

Memorable 'Sister' Strikes Emotional Chords

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 3, 2013 - 3:16pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – With a delicacy and melancholy reminiscent of the Dardennes brothers, Ursula Meier's "Sister," shortlisted for the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film and opening tomorrow in Chicago at the Music Box Theatre, is a heartbreakingly effective piece of work about a boy forced to be a man by his circumstance. The film is sometimes a bit too languid for its own good but strong cinematography, excellent performances, and a deft touch with how adulthood can be forced upon what should be carefree adolescence make it emotionally memorable without ever feeling manipulative.

Simon (Kacey Mottet Klein) is not an average twelve-year-old. He lives at the base of a mountain upon which rests an Alpine ski resort well-trafficked by the wealthy. Seemingly every day, Simon goes to the resort and raids it for equipment – boots, skis, masks, etc. – that he then resells to pay for food for himself and his sister Louise (Lea Seydoux). When a worker at the resort named Mike (Martin Compston) catches him in the act, he ends up serving as a conduit for Simon's activity. Steal from the clientele, resell to the staff. Gillian Anderson makes a brief-but-effective appearance as one of the tourists who symbolizes the solid family life Simon wishes he could have without Meier forcing that aspect of the narrative.

Life at home is bad for Simon. Louise is unsupportive in every regard, often not coming home for days at a time and even criticizing the food that Simon steals to keep her fed. She is notably older than Simon and yet the boy is supporting the woman. At first, it feels like "Sister" is a film designed to encourage us to root for the more responsible (even if he is a thief) child to leave his downright abusive sister behind but then "Sister" takes an unexpected turn, revealing something about the relationship between Louise & Simon that makes the entire piece that much more heartbreaking.



Sister

Photo credit: Adopt Films

Like the Dardennes ("The Kid with a Bike"), Meier has a real gift with her young star as Klein gives a performance that never feels artificial in any way. He's quite good here, appearing in nearly every scene and striking just the right balance of childlike wonder and forced adulthood. There are moments where Klein perfectly reminds us that he's just a kid, whether he's pretending to be a chicken or enjoying a meal with Anderson's character, one of the few people it feels has been kind to him in recent years. Seydoux ("Inglourious Basterds", "Midnight in Paris") is typically good as is the reliable Compston ("Red Road") but the film belongs to Klein.

Film is also strong technically, especially the excellent cinematography from Agnes Godard, who often takes long shots to illustrate the upstairs-downstairs quality of life at the ski resort and further down the mountain physically, socially, and economically. There were times in the first act where I felt Meier lost a bit of the pacing as Simon was going through his ski-stealing motions yet again but the second half of the film is truly moving and memorable. "Sister" presents no easy answers in its depiction of a young man with a dark past and melancholy present. At least the incredibly powerful final images that remind us of the fragile, unpredictable nature of childhood and Simon's entire situation, hint at the always-hoped-for potential for a happier future.

"Sister" stars Kacey Mottet Klein, Lea Seydoux, Martin Compston, and Gillian Anderson. It was written by Antoine Jaccoud and Ursula Meier and directed by Meier. It will be released at the Music Box Theatre in Chicago on January 4, 2013.



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