

Challenging 'Child's Pose' Sparked by Luminita Ghaoeghiu

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 26, 2014 - 8:19pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Parents often feel responsible for their child's reprehensible actions or despicable behavior. They may feel it reflects poorly on their own character and will go out of their way to fix a situation, make it all better. Certainly not all parents, but definitely the mother we meet in "Child's Pose," a Romanian film from last year that is finally getting released here in the United States. It's a fascinating film centered on a controlling and manipulative mother who will confound audiences with her own questionable behavior and blunt demeanor, leaving them to ponder whether or not her concern and emotional responses are genuine or come from a place of self-preservation.

We meet the sixty-something Cornelia (Luminita Ghaoeghiu) at her birthday party, surrounded by her husband and a collection of Eastern European bourgeoisie. We learn this affluent woman is a successful theatrical set designer and architect, and is respected in elite social circles. When asked where her thirty-something son, Barbu (Bogdan Dumitrache) is, she comes up with an excuse that sounds good, as if convincing herself more than others. As much as we see her buzzing around the room, dancing with abandon, laughing and greeting friends, we sense her adult son is a source of contention in her life.

We meet her son when she does, sitting in a police station where his report is being processed. Cornelia's sister, Olga (Natasa Raab), had pulled her out of a small theatrical performance to take her to her son, stating her son has been in a car accident. Earlier that evening, Barbu was involved in a reckless driving incident that resulting in the death of a fourteen year-old boy from a lower class village. They show up in their furs, talking on their cell phones and making demands of the two police officers. Cornelia persuades a distraught Barbu to lower the speed of his vehicle, determine to use her connections and spin this tragedy in such a way that will prevent her "baby" from going to jail, ruining his life forever.



Domnui (Florin Zamfirescu) and Cornelia (Luminita Ghaoeghiu) in 'Child's Pose'

Photo credit: Zeitgeist Films

By using her upper class status to hinder the investigation and offering to pay off the driver (Vlad Ivanov) her son tried to overcome on the freeway, Cornelia takes over while her resentful son wishes she would stay out of it. But this is the pattern that has developed for so many years. She coddles and protects. His cowardice prevents him from speaking how he truly feels. As the accident continues to be processed, both legally and emotionally, the already fractured mother-and-son relationship becomes even more strained and distant.

Director Colin Peter Netzer ("Medal of Honor"), who co-wrote this superb screenplay with Razvan Rdulescu (also credited for acclaimed films of the Romanian New Wave, 2007's "4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days" and 2005's "The Death of Mr. Lazarescu") isn't out to paint a picture of a Cruella De Vil we can empathize with. Cornelia isn't that black-and-white a character. Not as over-dramatic as the determined mother-who-will-do-anything tends to be in film, Netzer and Rdulescu have created, in Cornelia and Barbu, two tragic figures we can understand and recognize. They are offered to the audience as authentic and real people who are ultimately crippled by where they are in life. A cycle of dysfunction has made them both unbearable, yet nevertheless reliant on each other.

Netzer incorporates surprisingly steady handheld camerawork in "Child's Pose," thanks to cinematographer Andrei Butic. It often treats viewers like another character in the film. We are there with Cornelia and her sister at the scene of the accident, we are present at the police station and throughout the film's several absorbing family discussions. We're so used to seeing shaky handheld work in film, it's a pleasure to see the camera maneuver around these characters in a fluid manner, or even sit patiently as they have some challenging discussions.

It's during the conversations these characters have that "Child's Pose" impresses the most. They are conversations that feel natural and relatable. Two specifically stand out, both involving the mesmerizing performance by Ghaeighiu. One was a scene where Cornelia sits down with her son's girlfriend, Carmen (Ilinca Goia), in an attempt to make peace and form an agreeable union in order to make things easier for Barbu. Anyone who's watched a domineering/overprotective mother around their son's girlfriend knows that this girl will never be good enough and will always be seen as an annoyance or threat. We pick that up in great subtle ways throughout the film, but this scene is quite revealing, showing Cornelia who her son really is from the perspective of his lover.

Another revealing scene is a stressed conversation Barbu has with Cornelia. In it he gives his mother an ultimatum, where he takes a "don't call me, I'll call you" attitude. Cornelia just sits there, silently taking all the hurtful comments from her son. From her perspective, she has gone above and beyond to protect and help him. From his perspective, she's smothered him and not given him any chance to make his own moves. From our perspective, we can see where both are in the wrong, but we can also understand where they are coming from. It's all about in how they are communicating what they're feeling. That's what will be remembered the most down the line.

During that conversation, Cornelia expresses to her son one of the film's most thematic lines, "parents find their fulfillment in their children. Everything they failed to accomplish, they achieve through their children." It's a line that establishes what we've already known about Cornelia up till then, but the heartache and frustration on Ghaeighiu's face is incomparable. It's one of many moments that confirm that "Child's Pose" definitely succeeds on this veteran Romanian actress' talents.



Bogdan Dumitrache as Barbu in 'Child's Pose'

Photo credit: Zeitgeist Films

One of the most emotional and intensely awkward scenes comes at the end, when Cornelia takes Barbu and Carmen to meet the parents of the boy he has accidentally killed. Obviously, it's heart-wrenching to watch, but it's also the most vulnerable and open we've seen of

Cornelia. As she takes the verbal barrage from the child’s father (excellently played by Adrian Titieni), we see her naturally at a loss as to how to respond, while the wheels turn internally in an effort to state her son’s defense. What comes out is a raw albeit pathetic plea for Barbu, one that borders on being disrespectful, but it’s desperation is what we’ve come to expect from Cornelia. It’s entirely difficult to tell if what we’re seeing from Cornelia is real or her manipulation in cruise control.

The less-is-more approach the director takes in handling the eventual confrontation between the child’s father and Barbu is quite powerful. Each actor must rely on body language as the camera watches then from the backseat of Cornelia’s automobile. It doesn’t matter that we don’t know what they’re saying. The film has earned this silent moment. It’s difficult enough as it is.

The title, “Child’s Pose”, is an odd one. I’m sure something is lost in the English translation of the original title, “Pozitia Copilului”, but one could arrive that it’s meant to connote “the position of the child”. Here is a story where the adult child’s position is stuck in a place free of growth, primarily due to the mother’s relentless involvement in his life. It’s a look at a damaged relationship that seems uncertain how to repair itself, right up until the end.

“Child’s Pose” continues its limited release in Chicago on April 25th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Luminita Ghaoeghiu, Bogden Dumitrache, Florin Zamfirescu and Natasa Raab. Screenplay by Calin Peter Netzer and R?zvan R?dulescu. Directed by Calin Peter Netzer. Not Rated

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