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International Press Service

Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

?Fjord? Review: A Family Drama Built on Silence

Monaco, 14.11.2026 [ENA]

Cristian Mungiu has never been interested in easy moral conclusions. His films resist clear divisions between right and wrong, exploring the uncomfortable space where conflicting perspectives coexist and certainty becomes difficult to maintain for everyone involved.

Fjord, the Romanian filmmaker's latest feature, continues that tradition while pushing it into especially uncomfortable territory.
Set within a Romanian evangelical family living in rural Norway, the film follows Mihai and Lisbet Gheorgiu as concerns surrounding their parenting practices attract the attention of child protection authorities. The subject matter alone is delicate: religious ideology, child welfare, cultural identity, migration, family autonomy, but Mungiu approaches it with the same restraint that has defined much of his work.

What emerges is not a courtroom drama searching for answers.
It is something colder.
Fjord is less interested in proving innocence or guilt than in observing what happens when two systems of belief collide and neither sees itself as wrong.
The family believes they are acting through love, discipline and faith. The institutions believe they are acting through protection. The film refuses to privilege either perspective.
That refusal makes Fjord deeply unsettling.
Watching it often feels like walking through fog while keeping your eyes open. You move forward, but clarity never arrives.

The film deliberately avoids easy explanations, leaving viewers to navigate its moral terrain on their own.
And the tension never leaves, as there is barely a scene without it.
Not because dramatic events constantly unfold, but because Mungiu builds pressure through accumulation.
Silences linger slightly too long. Conversations feel unfinished. Every interaction carries the possibility that something invisible may suddenly fracture.
The result is almost physical. You sit anticipating. Waiting.
Not necessarily for what will happen, but for some kind of confirmation that never comes.

Visually, Mungiu reinforces that intimacy through remarkable restraint. The cinematography keeps its

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distance, often observing rather than following. Many scenes play as though the audience has simply been placed inside the room with these people.
You are not watching characters move through plot points. You are sitting with them.
Watching conversations happen. Watching tension grow. Watching a family attempt to hold itself together.
That closeness becomes one of the film's most affecting qualities because Fjord grants access to spaces that feel private, the hidden areas of domestic life where belief, fear and responsibility quietly coexist.

It feels intimate without ever becoming sentimental, and importantly, it never slips into melodrama.
This is where the film becomes especially impressive. With subject matter this sensitive, it would have been easy to push toward emotional excess. Mungiu resists that entirely. The drama remains restrained, even when emotions run close to breaking point.
That restraint gives the performances room to breathe.
Sebastian Stan delivers one of the strongest performances of his career as Mihai. His work is built almost entirely through control. He plays the character with complete conviction, creating someone deeply devoted to his faith and family while never fully revealing what lies beneath that certainty.

As the pressure builds, tiny shifts emerge.
Pauses. Hesitations.
Moments where confidence starts feeling less natural and more maintained. Stan handles these changes beautifully.
Renate Reinsve is equally compelling. Her Lisbet moves differently through the crisis. She adapts where Mihai resists. She negotiates where he withdraws.
Together, they create an uneasy emotional balance.
The audience's sympathies constantly shift. At one moment, the family feels persecuted.
At another, questions emerge. The film repeatedly forces viewers to confront their own instincts and assumptions.

What lingers most is not simply the central conflict itself, but the unease the film creates around the viewer's own response to it. Fjord constantly shifts the ground beneath its audience. Sympathy moves toward one perspective, only for the next scene to quietly destabilise that certainty again. The film repeatedly withholds the reassurance that one side is ultimately more justified, more moral, more correct than the other.
That reassurance never arrives.
At first, that felt frustrating, but by the end, it felt essential.

Because Fjord is not interested in offering the comfort of moral certainty. It is interested in doubt. Not doubt as weakness, but doubt as a necessary form of self-interrogation. The film speaks directly to this

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growing inability to agree on anything, to the way contemporary discourse increasingly pushes people toward rigid positions where uncertainty itself begins to feel unacceptable. What makes Fjord so quietly fascinating is that it suggests the need for more doubt in modern life, not necessarily doubt directed toward others, but toward ourselves. Toward instincts.

Toward assumptions. Toward the systems of belief inherited and defended with such confidence. The film continually asks viewers to confront the possibility that they may be wrong about one another.
And in that sense, the film's real tension is not located purely within the family or the institutions surrounding them. It exists inside the viewer. Inside the discomfort of recognising how quickly people search for certainty, for sides, for conclusions.
Fjord ultimately pushes against extremism itself, against the belief that every conflict must produce a clear moral winner. The film understands that once certainty hardens completely, empathy slowly disappears with it.

Perhaps that is what makes Fjord so fascinating. It confronts deeply difficult subjects within an increasingly polarised world while refusing the moral certainty audiences often expect from films like this. There are no clear conclusions waiting at the end. Only questions. What is right? What is wrong? Where does parental freedom end and protection become intrusion? The film leaves those questions unresolved. Even its final moments, quiet, restrained and genuinely breathtaking in how they land, refuse resolution entirely. Instead, Fjord ends exactly where it has existed all along: inside uncertainty. And long after the film ends, that uncertainty remains.

Bericht online lesen:
https://plotpoint.en-a.de/kunst_kultur_und_musik/fjord_review_a_family_drama_built_on_silence-94557/

Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:
V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDStV: Soffi Popescu

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