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San Sebastian 2022 review: Grand Marin (Dinara Drukarova)

Matthew Joseph ←
Jenner →
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There is something so intriguing about the sea, and it has been the source of inspiration for generations of artists who endeavour to tame the ocean in order to understand its many mysteries. One of the more recent examples comes in the form of *Grand Marin* (alternatively known as *Woman at Sea*), which serves as the directorial debut of Dinara Drukarova. A veteran of the Russian film industry mainly known for her acclaimed work as an actor, she proves herself to be a fascinating directorial talent, showcasing a strong authorial voice that is explored with the work she does on both sides of the camera in this film. Focusing on a few weeks in the life of a wayward young woman of indeterminate origins who finds her way to the seas of Northern Europe, where she hopes to find gainful employment on a fishing vessel, the film is a powerful exploration of individuality and identity in a world that is not readily accepting of those who do not fit into preordained standards. Beautifully simple and incredibly evocative and told with a deft combination of heartfelt humour and genuine pathos, *Grand Marin* is a powerful celebration of one individual’s journey through a hostile

world, as demonstrated with sincerity and complexity by a filmmaker whose stunning artistic voice is reflected in every frame of this well-constructed social drama.

As said, the allure of the sea has been a fascinating subject for many individuals, and Drukarova contributes to the conversation by carefully crafting a story of a lonely woman finding her way into a small fishing commune, where she successfully manages to get a job as a deckhand on a boat. *Grand Marin* is not solely a gritty realist drama about someone seeking employment – it is the narrative foundation, but it is far from the only subject being explored here. The director uses the sea to look into the mind of someone who does not fear this intimidating, powerful and natural entity, but rather finds it her only passage to the future. The film orbits around discussions on the expansive escape of the sea, which represents liberty and a radical departure from the routine of everyday life, and focusing on the people who dedicate their lives to voyaging into these waters, often on a daily basis. The character of Lili is one of many lost souls taking refuge on a vessel, which is not only a means to employment, but a method of escape from a world that is not accepting of outsiders. We are introduced to many characters, each one plucked from different backgrounds and placed alongside each other. The language barrier may make communication difficult, and there may be differences in cultural standards – but they all ultimately speak the same language when it comes to the appeal offered by living and working on the sea, a life that offers them the chance to shift away from the restrictive standards of *terra firma* and the people who inhabit it.

Characterization was clearly very important to Drukarova as she constructed this film, which is surprisingly complex when it comes to developing the people who inhabit the story, even those who exist on the periphery. The director places herself in the central role, playing the part of the wayward woman who seeks the solace of the sea when she realizes there isn't a place for her on land. She is adrift in a lonely world, struggling to

stay afloat until she realizes her purpose extends further than she initially imagined. It's an impressive performance, and one that gives Drukarova the chance to not only showcase her stunning directorial prowess, but also continue to hone her craft, with the many challenges she sets for herself here being incredibly impressive. *Grand Marin* is primarily an intimate character study of a woman seeking freedom and solace from the past, tenaciously seeking a chance to escape and encountering a group of individuals who will undoubtedly ask her some variation of the question, "Where did you fly from, little sparrow?" A motif that may seem insignificant at first, but establishes a conceptual foundation from which Drukarova draws many of the most interesting components of the story and turns in a performance as fascinating as it is insightful. It comes from a place of deeply human curiosity, which is reflected in every moment of this nuanced, detailed portrait of a directionless individual finally finding her place in the world.

Grand Marin is a simple film, and Drukarova avoids resorting to excess, since this would remove the very poignant sense of realism that occurs throughout the film and gives it a distinctly authentic tone. The power of this film is not contained in the bold strokes but rather the more intimate details, with the director weaving together a vibrant tapestry of the human condition condensed into a few small moments of compassionate drama. This is a film about the perpetual search for meaning, and the realization that there isn't a clear formula on how to find one's life purpose. Instead, it demonstrates the importance of tenacity and ambition, and how sometimes the most earnest solution is to simply chart the unpredictable waters of life – both literal and metaphorical. Telling a sweetly sentimental story that is kept subdued and direct for the most part, *Grand Marin* captures a deeply poetic simplicity related to everyday life, centring on the trials and tribulations of a woman trying to find her place in a hostile world, and who eventually finds her sanctuary in the most unexpected of

places. Composed of stunning performances, a strong concept that hinges on the director's ability to take note of visceral human moments, and a genuinely compelling story that reveals many unimpeachable truths, it is clear that this film carries a lot of depth, which is so beautifully introduced throughout this thought-provoking, meaningful account of life in all of its unpredictability.

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