

Venice Review: 'Blondie' A Promising Swedish Family Drama That Gets Less Interesting As It Goes On



For millennia now, the idea of three sisters has been a potent one in myth and literature. From the Fates of Greek legend to the witches in "**Macbeth**" to Olya, Masha and Marina in Chekov's play, the theme recurs across civilizations, with mountain ranges and rivers named after some variation on "three sisters" the world over.

And it's this archetype that director **Jesper Ganslandt** ("**The Ape**") looks to tap into for his new film, "**Blondie**." A stylish and well-performed family drama described as a "deconstruction" of a genre that, in Sweden at least, **Ingmar Bergman** made his own, the film starts promisingly, before lapsing into convention and ultimately failing to really dig into the characters that it set up.



Three Swedish sisters are all returning to their mother's home in the countryside. The eldest, Elin (**Carolina Gynning**) is a coke-addled model in Paris, who has a difficult relationship with the matriarch. The middle child, Katarina (**Helena Af Sandeberg**), who was always the responsible one, is married with two young children, but increasingly unhappy in her union, is cheating on her drunken husband (**Olle Sarri**) with a younger colleague. And the youngest, fragile Lova (the adorable **Alexandra Dahlström**, who starred in **Lukas Moodysson's "Fucking Amal"/"Show Me Love"** fourteen years ago) is a student in London, nervous about her return home.

Their mother Sigrid (**Marie Göransson**) welcomes them warmly, despite being quite happy living at home with her many dogs. But as preparations get underway for her 70th birthday, tempers start to fray, and old resentments between the sisters, and their mother, begin to bubble up.



From the off, it feels like "**Blondie**" (the title refers specifically to Elin, though all four protagonists are blonde) could be something special. A pretty credit sequence of what seems like stars in the night sky, appearing and disappearing, segues into a bravura shot of a long track into a box, tiny against a black backdrop, which turns out to be a photo studio in which Elin is doing a shoot. Indeed, across the opening minutes, there's a stylish zip to proceedings that's reminiscent somehow of a slightly lower key **Nicolas Winding Refn**.

In fact, things stay promising across that first act (the film is consciously and theatrically divided into acts, complete with separate title cards). The family home is a stunning piece of production design, which really shines thanks to **Linda Wassberg's** picture-perfect photography. And as the build-up to the party takes place, there's a darkly funny edge to the proceedings that makes it feel as though something truly subversive and twisted is brewing.



Sadly, things go somewhat downhill from there. Elin and Katarina have already been neatly sketched out by the start of the second act, but for the most part, their mother and younger sister remain fairly enigmatic. And sadly, neither Sigrid or Lova, despite being equally intriguing characters, get much more time in the second half of the film. Indeed, Elin and Katarina somewhat stall as characters too around the halfway point - a shame, given that the actresses are all giving strong performances.

This is all because of a plot development that manages to file the edges off the picture, and turn it into something closer to "**The Family Stone**" than, say, "**Festen**." The performances remain strong, the visuals equally so, but all of the subversive air goes out of the film, and that distinctly weirder first act (as well as **Fredrik Emilson's** overly sinister score) means that the emotional punches don't really land either.

Maybe it's all part of the director's deconstruction, but if that's the case, it's not a particularly interesting one. We were genuinely enthused by the opening of "Blondie," enough so that we'll certainly be keeping a close eye on Ganslandt's work from here on out. Hopefully next time, he'll be able to carry the film across the finish line - or indeed, past the first bend. [C]

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