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THE 42ND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM: A SHORT IMPRESSION

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Silent Ones (Ricky Rijneke)

With the anecdotal evidence of the director's youth in hand (although at 31, she is older than I expected), it should come as no surprise that *Silent Ones* was yet another debut film, and a stunning one at that. Rijneke was born and raised in Rotterdam, so she was sort of playing a home game, but she squandered that advantage by shooting the whole film in Hungarian with an international crew. The film opens with a car turned over in a meadow, a young woman, Csilla, scrambling out, the obvious victim of a car accident. Dazed and confused by a concussion, she drops in the grass next to the car. Were there any other passengers in the car? In the next scenes, we see her boarding an international freighter as part of the crew, a ship run by the shady Gábor. Her only possession besides the clothes on her back is a small silver fish that used to belong to her kid brother, Isti. It turns out that he was also in the car, but was lost after the accident. Life on the ship is made hell by Gábor, who violates Csilla, and takes the only thing that physically connects her to her brother, the little piece of jewelry. The film jumps back five months, and we follow Csilla and Isti on their road trip towards Western Europe, as they take a number of odd jobs. The deep-felt connection between Csilla and her brother becomes apparent, and by the time we reach the accident the imminent loss of her brother weighs heavy on the film, only to be given a wry twist at the end.



A happy experience, this film is not. A story about two people on the edge of Western society, true 'silent ones,' people who would go unnoticed by most of us, anonymous. At least they have each other, as it is the two of them against the world, and they enjoy their freedom in the wide open spaces of the (mostly Dutch) countryside. The wide landscapes, shot through all four seasons, are strikingly beautiful, and punctuate Csilla's state of mind. In contrast, the scenes on the freighter never show the open water, confining Csilla to the labyrinthine interior of the ship's hull, with its cramped quarters and narrow hallways, the sound of engines and machinery constantly droning in the back. Csilla is now locked inside a miserable world, alone and lost, trying to find a way through the mazes of her mind, searching for what she will never find: the happiness and freedom that she had with her brother. After a brief return to Csilla on the ship, the final scene is delivered as a blow to the gut, leaving the audience in silence. The strength of the film lies in part in its use of silence, at least as far as spoken word goes. There is very little dialogue, yet leading actress Orsolya Tóth and her young co-star Fatih Dervisoglu manage to convey a whole array of emotions in their facial expressions and looks. The chemistry between the two is amazing, and it lifts their scenes together above the mundanity of their actions, such as field work for a carrot farmer or selling cigarettes to truck drivers waiting for yet another border. They go unnoticed and are totally dependent on each other, and as such trust each other totally. This is what makes what comes before and after their time on screen together so devastating. Combined with an imagery that is often drained of color, yet exudes a curious warmth and feeling of comfort, Rijneke's film creates an atmosphere that emphasizes the bond between the two main characters. It is somewhat reminiscent of Bruno Dumont's *Hors Satan*, only much softer and warmer, making the punchline all the more wry. A powerful, very self-assured debut, *Silent Ones* confirms that this director is one to watch. Don't be surprised if this wins one of the Tiger Awards at the end of the festival.

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