



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

LAMB (15)

Director: Valdimar Jóhannsson

Starring: Noomi Rapace, Hilmir Snær Guðnason, Björn, Hlynur Haraldsson

Iceland/Sweden/Poland, 2021, 1 hour 46 minutes SUBTITLES

This is a tale of simple county folk, but it's not *The Archers*. It is difficult to pigeon-hole *Lamb* as it flips between Norse myth, horror, revenge drama and comedy. Simran Hans writing in the **Guardian Online** [12 December 2021] described Valdimar Jóhannsson debut directorial feature as fun and freaky, "I laughed out loud at his audacity and had nightmares later" The film constantly moves across genres but always with a brooding sense of impending doom. Jóhannsson explains [**The Hollywood Reporter**, 12 November 2021] "We just wanted to make an art house film that we wanted to see and felt we had not seen before. It's really a classical story with this one strange element. The plan was not to make a horror film".

Set in bleak, but beautiful and haunting rural Iceland and filmed by cinematographer Eli Arenson, the landscape is more than a backdrop. It is an essential stage creating the mood of the film and forms a part of the narrative. Speaking to British Cinematographer Arenson commented: "Nature plays a role in the film. There is an almost ominous feeling that it's watching over man's attempt at controlling it"

It is an ambitious and confident debut for Jóhannsson, but to appreciate it you have to enter into the imaginary and surrealistic world he created with his co-writer the Icelandic poet Sjon. The plot is less important than the allegorical tale of loss, human selfishness and disregard of nature, revenge and hubris. But here goes, without too many spoilers. Farmers Marie and Ingvar adopt Ada, half sheep half human to replace Marie's dead child. They appear to recover from their grief and loss and their new child Ada is a source of happiness, but unsurprisingly the unreality means it is short lived and unsustainable. Human relationships become fractured as emotions clash with the role of the animals and the landscape. Ada's mother pines for her lost lamb, but with little empathy from Marie. Ingvar's brother, Petur proves to be an opportunist sexual predator. Ada's mystical and monstrous father is a brooding and sinister ethereal presence. It doesn't end well.

Besides Ada and the lurking monster *Lamb* has a small human cast. Marie is played by Swedish actor Rapace best known for playing Lisbeth Salander in the film adaptation of Stieg Larsson's Millennium crime series. Ingvar and Petur are played by the lesser known but well-respected Icelandic actors Guonason and Haraldsson.

Lamb premiered at the Cannes Film Festival 2021 and won the prize for Originality in the Un Certain Regard Section. It was selected as Iceland's entry for the 2022 Academy Awards Best International Feature Film Category and has been doing reasonably well on the international film festivals circuit with good if not overwhelming positive critical response.

Notes compiled by Adrian Rhead