



Autumn Ball (Sugisball)

123 minutes, 2007, Estonia

Director and Screen Writer: Veiko Ounpuu

Cast: Rain Tolk, Taavi Eelmaa, Juhan Ulfsak

Synopsis

It's Autumn. We see a huge sprawling conurbation of tower blocks built in the Soviet era - the neighborhood called Lasnamäe. Unkempt youngsters are tossing a football around muddy squares in between buildings while yelling obscenities. Men with striped sailors shirts and blank faces are smoking on the balconies built close to accommodate their ever extending families. Women are fussing in their kitchens or hanging their washed linen out to dry. Infants in the yard hang from the iron monstrosities, once built as merry go rounds for a standardized childhood, now heaps of scrap metal waiting to bleed a nose or tear a sleeve. In between the few slim bushes lay the drunkards, twitching to the sounds of a distant siren. People wearing colourless overcoats and solemn grey faces are moving in herds to bus stations to discount supermarkets and then back again. In the evening, when the sky darkens, the windows are lit by the blue glow of television screens. The Autumn Ball is a film about different forms of solitude. Sometimes unbearable but mostly endurable the feelings of loneliness are strongest in such intimate proximity to other people. The film is also an attempt to poetically extrapolate or generalize on the conditions of our existence; to find from the sum of all different angles something larger than the sum itself.

Review, Sheri Linden, The Hollywood Review

Strong on atmosphere and angst, the multi-strand drama "Autumn Ball" takes its time bringing together its orbiting characters, a half-dozen aching souls in a housing complex on the outskirts of Tallinn, Estonia. Although it sometimes suffers from ennui overload, the film gets under the skin, its darkly comic observations filtered through Tarkovsky, Kieslowski and Cassavetes but alive with their own bracing melancholy. Winner of the Horizons Award at the Venice Film Festival and a competition selection at the recent AFI Fest, the film is sure to make an impression as it travels the fest circuit.

Writer-director Veiko Ounpuu's adaptation of "Sugisball" (Autumn Ball), a 1979 novel by Mati Unt, a leading literary figure of Soviet-era Estonia, is set in the pre-independence 1980s. The future-forward high-rise suburb at the center of the story, abutted by desolate fields, stands as a dated monument to the crumbling USSR. Striking lensing by Mart Taniel makes the most of the cold natural light, penetrating the facades of the well-played characters and the sad spaces they inhabit. Ulo Krigul's brooding score is a key asset as well, especially in the film's wordless stretches, like the powerful break-up scene that opens the film.

Writer Mati (Rain Tolk) stands on his apartment balcony as though poised between life and death. His farewell hug to his departing wife (Mirtel Pohla) turns into a desperate attack. Left alone, he soon embarks on a binge. When not at his typewriter in a room that appears to be constructed of books, he's out making a fool of himself at clubs. Alcohol comforts and undoes

many of the characters. Fueled by brandy, self-consciously fashionable architect Maurer (Juhan Ufsak) is heartlessly honest with his unhappy wife, Ulvi (Tiina Tauraitte). A single mother (Maarja Jakobson) fends off the blunt overtures of strangers, calming her nerves with dainty glasses of liqueur. Sobbing over the "forbidden love" of "The Thorn Birds," she's unaware that her young daughter (Iris Persson) is drawn to Kaski (Sulevi Peltola), a friendless barber.

For Theo

(Taavi Eelmaa), a doorman at a depressing red-curtained nightclub, the opiate of choice is sex. He tallies his one-night stands -- first name and astrological sign -- adding numbers 210 and 211 after a spirited threesome. But like most everything here, the encounter ends on a note of disconnection. In their botched, often cruel encounters, the characters are often monstrous. In their aloneness -- whether writing, dancing solo or eating breakfast -- they become more human.