has no very high-flown ideals that we are privy to - the house rules involve a shared beer fund and regular kitchen-table meetings over meals prepared according to a predetermined schedule. Vinterberg himself was, from the age of seven, raised in surroundings similar to those depicted - these are working urban professionals, not back-to-nature agrarian utopians. The central couple are a professor and a newscaster, Erik and Anna, played by Ulrich Thomsen and Trine Dyrholm, both veterans of previous Vinterberg productions, including the international breakthrough *Festen* (aka *The Celebration*, 1998). Erik and Anna are both seemingly in their forties, though their careers are on different trajectories - he's a professor of 'rational architecture' finally on the brink of breaking out into actual commissions, she's a female TV anchor at the age that makes the station higher-ups start to look elsewhere. What would be a touchy time for the couple regardless is exacerbated when they enter into a living arrangement that seems to hasten the breakdown of the family unit by diminishing its centrality, dissolving it within the commune. It takes a village.

Vinterberg's best claim to a place in film history is in his display of the cinematographic possibilities of flexible, skittering, insinuating new digital cameras in *Festen*. He is less inclined towards swashbuckling these days, and *The Commune* is mostly dedicated to trying to register the ultrasonic tremors of its star performances with handheld fumbling. Despite the commune setting and ensemble cast, Vinterberg rarely loses focus on the the dissolution of Erik and Anna's marriage, and particularly on the small blows to Anna's increasingly beleaguered psyche - the way she side-eyes her



young and beautiful make-up girl at the TV station, the dozen little warning signs that lead to breakdown histrionics and festival prizes.

Dyrholm is as good as one can be when mired in mediocrity - Vinterberg's movie is a conventional and low-stakes work, done in the familiar naturalistic style that crosses borders like the euro - matter-of-fact with sex, earnest, devoid of comedy and full of drippy period soundtrack cues that aim to half-nelson the viewer into feeling something. Compare it to such recent studies of communal system breakdown as Nathan Silver's New Jersey-set rehab psychodrama *Stinking Heaven* (2015) or Amanda Rose Wilder's *Approaching the Elephant* (2014), a documentary about the struggle for the soul of the Teddy McArdle Free School, and it disappears - a mid-70s nostalgia piece that can't get a grip on the memory.

#### Credits

<b>Trine Dyrholm</b>	Anna
<b>Ulrich Thomsen</b>	Erik
<b>Helene Reingaard Neumann</b>	Emma
<b>Martha Sofie Walstrøm Hansen</b>	Freja
<b>Lars Ranthe</b>	Ole
<b>Fares Fares</b>	Allon
<b>Magnus Millang</b>	Steffen
<b>Anne Gry Henningsen</b>	Ditte
<b>Julie Agneta Vang</b>	Mona
<b>Sebastian Grønegaard Milbrat</b>	Vilads
<b>Director</b>	Thomas Vinterberg
<b>Screenplay</b>	Thomas Vinterberg, Tobias Lindholm
<b>Dir of Photography</b>	Jesper Toffner
<b>Editors</b>	Anne Østerud, Janus Billeskov Jansen
<b>Composer</b>	Fons Merkies
<b>Costume</b>	Ellen Lens
<b>Sound design</b>	Anne Jensen, Kristian Eidnes Andersen

**Denmark/Sweden. The Netherlands/Norway 2015**  
**111 mins**

### **Another view**

Danish director Vinterberg's drama may be set in a commune in early 1970s Copenhagen but it is more in the spirit of *The Good Life* than of *Haight-Ashbury Flower Power* or the *Summer of Love*. The idea for everyone to live together comes from a middle-class, professional couple. Erik (Thomsen) is an architecture professor.

His wife Anna (Dyrholm) is a newscaster. They have a precocious teenage daughter Freja (Martha Sofie Wallstrøm Hansen). Unable to afford to live in Erik's family home, they decide to "call more people" and to create an extended family.

At first, all goes swimmingly but then Erik begins an affair with a 24-year-old student Emma (Helene Reingaard Neumann), who looks like she's an actress from "a French romantic movie". She moves into the home and Anna, Erik's wife, slowly goes into meltdown.

As so often in his work, Vinterberg invokes the spirit of Ingmar Bergman. There is yet another scene of the extended family holding hands and dancing around the house (a clear reference to a famous moment in Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*). The film also often plays like a reworking of *Scenes From a Marriage*, Bergman's probing and very bleak psycho-drama about a couple whose relationship has turned rotten at its core.

Vinterberg is so preoccupied with Erik and Anna that he treats the rest of the characters in a surprisingly cursory fashion. Among the others in the household is a little boy with a weak heart who doesn't think he is going to live beyond the age of nine, an odd job man (Fares Fares) who breaks down in tears at the slightest excuse and Erik's hard-drinking and very chaotic bohemian friend Ole (Lars Ranthe).

The residents hold their meetings around the dining table. They talk as earnestly about beer bills and dishwashing machines as they do about relationships and evictions.

Thomsen and Dyrholm give exceptional performances as the couple whose marriage flounders in spite of their affection for one another and determination always to do the right thing. They seem so grounded and sensible that it is all the more shocking when both begin to behave so erratically. The commune, they soon discover, isn't any kind of Eden after all.

of the time to set up a business involving kidnapping, extortion and murder.

### **Under the Shadow (UK 2016. Cert 15)**

Babak Anvari's debut feature is about a mother and daughter struggling to cope with the terrors of the post-revolution, war-torn Tehran of the 1980s, when a mysterious evil begins to haunt their home. Winner of the 2017 BAFTA for Outstanding Debut for Writer/Director/Producer, Anvari's feature was also voted Best Film in the 2016 British Independent Film Awards.

### **Julieta (Spain 2016. Cert 15)**

Pedro Almodóvar returns to something like his best form in a bewitching tale in which we learn how Julieta, a middle aged woman apparently starting a new chapter in her life, has everything turned upside down when a chance meeting reveals news of her estranged daughter with whom she has lost touch.

### **Our next screening: Friday February 24th, 7.30pm The Pearl Button (Chile/France 2015. 12a)**

Patricio Guzmán is the acclaimed director of the award winning films *The Battle of Chile*, (Parts I-III, 1975-1979), *The Pinochet Case* (2001), *Salvadore Allende* (2004) and *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010 - shown by LFS). *The Pearl Button* is a stunning meditation on the complications of a remarkable history lost to time, uncovering the voices of the Patagonian Indigenous people, the first English sailors and the political prisoners of the 1970s. Using both archival images and gorgeous new footage and turning documentary into poetic metaphor, Guzmán weaves together different periods of history and geography to create a gripping tale of our modern world.

### **Programme news**

The 3 films selected to complete the season are as follows:

#### **The Clan (Argentina 2016. Cert 15)**

Set in Buenos Aires in the 1980s, Pablo Trapero's film (the latest in a sequence of thrillers drawn from events in his country's past) is about the Puccio clan who take advantage of the right wing politics