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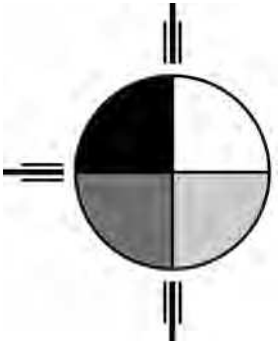
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movies BY MOLLY TEMPLETON



Bard Owe in *O'Horten*

Norwegian Would

Taking life off the tracks

O'HORTEN: Written, directed and produced by Bent Hamer. Cinematography, John Christian Rosenlund. Music, Kaada. Starring Bard Owe. Sony Pictures Classics, 2009. PG-13. 90 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

It's a very precise life that Odd Horten (Bard Owe) lives. When director Bent Hamer (*Kitchen Stories*) depicts Odd's morning routine, it's clear that this is the way every morning goes, right down to the careful placing of a sheet over his birdcage. Everything is just so in Odd's world, and everything is just so in Hamer's film: the careful framing, the warm indoor light contrasting sharply with the crisp cold of Norway's winter, the symmetry of doorways and train tracks.

Odd has spent a lot of time on those tracks — time now coming to an end with his impending retirement. He is facing a life without the timetables and tracks from which an engineer cannot vary, and he is clearly unprepared for it. He will fly back to Oslo, he tells a woman who's clearly interested in him. Even this little variation — the engineer on a plane! — is shocking at first. But a series of unexpected encounters gradually push Odd out of his organized, cautious comfort zone.

It would be a mistake to overstate or oversell Hamer's sweet, dry, restrained film, which applies an appealing

spareness to the story of a 67-year-old man experiencing a transformative few days. *O'Horten* is quiet (it's nearly six minutes in before anyone speaks) and, for the most part, subtle (one episode with a strange, lonely older man Odd finds sprawled on the street has a surprising, though not off-putting, sentimentality). Its sense of humor is compact and specific, often physical but never slapstick. An overactive ice machine, a group of engineers enthusiastically identifying train sounds, a man stuck in a pair of high-heeled red boots, the brief glimpses of personality shown by the diners in a restaurant — these are the things in which Hamer finds the humor, the peculiarities, of life. All of them contribute to Odd's slow, gentle awakening to the possibility that it's not too late for him to choose his own path, to go places other than where the rails and the schedules once took him. The small sentence that contained him before — "I didn't dare" — can still be thrown to the wind (or, as the case may be, over the edge of a ski jump).

When Odd Horten dares, Hamer's film suddenly opens up, shakes off some of its carefully composed beauty and slips into sunlight. It's a small triumph that provides a disproportionate sense of satisfaction. And yes: It's a little bit odd. **EW**

O'Horten opens Friday, Aug. 21, at the Bijou.

Annual time.. Again?? Ugh!
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