

Friday, January 30th, 7.30pm

We Are The Best (15)

dir: Lukas Moodysson

starring: Mira Barkhammar, Mira Grosin, Liv LeMoyne

sponsor: LFS members

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Lukas Moodysson's status as the prodigy of Swedish cinema has somewhat faded in recent years, partly as a result of following two abrasively experimental films (*A Hole in my Heart*, *Container*) with the leaders in globalism statement *Mammoth*. *We Are The Best* comes as a surprise - at once a return to the youth-feminist energy of his 1998 debut *Show Me Love* and a return to comedy, 14 years after his much-loved *Together*. Compared to the director's darker work, *We Are The Best* might seem an easy option, but it's clearly a very personal film - not least because it's based on a comic strip by his wife Coco Moodysson. She is presumably the original for Bobo (the candid, solemnly androgynous Mira Barkhammar) whose early teen insecurities provide the film's emotional focus.

Set in the early 80s, *We Are The Best* feels bang-on about the punk experience of the time, because it is at once about getting it right and about getting it wrong. The pubescent proto-Riot Grrrl trio get it wrong in that they arrive on the scene way too late: everyone keeps saying that punk is dead. Klara's big brother has moved on to Joy Division and the other girls in school dance in pink Lycra to The Human League. And yet the trio get it right in that they represent the essence of the original punk idea - reacting to boredom and banality, seizing the moment, defiantly cheeking the adults and would-be adults around them. And they do it with only one song in their repertoire - the magnificently brattish protest number "Hate The Sport", into which the outspokenly political Klara (Mira Grosin) compresses all her rage, and for which the subtitles come through with flying colours: "The atomic bombs blow up our cities, yet you want more tennis committees."

Despite the trio's gaucheness, they come across as authentic feminist heroines, models of creative self-determination. Like their characters, the three young leads, who go at their parts with



infectious ebullience and daring, seem to create themselves as we watch - Markhammar and Grosin are apparently trying their instruments for the first time, while Liv LeMoyne as Hedvig audaciously undergoes the screen baptism of having her long hair cropped on film. This is a movie about self-liberation and about friendship overcoming obstacles and romantic rivalry, and a reminder of why teenagers have traditionally formed bands: the mere act of saying "We're in a band" makes it so, whether or not you have any instruments, songs or talent. Klara reminds the depressive Bobo about what's good in her life: "You're in the world's greatest band". And in the moment she says it, of course it's true.

There is some material here that you perhaps need to be Swedish and of a certain age to appreciate fully. - such as the exact cultural significance of the band Ebba Grön. Other humour is of a more general period relevance - the self-absorbed, post-hippy laxness of Bobo's divorcee mother and Klara's embarrassing clarinet-playing dad, for instance. There's also a terrific double-act in unreconstructed '70s rock-clods Kenneth and Roger, the youth-club workers who think they can teach this girl 'band' how a guitar is handled - then blanch at Hedvig's fretboard prowess.

Generally atmospheric and relaxed, the film only itself erupts into frenetic punk mode during the end credits, as the girls lark around with cheerful obnoxiousness in a fast-food outlet. *We Are The Best* is a low-key pleasure. It is perhaps not a project that tests Moodysson as a director but it resoundingly shows his brilliance at directing young performers: he'd be a hell of a lot better at running a youth club than Kenneth and Roger.

Synopsis: Stockholm, 1982. Twelve-year old female misfits Bobo and Klara are united by their passion for punk. At their youth club they get metal band Iron Fist thrown out of a rehearsal slot, claiming that they have a band too. Although they can't play, they decide to form a band for real, and enlist shy schoolmate Hedvig, a talented guitarist. Bobo and Klara persuade Hedvig to let them cut her hair; as a result, Hedvig's devout mother tries to blackmail them into going to church. The three girls contact Elis and Mackan, boys from a local punk band: Bobo and Klara fall out over Elis's affections but Hedvig makes peace between them. Youth club workers Kenneth and Roger book the band and Iron Fist to play in another town. The girls' act provokes a riot: they return from their debut gig in triumph.

Credits

Bobo: Mira Barkhammar
Klara: Mira Grosin
Hedvig: Liv LeMoyne
Kenneth: Johan Liljemark
Roger: Mattias Wiberg
Elis: Jonathan Salomonsson
Mackan: Alvin Stollo
Bobo's mother: Anna Rydgren
Bobo's dad: Peter Eriksson
Linus: Charlie Falk
Klara's mum: Lena Karlsson
Klara's dad: David Dencik
Hedvig's mum: Ann-Sofie Rase
Klara's little brother: Emrik Ekholm

Director: Lukas Moodysson
Screenplay: Lukas Moodysson
DoP: Ulf Brantås
Editor: Michal Leszczykowski
Sound: Hans Muller
Costume: Moa Li Lemhagen, Schalin

Sweden/Denmark/Norway 2013
 102 mins



Lincoln Film Society

Patron: Jim Broadbent



Lukas Moodysson explains

“*We Are The Best* unites two core tenets that helped to define Lukas Moodysson's early work – his ability to keenly capture the excruciating moment-to-moment oscillations of absolute surety and crippling insecurity in teenage life: and how popular music can be used as a tool to connect the psychological states of characters. Think back to the disarmingly earnest moment in *Show Me Love* when the girls hitch a ride with a random stranger and get lost in each other's eyes while Foreigner's 'I Want To Know What Love Is' blares on the car's stereo; the repeated use of Abba's plaintive 'SOS' in *Together*; controversially, the use of the vicious 'Mein Herz Brennt' by German heavy metallers Rammstein to illustrate the white noise between the ears of *Lilya 4-Ever*'s suicidal title character.

In *We Are The Best*, music is treated as an essential form of self-expressions but is also fertile ground for discussing a variety of issues, including spirituality. Moodysson is a committed Christian and includes a number of scenes – alternately hilarious and touching – in which the girls wrestle with issues of faith. Young Klara has a near-messianic commitment to atheism, and declares of Hedvig, “We'll influence her away from God... That's what punk's all about – influencing other people.” For an ostensibly light film, it's weighty stuff.

We Are The Best is Moodysson's first film since 2009's *Mammoth*. During that film's post production, his father died – an event that, unsurprisingly, had a huge impact. In 2010, he told an interviewer he'd considered giving up film-making entirely: “Sometimes I wake up and it feels like it's over.” He briefly considered making a film about the experience but instead wrote a novel, *Dögen and Co* (literally “Death and co”), which was broadly well-received in his native Sweden. What then has influenced the embrace of positivity apparent in *We Are The Best*? Moodysson's reply has a perverse kind of logic: “Sometimes it feels like if I'm happy, it equals dark movies. I'm not saying that I felt bad when I made this movie but I needed to make a movie that would be uplifting because I needed to be uplifted. And I felt that people around me needed that. I wanted to make a happy movie, the kind of movie you want to see if you are feeling bad.”

We Are The Best is not without hints of melancholy (the thoughtful, introverted Bobo undergoes a gruelling period of self loathing), but it's arguably his most upbeat and enjoyable work in more than a decade. *Mammoth* was a gloomy multi-continent saga concerned with the corrosive effects of unfettered capitalism, and constituted Moodysson's contribution to a sub-genre of films – the liberal humanist, we-are-all-connected bad trip – (see also *Crash*, *Babel*, *21 Grams*, *360*) – that now seems all but played out. Before that came the monochrome *Container* (2006), an avant-garde, plot-free stream of consciousness and the jarring *A Hole in My Heart*, whose combination of low-grade visuals, deliberately aimless narrative and shock tactics (including

gruesome close-ups of genital plastic surgery) alienated critics and audiences alike: it's the one occasion when Moodysson's evident empathy for the vicissitudes of adolescent life transmogrified into adolescent, 'fuck-you' film-making. The despairing *Lilya 4-Ever* completes a spell of darkness that stretches back a long time.

I suggest that if anything connects the director's disparate string of films, it's a palpable strain of humanism – even his scummiest characters seem to have beating hearts. Moodysson, by his deadpan standards, seems enthused by the idea “That's the way I want it to be. That's what I always try to say when people claim that I'm making these dark, experimental movies. They are combined by some kind of warmth. I always like the characters and I always want the best thing for them. I feel that I'm protecting them.” Moodysson becomes animated: “I don't like movies that are cold, no matter how good they are. Cold for me is like death. It's like suicide. It's like, why live if you feel like life is cold? Life is sometimes really painful and if you portray life, it's OK to make painful movies, it's OK to make dark movies. But never make cold movies because that's not life.”

Ashley Clark: taken from a longer article (Punk's Not Dead) Sight and Sound, May 2014

Our next film: Friday, February 6th, 7.30pm

A Thousand Times Goodnight (Norway/Ireland/Sweden 2013: Cert 15)

Rebecca is one of world's top war photojournalists, capturing dangerous and chilling images in the most dire landscapes, all in an effort to shed light on the real cost of modern war. But she's also a wife and mother, leaving behind a husband and two young daughters every time she travels to a new combat zone. After a near-death experience chronicling the ritual of a female suicide bomber, husband Marcus evels an ultimatum: give up the dangerous profession or lose the family she counts on being there when she returns from each assignment. Yet the conviction that her photos can make a difference keeps pulling at Rebecca's resolve, making it difficult for her to walk away entirely. With an offer to photograph a refugee camp in Kenya, a place allegedly so safe that daughter Steph is allowed to join her, Rebecca comes face to face with just how much she risks each time she steps back into the fray..