

Patron: Jim Broadbent
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Victoria (Cert 15)

dir: Sebastian Schipper

Starring: Laia Costa, Frederick Lau, André Hennicke

Sponsors: Jonathan and Shuna Killin

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Synopsis: Present day Berlin. Victoria, a young Spanish girl recently arrived in the city, meets Sonne and his friends in a nightclub. They offer to show her 'the real Berlin'. They wander through the streets, steal alcohol from a small shop and smoke dope on the roof of an apartment building. Victoria and Sonne are attracted to one another. They go to a bar where she works. Sonne's friends arrive: the 4 of them have been called to a meeting. Victoria agrees to go with them. At the meeting, local gangster Andi forces them to carry out a bank robbery; Victoria is made to drive the getaway car. The police locate them. There is a gunfight and 2 of Sonne's friends are shot. Sonne and Victoria escape and seek refuge in an apartment. When the police arrive, they disguise themselves and escape to a hotel where Victoria realises Sonne is badly wounded. He dies. Victoria takes the money and leaves.

Sebastian Schipper's low-budget drama about a reckless young girl's excursion into the world of crime would be an ordinary enough affair were it not for the astonishing fact that he and cinematographer Sturla Brandth Grøvlen shot the whole 138 minutes in a single take, roaming the streets of Berlin to encompass 22 different locations en route. Bolstered by an atmospheric score by Nils Frahm and masterful performances by its young leads, who improvised most of the dialogue while carefully hitting their precisely orchestrated cues, the result is a lively and engrossing exercise in creative swagger.

The single-take gimmick has been alluring for many directors. Hitchcock used the technique to suffocating effect in 1948's *Rope*; Alejandro Iñárritu's *Birdman* (2104) relentlessly unspooled a man's life into a one-take, slow-motion meltdown. The effect is always uncomfortable. Denied the punctuation of the cut, the audience never has space to breathe, yet replacing the soothing banality of the shot/reverse-shot structure with a piece of showy technique means it's harder for us to feel completely immersed in the action. Of course, before digital, one-take films were always an illusion, and even Schipper's meticulously executed film is apparently a hybrid of three different run-throughs.

The joins, if there are any, are invisible, as we descend headlong into the nightmare that overtakes Victoria (Laia Costa) when she leaves a nightclub in the early hours and falls in with a passing group of drunken lads out to make trouble. One of them, Sonne (Frederick Lau), takes a particular shine to Victoria, though they can only communicate in broken English since she is Spanish and he is German. But their increasingly supercharged connection turns dangerous when he drags her into an armed robbery that he and his mates have been coerced into carrying out. Our bafflement at her choices (naive? self-destructive?) is only increased by the unwavering gaze of the camera despite the fact that she never leaves our sight. Victoria's motives remain opaque.

It's at this point, about halfway through, that the film makes a lurching turn from hipsterish whimsy into high-stakes heist thriller - not a transition that most films would survive, and this one does so only by the skin of its teeth. The one-take conceit is both the cause of, and the solution, to Schipper's problem here: a conventional structure would have allowed him to compress the action and balance the film's storyline more convincingly, but he is hampered by the strict temporal unity he has imposed on himself. Yet because of the sense of ineluctable propulsion created by Grøvlen's complex camerawork, which ducks and weaves through the shadows of a long, drunken night, the film makes you want to follow where it leads, even when the plot disregards the most basic requirements of plausibility.

The performances help enormously. Costa is convincing as the lonely outsider who takes a crazy punt on a total stranger and uses the danger of it to drown out her sense of failure and ennui. Lau is equally good as the slippery charmer whose easy lies come bubbling up from an anxious awareness of his lack of money, education and status. It's one of the film's more subtle strokes of genius to place a language barrier between Victoria and her new German friends; she is left out of crucial conversations which the audience, with the benefit of subtitles, understands, emphasising not only Victoria's alienation but her vulnerability. And it's these gaps and glitches in verbal understanding that makes the film's visual seamlessness even more dangerously seductive.

Schipper doesn't let Victoria off the hook, however; if she has been seduced by the dream of her own recklessness, she wakes up to discover a hard kernel of ruthless survivalism within herself. Her moral decline is laid out in no uncertain terms: at one point, she and Sonne kidnap a baby as a hostage, and the sharply realised terror and anguish of the child's parents make it clear how far Victoria has fallen. This rock-bottom moment contrasts with the cartoonish villainy of the unconvincing gangster (André Hennicke) who has masterminded the heist: the point seems to be that Victoria has discovered how alarmingly frictionless the slide can be from bored drifter to murderous scumbag.

Such tonal wavering is the main weakness of a film that otherwise simply bulldozes you with its ambition and commitment. Schipper and his cast have managed to turn a gimmick into a surprisingly subtle portrait of a millennial generation overwhelmed by its own unstoppable momentum.

Credits

Laia Costa	Victoria
Frederick Lau	Sonne
Max Mauff	Fuss
Burak Yigit	Blinker
Franz Rogowski	Boxer
André Hennicke	Andi



Another View

When you hear that the movie you're about to see was shot in a single take, it's hard not to fear a triumph of style over substance. Not only does Victoria director Sebastian Schipper avoid any of the CGI sleight of camera employed by Alejandro Iñárritu's *Birdman* he even goes as far as to work the whole film - which clocks in at just over two hours - from only 12 pages of script, with the cast improvising much of the dialogue.

Incredibly, it not only works but benefits from the approach, which gives his thriller a fluid urgency and naturalism, particularly when it comes to the characters' relationships. Cinematographer Sturla Brandth Grøvlen - who is having a good year courtesy of this and the Cannes Un Certain Regard winner *Rams* - manages to keep the camerawork measured and unflustered despite the fact that the characters are frequently captured on the move. The action never feels confined, with the 22 locations visited over the course of the real-time shoot - shot between around 4.30am and 7am on a single night in Berlin - well chosen and perfectly suited to the story.

We meet Spaniard Victoria (Laia Costa) as she hedonistically dances the night away in a club (there's a considerable amount of strobe effect here which may make this unsuitable for susceptible audiences). Her character is economically sketched as a thrill-seeker through the dance, a willingness to talk to anyone and the selection of a large shot of booze over a small one, so it seems natural that she would be willing to strike up a conversation with a group of young guys she meets as she leaves the club. Immediately, we are wary, Sonne (Frederick Lau), Blinker (Burak Yigit) and Fuss (Max Mauff), Boxer (Franz Rogowski), are that dangerous mix of flirtatious and drunk. This is, after all, long past the witching hour, in the dead part of night where unexpected dangers lurk for those not asleep.

Schipper keeps us on our toes, however, as this quickly turns into a tipsy meet-cute for Sonne and Victoria, she easily convinced to join the lads on a nearby apartment roof to smoke weed. Some of this early conversation tends towards the rambling, but the firm establishment of the film's players pays off once the thriller elements begin to creep in. Sonne is a familiar type, part street punk, part charmer, whose slightly bungling English language overtures - most of the time the gang talk to Victoria in English - only serve to make him more attractive to her. Lau and Costa have plenty of spark and play their flirtation with a reticence that underlines just how young they are.

The freewheeling nature of this early dialogue makes the sudden need for the group to take Victoria on a side trip to meet a gangster (Andre Hennicke), whom Boxer is in hock to, all the more intense and worrying, especially when he calls in the favour. Detailing what happens next would be to spoil the sudden surge into thriller territory that brings the likes of *Run Lola Run* to mind. Suffice to say that as the gang find themselves on the wrong side of the law, things soon spin out of control.

Perhaps because of the improvisation - although surely they must have rehearsed like crazy - even when the plot threatens to become contrived, the characters remain true to themselves. They may be in extraordinary circumstances but they still have the same skill-set - Victoria, resourceful and Sonne relying on a combination of bravado and impetuosity - as they had in the more flirtatious setting. It is this essential believability which makes Schipper's film stand out. Victoria and Sonne look normal and have the stale air of all-night-clubbers who've been up too long. Both actors play conflicted emotions beautifully - from a look that is part awe, part

desire, part sheepishness on the face of Lau as Sonne discovers Victoria can play the piano to Victoria's mix of desperation and determination as she commandeers an odd piece of cargo in a bid to get them out of danger later in the film. Schipper also makes good use of Nils Frahm's scoring, which adds to the mood, whether it is in its sweeping orchestral moments or pumping out rave beats. If the film's final moments seem almost inevitable, they are no less satisfying for that.

Amber Wilkinson (Eye for Film)

Our next film: Saturday May 6th, 7.30pm Julieta (Spain 2016. Cert 15)

Pedro Almodóvar's most recent film is the story of the eponymous Julieta, who is about to begin a new life in Portugal with her partner. Following a chance meeting with a friend of her daughter Antia (from whom she is completely estranged), Julieta learns of Antia's whereabouts and decides she must at long last confront what caused the breakdown in their relationship. Almodóvar's signature themes (desire, passion and identity), trademark styles (complex and melodramatic narrative, strong colours) and some favourite personnel all feature. After the disappointment of *I'm So Excited*, this is a welcome return to form

Please note the screening date which is different from that published

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