

## Mind-Blowing ‘Midsommar’ is Disturbing and Beautiful

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 4, 2019 - 11:27am

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Midsommar” is beautifully composed, disturbing in nature and very very Swedish. Writer/Director Ari Aster creates a stunning sophomore effort (after his brilliant debut “Hereditary”) that is pure cinema, and weaves a fantastical tale of humanity stripped to its bare bones. It moves a bit slow, but it also builds to something completely original and unexpected.

With more than a nod to the Swedish master Ingmar Bergman, Aster starts with the horribly emotional wreckage of a triple suicide, and morphs into a Swedish Midsommar fest, which becomes more and more unimaginable. There is also the contrast between the ugly American superficiality and the older European culture, which narrows the vision of the guests in witnessing the events of the ritual – and you’ll understand why once you see the film. Like religion, the Swedish commune that is depicted relies on myth, but their myth is rooted into a more natural human cycle (thus the reference to “mid-summer” and the nearly 24 hour sunshine). There was a time when we were more attuned to our nature, and the nature around us, Aster just frames it in some vivid and disturbing rites of passage.

Twentysomething grad student Dani (Florence Pugh) is in emotional crisis after her family commits a triple suicide. Unstable herself, she is a little girl lost after the happening, and clings to a soulless relationship with her boyfriend and PhD candidate Christian (Jack Reynor). She gloms onto a retreat to Sweden with Christian’s friends, and begins a new journey.



Dani (Florence Pugh) is in Over Her Flowered Head in ‘Midsommar’

*Photo credit: A24*

The commune is rooted in ancient traditions, including a nine-day Midsommar “festival” that includes many rituals of human transition, and happens once every 90 years. Josh (William Jackson Harper) and Christian fight over who will study the cultish behavior for their thesis, which alerts the commune’s elders to possible infiltration. As the days of the festival commence, the collective anticipates the crowning of the May Queen.

Whoosh, there it is. The story unfolds slowly, but the commune is stationed in a beautiful setting of nature, and Aster’s composition – aided by the bright light cinematography of Pawel Pogorzelski (his DP for “Hereditary”) – and the use of the relentless light is in sharp contrast to the previous film. There are many shots that look like paintings, aided by the production design of the commune itself, with angular buildings and decorated interiors that completely surprise.

The cast is willing to go along, especially the exceptional Florence Pugh (unforgettable in “Lady MacBeth”). Pugh is tasked with handling a wide spectrum of emotional highs and lows, and delivers all of it with a presence that absorbs focus. Jack Reynor was more than willing to wring out his character, and his approach is creative in its low key manner. Will Poulter (as fellow traveler Mark) is always welcome, he is acerbic comic relief among all the Swedish smiles.



Welcome to Sweden in ‘Midsommar’

Photo credit: A24

The film deals with mental health, and how that affects the good and bad decisions in our daily interactions, mixed with the ancient ritual commune. This was an overriding theme in several Ingmar Bergman films (“Through a Glass Darkly,” “Persona”) and with its many scenes of unbalanced dreams and realities, “Midsommar” is a nod to the old master. There is something about Sweden within the festival, and there is something about us in how the communal energy unfolded.

Ari Aster is a filmmaker name to remember, as he delves deeply into the psyche of families, friendships and their communal relationships, both in “Hereditary” and now “Midsommar.” Although his films are not quite the escape a superhero movie is, it treats us exactly how we are, not what we pretend to be.

*“Midsommar” opens everywhere on July 3rd, including Landmark Century Centre in Chicago, 2828 North Clark Street. Featuring Florence Pugh, Jack Reynor, William Jackson Harper, Will Poulter and Ellora Trecis. Written and directed by Ari Aster. Rated “R”*



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [20]  
Editor and Film Writer  
HollywoodChicago.com  
[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [19]

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