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'To the Night': Film Review | Karlovy Vary 2018

11:20 AM PDT 7/6/2018 by Boyd van Hoeij



Courtesy of Karlovy Vary International Film Festival

THE BOTTOM LINE
Hard to watch. 



Caleb Landry Jones headlines this psychological acid trip of a movie directed by Austrian filmmaker Peter Brunner ('Those Who Fall Have Wings').

A childhood tragedy consumes a young Brooklyn artist in *To the Night*, the English-language debut from Austrian musician and semi-experimental director Peter Brunner (*Those Who Fall Have Wings*). This former student of Michael Haneke has crafted a psychological drama that's hard to watch as the protagonist — played by Caleb Landry Jones at his most intense — both consciously and subconsciously tries to find a way to deal with the fact that his parents died in tragic circumstances when he was a child.

A Karlovy Vary competition title, this will travel to other festivals mainly on the strength of the name of co-producer and editing consultant Ulrich Seidl, as well as cinephiles' familiarity with Jones, who last year alone co-starred in *Get Out*, *Three Billboards Outside of Ebbing, Missouri* and *The Florida Project*. However, the project might be a tad too experimental and the protagonist too unlikable for more commercial pickups.

Norman (Jones) is an artist whose latest project involves slowly melting babies made of ice in glass boxes and underneath menacing red lights. Since Norman has brought his own 8-month-old to the opening — a child somewhat oddly called Caleb (Bodhi and Hudson Mitchell) — it's already clear this is a guy with some unresolved issues. It slowly becomes clear, mainly through the rather facile showcasing of material on Norman's laptop, that the tortured artist lost his parents in a fire at his palatial childhood home outside New York. Though the property, on a large leafy estate, has remained unsold, one assumes there must have been some kind of inheritance that has allowed Norman to afford his enormous Brooklyn artist's loft, which is the kind of gigantic atelier space filled to the brim with industrial loot and mountains of knickknacks that seems to exist more often in the minds of overeager production designers than in reality.

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His girlfriend and the mother of little Caleb, Penelope (Eleonore Hendricks), has to suffer through Norman's breakdowns and violent outbursts, like when he hits her in the face during a shouting match early on. She seems aware he's a broken individual but it is still something of a miracle she decides to stick around, especially because he has a way of punishing her for things she does out of kindness, like when she organizes a party for his 29th birthday (he can't deal with the party because he turns older than his parents ever were). Their relationship is never really explored, however, with the director instead always staying close to the perturbed and blinkered perspective of his male protagonist.

Brunner, who also edited the film and wrote the screenplay, continues in the semi-experimental vein of his previous two films, *Those Who Fall Have Wings* and *My Blind Heart*, as *To the Night* strings together images and situations that are connected more in emotional or psychological terms than they are rooted in logic or narrative conventions. The star of Brunner's earlier works, Christos Haas, an actor with Marfan syndrome, plays a supporting role here as Andi, a friend of Norman's whose kitchen fire rather predictably sparks a

problematic response from the protagonist. Andi is also involved in the story's rather bizarre finale, which involves an aquarium, a contraption to lower a car seat into the glass box full of water and a jerry can of gasoline. No points for guessing things might not quite turn out as planned — even if it is hard to guess what exactly it is that Norman did plan to do.

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To the Night does feature a striking and fully committed performance from Jones, who sells both the character's intense rage as well as his tragic and seemingly incurable gloom. Whether all but the most hard-core art house audiences will want to follow such a downbeat and often negative character for the span of an entire feature, however, is another matter.

The feature's look is appropriately grungy, combining expensive-looking locations with a more ragged visual aesthetic that often feels vaguely hellish, with red lights a recurring visual motif throughout.

Production companies: *Freibeuter Films, Loveless, Ulrich Seidl Filmproduktion,*

Cast: *Caleb Landry Jones, Eleonore Hendricks, Abbey Lee, Jana McKinnon, Christos Haas, Bodhi Mitchell, Hudson Mitchell*

Writer-Director: *Peter Brunner*

Producers: *Oliver Neumann, Sabine Moser, Matt Parker, Charly Hugo, Klara von Veegh*

Executive producers: *Daniel Blanc, Gill Holland*

Director of photography: *Daniel Katz*

Production designer: *Katie Hickman*

Costume designer: *Rachel Dainer-Best*

Editor: *Peter Brunner*

Sales: *Reel Suspects*

Venue: *Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (Competition)*

In English

102 minutes

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