

The Girl

By Rebecca Boyle

The Girl, directed by Fredrik Edfeldt, is the story of a ten-year-old girl left alone by her parents when they go to Africa as aid workers. Although she is meant to be looked after by an aunt, the girl soon concocts a plan to get rid of her and is able to spend the summer alone. The film darkly explores the girl's loss of innocence as, alone and without guidance, she learns much more about the world than she may have otherwise. She has many experiences, good and bad, before she realises she does need adult guidance. Her parents come home never knowing what their child has gone through.

This film is valuable in many ways, most of all for its many interesting and interwoven themes, like the loss of innocence, the effects of peer pressure, and the conquering of your fears, made particularly effective through Edfeldt's subtle handling of them. The riveting performance of the main child actress cements the entire film together, while aesthetically the film has much to offer, with careful cinematography, soft lighting, and a good use of subtle colour.

But this is a film dealing with loss of innocence, and, particularly as the main character is so young, it is dark, and sometimes disturbing. Certain scenes, dealing with ten-year-old girls already talking about sex, or forcing a young boy to strip, are alarming, although they certainly reinforce the film's messages. However, these definitely make it unsuitable for too young an audience.

There are also certain aspects of the film that I find unbelievable. Because the film is told from a child's point of view, one expects it, to a certain degree, to portray adults as stupid. But I find it hard to believe that parents would go to Africa for the summer and leave their ten-year-old daughter at home; that an aunt entrusted to care for a young child would not think twice before running away with a boyfriend and leaving that child alone; and that the only neighbour who figures it out gets drunk and allows himself to be bribed into silence, despite the fact the child should be his responsibility.

The Girl is an aesthetically delightful film, engrossing, with many strong and important messages, but there are barriers in it that I find hard to cross, like the fact that all the adults are stupid and that all the children are brats. Oddly, there are very obvious jokes for young children in the film, involving adults being ridiculously clumsy, but the other, adult content makes it inappropriate for them. Older children and teenagers are the most likely audience, because they can appreciate the childhood issues without being worried by the other content. Still, the relatively slow pace and small quantity of dialogue could pose a barrier to some, and there's a nasty undercurrent that's hard to ignore. Despite this, for its message, and its many other merits, both stylistic and plot related, *The Girl* is still worth watching.