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Review

One Fine Morning review – Mia Hansen-Løve's moving tale of love and loss

In the role of a lifetime, Léa Seydoux plays a widowed single mum caught between new romance and the failing mind of her father in the French director's deeply personal Cannes prize winner



📷 'A masterclass in interiority': Léa Seydoux, with Melvil Poupaud, in One Fine Morning.



Mark Kermode

🐦 @KermodeMovie

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The French writer-director Mia Hansen-Løve became a festival fixture with films such as *All Is Forgiven* (2007), *Father of My Children* (2009) and more recently the Palme d'Or nominated Bergman Island (2021). My own favourite Hansen-Løve films include the pulsing *Eden* (2014) and the ruminative *Things to Come* (2016), the latter of which contains one of Isabelle Huppert's finest screen performances. But in this, her latest Cannes prize winner, Hansen-Løve hits a career high note, delivering a quietly thoughtful and ultimately life-affirming portrait of the strange interaction between loss and rebirth. It's a miraculous balancing act that pretty much took my breath away.

Léa Seydoux, whose own career encompasses everything from Palme d'Or winners to Bond blockbusters, lands the low-key role of a lifetime as Sandra, a thirtysomething widowed mother with a Jean Seberg *À bout de souffle* crop whose life is pulling in two very different directions. Her philosophy professor father Georg (Pascal Greggory) is suffering from Benson's syndrome, a neurodegenerative condition that is causing his mind, vision and memory to fail. "His entire life was dedicated to thinking," says the clearly distraught Sandra, a professional translator whose ability to intermediate is crucially failing her, and who increasingly feels "closer to my father with his books than with him". Only his companion, Leïla (Fejria Deliba), seems truly able to reach Georg, who has even closed his mind to the beauty of a once-loved Schubert sonata – a heartbreaking moment.

At the same time, an encounter with old friend Clément (Melvil Poupaud), a "cosmo-chemist" who travels the world collecting space dust, sparks new romance in Sandra's life. It's an illicit affair (Clément is a married father) that reawakens feelings and physical passions she thought she had "forgotten" ("How could this body stay asleep for so long?" he marvels). Meanwhile, Sandra's mother, Françoise (Nicole Garcia), seems to be enjoying a later-life renaissance, eagerly engaging with the modern world by going on nonviolent environmental demonstrations while her ex-husband is confined to care homes.

Yet even Françoise has memory lapses, seemingly erasing thoughts of her previous unhappy marriage (she remembers only her professional life) and in the process throwing the baby out with the bathwater. As Sandra exasperatedly tells her: "It's like you've forgotten everything that happened to us between the ages of nought and 20!"

While all of Hansen-Løve's films have felt deeply personal, she describes *One Fine Morning* (a title that implies an almost fable-like moment of change) as her "most autobiographical" work. Her own father suffered a neurodegenerative condition, and Georg's journey from hospitals to nursing homes, and the

attendant anxiety that causes his relatives, is directly inspired by the film-maker's experiences. Indeed, anyone who has witnessed first-hand the disorientating presence/absence duality of caring for a loved one with memory loss, and helplessly struggling to find a safe space for them, will recognise Sandra's quandary of "mourning someone who is still alive".

Politics lurk at the edges of the frame, from a dismissive assessment of the government ("She votes for Macron, then takes down his picture!") to fumbled pleas for assisted dying and a passing reference to schoolkids learning terrorist attack drills. Yet far more powerful is the dramatic catharsis that *One Fine Morning* offers the viewer in its uncommonly tender intermingling of grief, guilt and ecstasy.

Like Huppert in *Things to Come*, Seydoux's performance here is a masterclass in interiority, leading the audience deep into Sandra's bewildering encounters with polar opposite emotions, locked in a form of emotionally Socratic unspoken dialogue. Shooting on 35mm, cinematographer Denis Lenoir conjures a world of deceptively complex light and shade, softening the harsh edges of the medical and care home interiors, blending them with the more obviously lively exteriors in which new days seem to be dawning.

Musical accompaniment is minimal, although the film is significantly bookended by the sounds of Jan Johansson's performance of *Liksom en herdinna* (which featured in Ingmar Bergman's all but disowned 1971 oddity *The Touch*) and Bill Fay's wistfully romantic *Love Will Remain*. Listening to the latter after watching *One Fine Morning* for a second time, I found myself locked in that strange conundrum of crying and smiling simultaneously. It's a bittersweet dichotomy I treasure, and one that this beautiful film evokes perfectly.

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