

Focus on Sámi Blood

08-07-2017



Sámi Blood: Becoming someone else

It was in traditional clothes that the cast of *Sámi Blood* ^[1] turned up on the Lido to present the film in the *Venice Days* ^[2] section of Venice, in its world premiere. A touch of colour that accompanied the heartfelt and strongly applauded first work by Swedish director **Amanda Kernell**, the story of a young girl who, at the age of 14, no longer identifies with her family and dreams of a different life, abandoning her community (and her identity) with courage and anguish.

We're in the land of the Sami people, in the northernmost region of Sweden. An elderly lady by the name of Christina (**Maj Doris Rimpi**) returns to her homeland for the funeral of her sister. It's not an emotional affair, however. Pleasantries are rushed and Christina is ill-at-ease, impatient to leave as soon as possible to go home. But her home was once there, on those plateaus, with her family, which raised reindeer and sang yoik, the traditional Sami song. We are told all this in a long flashback which catapults us into the 1930s, when Christina was 14 years-old and called Elle Marja (played by fresh-faced **Lene Cecilia Sparrok**). Elle Marja and her sister Njenna (**Mia Erika Sparrok**, Lene's actual sister) are sent away to a boarding school exclusively for Sami people, where they learn the Swedish language and culture. Whilst Njenna finds it hard to fit in, Elle Marja soon goes to the top of the class: her dream is to become a Swede, move to the city, to Uppsala, and to become a teacher.

The journey of this young woman, however, is fraught with obstacles: the racist attitudes of tall blonde Swedes towards this young girl who is seen as a savage, the way she is ostracised by her teacher (**Hanna Alstrom**) who, despite recognising the girl's skill, denies Elle Marja any help in pursuing her studies (because Sami people have smaller brains, she says), and last

but not least, the resistance she meets from her proud mother (**Katarina Blind**), who doesn't accept her daughter's emancipation. But Elle Marja pushes forward, demonstrating exceptional determination even though she still looks like a child, small in stature but with fire in her eyes, played beautifully by this debut actress who gives the character just the right dose of maturity, passion and strength, without ever once putting an expression wrong. An intense and blunt coming-of-age story which reveals a relatively unknown page in the history of Swedish colonialism, built on discrimination and the validation of race (the scene in which the protagonist has parts of her body measured is one of the most disturbing of the film), and questions family ties, showing how being tied to your roots is not always a given.

Sámi Blood is a co-production between Sweden, Denmark and Norway, involving Nordisk Film Production Sverige [3], Bautafilm [4], Digipilot [5], Nordisk Film Production A/S [6] and Sveriges Television [7]. International sales of the film, which has been screened in the Discovery section of Toronto after Venice, are being handled by Danish company LevelK [8].

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Links:

[1] <http://cineuropa.org/f.aspx?t=film&did=313811>

[2] <http://www.venice-days.com/>

[3] <http://cineuropa.org/id.aspx?t=prodcompany&did=39993>

[4] <http://cineuropa.org/id.aspx?t=prodcompany&did=315254>

[5] <http://cineuropa.org/id.aspx?t=prodcompany&did=315255>

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[7] <http://cineuropa.org/id.aspx?t=prodcompany&did=8458>

[8] <http://cineuropa.org/id.aspx?t=intsale&did=116113>