

A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence

SWEDEN 101 MIN

ROY ANDERSSON



WINCHESTER
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Why would anyone write about a Roy Andersson film? You might as well dance about a cake. The Swedish director's Living Trilogy, which began 15 years ago and concludes with this sublimely ridiculous piece of filmmaking, stands apart from the rest of cinema at such a remove that trying to make sense of it in words is beside the point, and perhaps impossible. You just have to watch it, then grab a net and try to coax your soul back down from the ceiling.

Imagine Jacques Tati stuck in Ingmar Bergman's spare room and you can just about start to picture the strangeness of *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* – the winner of the Golden Lion at last year's Venice Film Festival and one of the very best films you can see this year.

It shines with a hyperreal beauty – what Wordsworth called the glory and the freshness of a dream – but its colours are a becalmed, Ikea blend of beige and grey. It's about doom and death and the ineffable weirdness of human experience, and it made me laugh until I wept.

Like the first two films in the trilogy, *Songs from the Second Floor* and *You, The Living*, *A Pigeon* is made up of mostly, but not entirely, comic sketches that play out on meticulously constructed box-like sets. The cast are non-professionals, and wear pale clothes and pasty make-up. Their faces recall Buster Keaton at his most deadpan, but in their vacant stares we're supposed to see ourselves.

In the opening scene, a chubby, unkempt man peering into some very Anderssonian glass cases at a museum,

the third of which contains the first of the two pigeons that actually appear in the film, stuffed and mounted on a stick. He gawks, then pauses to consider what he's seen, then moves on to the next exhibit. For the next 100 minutes, you will do the same.

There is a story...sort of. Jonathan and Sam, a pair of Vladimir and Estragon-like practical joke salesmen, wander from place to place, trying unsuccessfully to shift their stock.

"We just want to help people have fun," says Jonathan (Holger Andersson) with a cracking note in his voice – although there just doesn't seem to be a market for vampire teeth, laughing bags and a fantastically hideous mask called Uncle One-Tooth, that's described by Sam (Nils Westblom), with what might be described as a certain measure of optimism, as "a new item we have a lot of faith in".

But many of the film's scenes don't involve Jonathan and Sam at all, or have them hovering in the corner while some other strangeness unfolds in the foreground. Elsewhere, in a basement pub, a deaf old man nurses a shot of vodka. We flash back to 1943 – or perhaps a dream of it – and the man's younger self is watching patrons sing hymns in harmony and pay for their drinks with kisses. Then we return to the present and the barmaid fumblingly helps the elderly man, whose back is now turned to the camera, into his coat.

Robbie Collin, Daily Telegraph

WRITER: Roy Andersson **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** István Borbás and Gergely Pálos **MUSIC:** Hani Jazzar and Gorm Sundberg
CAST Jonathan Holger Andersson | Sam Nils Westblom | Lotta Charlotta Larsson | Karl X11 Viktor Gyllenberg

VOTING FOR *Mustang* A62 | B28 | C4 | D3 | E0 | Rating 88.4% | Attendance 105

Next screening | **Theeb** | Tuesday 18 April 2017 8.00pm

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