



Patron: Jim Broadbent
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A Man Called Ove (Cert 15)
dir: Hannes Holm

Starring: Rolf Lassgård, Bahar Pars

Sponsor: Dr Roderick J. Ørner

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Synopsis: Sweden, present day. Retiring after 43 years at the same firm and bereft following the death of his wife, Ove Lindahl plans to commit suicide. He's thwarted by repeated interruptions from new neighbour Parvaneh, a pregnant mother of two. Flashbacks show the teenage Ove witnessing his widower father, a railway mechanic, being fatally hit by a train. Later, Ove defies council officials seeking to demolish his family home, which is then destroyed by fire. Ove meets Sonja and they marry. In the present, Ove plans another suicide attempt, which also fails. He teaches Parvaneh to drive, bonds with her daughters and takes in a teenage lodger, who has been kicked out of home. Flashbacks reveal how Ove's happy marriage was all but ruined by a coach accident which paralysed Sonja. Ove and Parvaneh expose a council plan to institutionalise a friend against his will. Parvaneh gives birth to a boy. Ove dies shortly after.

With the news that Jack Nicholson has been coaxed out of semi-retirement to star in the US remake of Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann*, it's not hard to imagine the newly minted octogenarian following it up with a hypothetical redo of *A Man Called Ove*, Sweden's nominee for the 2017 foreign film Oscar. Played with bellicose gusto by Rolf Lassgård, its cantankerous, disdainful titular character - at first glance a misanthropic busybody with an obsessive-compulsive routine and an aversion to anything new-fangled - bears distinct echoes of the grumps Nicholson inhabited in both *As Good As It Gets* (1997) and *About Schmidt* (2002). As in the former film, it takes the unaffected overtures of a kind young woman - here pregnant Iranian immigrant Parvaneh (Bahar Pars) - to thaw the iceman out and excavate the pain that lies beneath the irascible exterior.

The film is directed in workmanlike fashion by Hannes Holm from Fredrick Backman's hugely popular novel, and there's little in its ultimately sentimental trajectory that truly surprises. What it does possess is a morbid streak that - initially, at least - can be arresting as a counterbalance to the sometimes aggressively quirky storytelling elsewhere. Bereft after the loss of his beloved wife Sonja to cancer, and pressurised into retiring from his job of 43 years by callow new management, Ove Lindahl subsists as a self-appointed caretaker of his nondescript, small-town neighbourhood. He resolves to end it all to join Sonja, but his numerous suicide attempts are continually interrupted by the unwitting Parvaneh, who has moved into the house opposite with her family.

These unhurried, darkly farcical scenes are unflinching in their depiction of Ove's makeshift preparations for his demise. Ove is, indeed, really bad at dying, as one character points out. But he has also been, as it turns out, a hardy survivor over the decades. Generous flashbacks chronicle a youth punctuated by tragedy and misfortune, much of it freakish in nature. Having lost his mother as a child, the teenage Ove sees his father, a railway mechanic, killed by a speeding locomotive. Later, the family home burns down, an event



that puts Ove forever at odds with the petty council bureaucrats he derisively calls "whiteshirts."

In the face of all this adversity, it's revealing that the young Ove obsessively sets his mind to fixing inanimate things rather than engaging with human-kind. Sleeping rough in the railways facilitates an unconventional meet-cute with Sonja, whose almost saintly compassion allows her to break through Ove's reserve. Holm, who doubles on writing duties, paints Ove as something of a dinosaur who doesn't suffer fools and who despises authoritarian types. But he's no bigot, at one point providing sanctuary to a Bosnian teenager shunned by his parents for coming out ("Are you one of those gays?" Ove enquires bemusedly.) Would-be oppressors are fought tooth and nail, such as the absurdly villainous "whiteshirt" who tries to install an old friend in a nursing home against his will.

Lassgård is a commanding presence and Pars an amiable foil, but the more Ove warms up, the more the narrative becomes laboured and trite. As the macabre bite of the film's early going gradually recedes, the increasingly lachrymose remainder leaves it feeling a little toothless.

Credits

Rolf Lassgård	Ove Lindahl
Bahar Pars	Parvaneh
Filip Berg	Young Ove
Ida Engvoll	Sonja Lindahl
Charatina Larsson	Anita
Börje Lundberg	Rune
Tobias Almborg	Patrick
Klas Wijlegård	Jimmy
Poyan Karimi	Mirsad
Simon Enderoth	Adrian
Johan Widerberg	'White Shirt'
Stefan Gödicke	Ove's father
Director	Hannes Holm
Screenplay	Hannes Holm (from the Fredrick Backman novel)
Director of Photography	Göran Hallberg
Editor	Fredrik Morheden
Composer	Gaute Storaas
Sound	Hugo Ekornes
Costume	Camilla Olai-Lindblom
	Sweden/Denmark/Norway 2015
	125 mins

Another view

We've all met Ove. The grumpy git who lives by the rules and expects – nay, demands – everybody does the same. Who spends an inordinate amount of time making official complaints about trivia. And who doesn't seem to like anything or anybody. That loaded question "do you enjoy life?" comes to mind.

In Ove's (Rolf Lassgard) case, he doesn't. His beloved wife is dead and the only thing he wants now is to be with her. At 59, he looks and behaves like somebody significantly older, permanently sees the negative side of everything and is a creature of habit, making his rounds at the same time every morning to check the gated development where he lives. At what for him is a most inconvenient moment, he discovers he has new neighbours, the pregnant Parvaneh (Bahar Pars), her husband and two young girls. They're friendly but, like any young family, slightly chaotic and far noisier than he would like.

But, in Hannes Holm's A Man Called Ove, there's more going on beneath that crusty surface. His life has had more than its fair share of sadness: his mother dies when he's a child and his father is killed in a tragic accident when Ove is a young man. Happiness comes with his one and only relationship with a woman, Sonja (Ida Engvall), who becomes his wife and the focus of his life. There's more personal tragedy to come and the interior of his house is scattered with clues: Sonja's clothes, a wheelchair in the corner

Essentially, his life is the story, with an emphasis on the present day and the changes that come with his new neighbours. It would be all too easy for the film to turn maudlin and sentimental, but Holm, who also wrote the screenplay, injects proceedings with a large dose of black comedy, irony and a razor-sharp sense of timing. Ove's various efforts to fulfil a promise to his beloved Sonja are always thwarted by other people, although they never realise at the time. But the fact that the curmudgeon is still around means that he touches the lives of others, even finding himself saving a life. It's the ultimate irony, and there's a definite hint of It's a Wonderful Life in seeing how he affects those around him, often unexpectedly.

While his life is changed by his new neighbours, this is no radical transformation. He's always been pedantic, awkward in company and a glass half empty kinda guy. That never changes. But he does come to realise that he needs other people, in the same way that they need him. Those morning rounds continue, he's still complaining and calling everybody "idiots" but the difference is that he also calls himself one as well. Holm skilfully balances the feel-good with the downright funny, the touching with the tragic. And the biggest irony of all is that, underneath, Ove has a big heart. Literally.

Ove and Parvanah make an unlikely double act but, as played by Lassgard and Pars, they're extremely effective. He only smiles once – encouraged by his neighbour – but, as the film progresses, he demonstrates that there's more to him than a grumpy face and a manner designed to keep the world at arm's length. But he can't keep Parvaneh at arm's length. At the start, Ove gets right up your nose but, by the end, he's really got to you. Tissues at the ready

Freda Cooper (Flickering Myth)

This is our last film of 2017. Thanks to everyone who has supported the Society over the last 12 months. We hope you have enjoyed the films we've presented and look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Happy Christmas, from the Committee

Our next film: Friday January 5th, 2018. 7.15pm*
The Handmaiden (S. Korea 2016. Cert 18)**

Set in 1930s Korea, con-man Fujiwara & his accomplice Sook-hee plan to deceive, seduce & rob Hideko, wealthy niece of elderly Kouzuki, of her fortune. But their scheme begins to fail when Hideko falls in love with Sook-hee. Themes of passion & revenge combine in this 'foxy concoction' (BFI) which is - apart from anything else - an astonishing visual and sensual experience.

***** This film is over 2 hours long.
Please note the earlier start time**