



West Australian
16/02/2009
 Page: 6
 Section: Today
 Region: Perth Circulation: 194862
 Type: Capital City Daily
 Size: 156.00 sq.cms
 Frequency: MTWTFS-

Haunting humour from a land of the living dead

FESTIVAL FILM

You, the Living (M) ★★★★★
 Erik Backman, Jessica Lundberg
 Directed by Roy Andersson
 Review: Mark Naglazas

The biggest joke in this deadpan delight from the folk who gave you Ingmar Bergman and ABBA may be the title itself.

You, the Living would suggest a movie about people bursting with life, like the 1958 Susan Hayward melodrama *I Want to Live!*

But there's so little movement in Swedish director Roy Andersson's long-awaited follow-up to his 2000 Cannes winner *Songs from the Second Floor* — the film consists of a series of loosely connected tableaux each bathed in sickly green light — you suspect the entire cast may be dead.

Or if they're not dead, haunted by death and impending disaster. Like the characters in a play by Samuel Beckett or a fable by Franz Kafka (clear influences on the movie), the people who populate *You, the Living* have a heightened awareness of their own mortality and insignificance in a meaningless universe.

They even suffer apocalyptic Cold War nightmares decades after the end of the Cold War, with the film book-ended by a man startled by a nightmare of bombers swarming over his peaceful city and, in homage to Dr

Strangelove, the realisation of that awful vision (Stanley Kubrick is another of Andersson's numerous influences).

Yet where *You, the Living* separates from Beckett, whose characters exist in eerie crushing isolation, Andersson reminds us that all of humanity is in the same sinking boat, which is why there's not a single close-up in the movie.

Instead of zeroing in on an individual, which is the driving force of Hollywood movies and the heart of the American mythos, Andersson uses wide shots and long takes to reinforce the connectedness between his long-suffering lost souls.

The gorgeous painterly compositions and Jacques Tati-esque genius for manipulating cinematic space is also the source of the film's hilarity and its humanity. (I doubt you will see a more visually arresting film during the current PIAF film season.)

Scene after mordant minimalist scene — an elderly man hobbles along with a squealing dog on his back tied to his walker, a man buying a train ticket can't make up his mind which line is quicker, an angry barber shaves a landing strip down the middle of a stunned customer's head — are elevated by the Edward Hopper-ish grungy gorgeousness.

Andersson's wonderful eye also brings fresh life to gags as old as Chaplin and Keaton, such as the

unforgettable sequence in which a man recounts his ill-fated attempt to whip off a tablecloth from under a heavily laden banquet setting.

Instead of the standard jovial party scene that goes badly awry, Andersson stages it with a solemnity that recalls one of those intense Bergman country house dramas, with the family all arranged around the table and expecting the absolute worst (again, the heavy air of impending doom that hangs over the whole movie).

And it does not end with a rap over the knuckles. In this wonderful parody of Bergman-esque miserablism (eat your heart out, Woody Allen) and a sharp critique of bourgeois Swedish society, Andersson metes out an absurdly over-the-top punishment to the inept tablecloth puller, presided over by stern-faced judges who would be at home on a war crimes tribunal.

While there is no over-arching narrative to tie these vignettes together, Andersson, who has developed an astonishing precision and economy after decades working in advertising, does manage to work in a sweet love story involving a pining groupie (Jessica Lundberg) and a too-cool-for-school rocker (Erik Backman).

You, the Living begins at the Somerville Auditorium tonight at 8.30pm.



Love interest: Erik Backman and Jessica Lundberg in *You the Living*.